

# **HISTORY: MASCULINITY AND HISTORY IN AN INDEPENDENT BOYS' SCHOOL**

BY

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this dissertation is my own work. It has not been submitted before, in whole or part, for the award of any degree at any other university. Where use has been made of the scholarship of other authors, they have been duly acknowledged.

.....

ADAM ROGERS

As the candidate's supervisor I hereby approve the submission of the thesis for examination.

.....

PROFESSOR JOHAN WASSERMANN

April 2013

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## ABSTRACT

Boys do not learn history in isolation. They learn history in genderised and genderising institutions. Many all-boys' schools construct their own particular kind of masculinity that is unique to the school. This may be the result of the needs of the particular clientele or may have been constructed over time or in the case of long-established schools it may even be a by-product of a by-gone era. Thus the construction of masculinity is strategic. Few studies have sought to highlight the impact that masculine gender construction plays in boys' understanding of history particularly within the context of an independent boys' secondary school in South Africa.

The subjects of this study were all born in 1991 or 1992 - at the time of this country's political and educational transformation. In growing up they have known nothing but a democratic South Africa and their history education has been entirely in keeping with Outcomes Based Education (O.B.E) and that of the official history curriculum as outlined in the National Curriculum Statement (N.C.S) – History. However, these boys have also grown up male in this democratic South Africa characterized by, amongst other things, gender equality. What this study sought to uncover was how boys' understanding of history interplays with the construction of their personal and collective masculine identity. Furthermore this study also sought to understand whether boys in learning history come to some understanding of a just sense of masculine construction.

Using the script of the play *The History Boys* as one of the mirrors against which I held my study, I also made use of the post-structuralist Lacan's (1949) Mirror Stage model to make sense of the data generated by my research. Immersing myself in boy-centred research I made use of a bounded case study using a purposive sample. The qualitative methods of narrative inquiry and focus group interviews were used to generate the data that was then coded and analysed using open coding. In addition I drew on the epistemology of the pro-feminist theorists in order to frame my research. Ultimately this case study sought to give voice to boys' experiences in order to investigate the impact

of masculinity on their understanding of history and how history education in turn informs the boys' masculine identity.

Through an intertwining vine of unofficial history made up of influential role players such as family members and friends, the school as a masculine regimenting agent and official school history over both primary and secondary schools, the boys of this study sometimes found themselves to be lacking because they did not measure up to the ideals of the traditional hegemonic form of masculinity. At other times, through their study of official history, these boys were able to dominate other boys because of their possession of historical knowledge thus formulating their own hegemonic masculinity as embodied in the history boy. Masculine hierarchies were therefore found to be constructed by institutions, teachers, subjects like history and boys themselves.

The official South African history curriculum is a transformative one that seeks to achieve an appreciation of gender equity and a sensitization to power dynamics at play in a constantly evolving South African society. However, the institution in which the boys found themselves is not evolving. It is a traditional one that essentially aims to maintain old-fashioned or "time honoured" values. These independent school history boys learnt many contradictory lessons on what it means to be a man from the independent boys' only boarding school in which they all found themselves as well as through official school history. These contradictory lessons all led to the conflicting and ambiguous notions of what it means to be a man. This in turn led to the creation of the hegemonic masculine form of the history boy that is established towards the top end of the masculinity hierarchy within this South African independent boys' school.

## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

A.H.A	American Historical Association
A.N.C	African National Congress
C2005	Curriculum 2005
DoE	National Department of Education
G.C.S.E	General Certificate of Secondary Education
H.S.S	Human and Social Sciences Learning Area
I.B.S.C	International Boys' Schools Coalition
I.E.B	Independent Examination Board
N.C.S	National Curriculum Statement
N.C.S - History	National Curriculum Statement for History
N.E.C.C	National Education Crisis Committee
N.S.C	National Senior Certificate
O.B.E	Outcomes Based Education
R.N.C.S	Revised National Curriculum Statement
S.A.G	Subject Assessment Guidelines
S.A.Ts	Scholastic Aptitude Tests
S.H.P	School Council's History Project
U.K	United Kingdom
U.S.A	United States of America

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*Boys only want to learn about one thing and that is war. They do not want to find out for themselves – they want to be told.*

Statement made by a workshop facilitator at the International Boys' School Coalition (I.B.S.C) Conference held at Maritzburg College on 7 March 2012

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

RUDGE: How do I define history? It's just one fucking thing after another.

(Bennett, 2004, p.85)

### 1.1 Background

Gender relations are historical. Until fairly recently, when referring to gender inequalities, this has meant the focus on the discrimination of girls or women. Gender studies conducted in the 1970s were largely dominated by the work of the radical feminist scholars, who, wanting to give girls the necessary skills and confidence to assert themselves in a male-dominated world, sought to challenge curricula, classroom power relations, assessment activities and examination results that had previously all served to oppress girls. This resulted in an overhaul of the secondary school curricular and the de-sexing of teaching and learning materials. This undoubtedly did much to empower girls and women. But what about the boys?

Feminism has done much to draw our attention to gender construction and power relations. It has also done much to focus on the impact of masculine norms in our schools and society. But at the same time feminism has done boys a great disservice by assuming that all boys and men are universally privileged and not going far enough to problematize the construction of masculinity. Kaufman (1999, p.76) points out that while many men do reap the benefits of the power that traditionally has characterised a patriarchal society, there is also a “strange combination of power and privilege, pain and powerlessness” too. The way that men have ordered the world and empowered themselves has come at a price – “pain, isolation and alienation not only for women, but also for men.” Gender theory has more recently been broadened to look at gender inequality more holistically - to include not only girls and women but also boys and men who “do not conform to, or who threaten or challenge, hegemonic notions of masculinity” (Morrell, 1998, p.220).

Over time, the broadening of gender inequality to include masculinity has also seen the creation of a new concept – gender justice – which has broadened the understanding of gender to include all gender inequality and not just the equality between boys and girls (Morrell, 1998). In addition there is a need to focus on the goodness in boys. In the view of Salisbury and Jackson (1996, p.105): “Effective ways of working with boys must start by rejecting the old equal opportunities approaches to gender issues that very often only generate shame, guilt and hostility in boys.” There are very few studies that have focused on the rejection of patriarchal hegemonic versions of masculinities and the acceptance of other forms of masculinities by boys in the classroom in general and in the history classroom specifically. This study seeks to articulate this. Furthermore, in giving voice to varied masculinities in the history classroom, this study shows how boys are able to determine for themselves the existence of masculine gender construction. There are very few positive studies that record boys’ narratives and whether they can determine for themselves a fair and just sense of masculine construction of gender identity. This is one such study.

History as a subject has had a rather insidious position in the South African curriculum, both past and present, as the subject has been exploited in order to legitimise past and present power bases which include gender relations. Historical knowledge is not neutral. Prior to the 1990s history curricula in South Africa were by and large designed by white men who sought to highlight the actions and achievements of white men (Dean & Siebörger, 1995). Thus this core set of knowledge was inextricably linked to the power relations of race and gender in South African society at large. Prior to 1994 history had been used as an essential means to carry out the National Party government’s Christian National Education. As the name implied, this system of education sought to justify the government’s Apartheid policies using religion, and history in particular was written from an Afrikaner nationalist perspective (Dean & Siebörger, 1995). Although taught in separate schools, both black and white pupils, no matter what their own family history, were taught the same school history in a core syllabus – mainly the history of European Western civilization and of the white population of South Africa. Textbooks were written by white male historians in order to

conform to the Christian nationalist perspective. No history from a revisionist or liberal historiography was allowed (Dean & Siebörger, 1995). Critical questioning and debate were absent (Siebörger, 2000).

The period following Nelson Mandela's release in 1990, and the lead up to the first democratic elections in 1994, was one of great expectancy for history teachers, history educationists and historians (Siebörger, 2000). They expected that a new history curriculum would be written, casting aside the old Apartheid one and instead implementing one that would forge a "new national identity" (Siebörger, 2000, p.1). This new history curriculum was expected to contain three new r's: reconstruction, redress and reconciliation (Siebörger, 2000, p.1). In addition a new curriculum would be designed to reflect different perspectives including the views of liberal and radical historians. It was thought that it would also expect pupils to develop the skills of the historian (Siebörger, 2000).

Shortly after 1994, the newly appointed Minister of Education, Sibusiso Bengu, began the process of revising the education curriculum and putting in place an interim history syllabus in order to take out antiquated, racial and controversial content (Siebörger, 2000). Chisholm (2003) referred to this as cleansing the curriculum. It saw, amongst other things, the rewriting of a formerly gender-biased curriculum. In so doing it was hoped to give just articulation to the stories of previously marginalised groups of people such as women and indigenous peoples and not just the so-called grand narratives of predominately white middle class men. The result was Curriculum 2005 (C2005) and with it came a form of outcomes-based education (O.B.E). C2005 intended to plot a route out of the "stultifying" education that had existed prior to 1994 and advocated a new approach to education – away from a "subject-bound, content-laden curriculum" (Chisholm, 2003, p.3). History, however, was at risk of losing its identity. History and geography were lumped together in a learning area known as human and social sciences (H.S.S). At the same time this model of O.B.E espoused only one outcome dedicated to history content and the remaining seven dedicated to skills and values. In the view of Siebörger (2000, p.2) "it created the sense that some content was



privileged.” Consequently C2005 has come into a lot of criticism.

Following criticism of this new curriculum a ministerial review committee was appointed and met in February 2000. This committee presented its report in May 2000. One of the results of the findings of this body was to “throw a lifeline to history – once again it has a place in the curriculum” (Siebörger, 2001, p.2). It suggested that a National Curriculum Statement (N.C.S) be drawn up for history. Within the same year the Working Group on Values Education published its report. Appointed by the new Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, it identified six values that it felt should be taught in schools: equity, tolerance, multilingualism, openness, accountability and social honour (Siebörger, 2001). The committee recommended that history in particular should be integral to the teaching of tolerance. The result of the discussions was the creation of the Revised National Curriculum Statement (R.N.C.S) which became policy in 2002. Distinctive features of this curriculum are rights-oriented and outcomes based (Chisholm, 2003). Amongst others, the R.N.C.S was designed on the principles of social transformation, human rights, inclusivity, as well as environmental and social justice (Department of Education (DoE), 2003). Unlike C2005 the new curriculum sought to achieve a high level of both knowledge and skills necessary to achieve social justice. According to the R.N.C.S the concept of social justice involved empowering those who had previously been denied both skills and knowledge (DoE, 2003).

In the view of Chisholm (2003) one of the components that shaped the revision of the curriculum and the implementation of the N.C.S - History was the question of voice and the representation of voice. By voice she refers to who speaks and the positioning of this voice. Power is a critical component of voice. Chisholm (2003) argues that it was the voices with social power that led to the revising of the curriculum and the writing of the N.C.S – History. Furthermore the N.C.S – History aimed to highlight the crucial role of memory in society in order to give voice to those previously subjugated (DoE, 2003). Some criticism of the N.C.S - History has been to the effect that in order to address the wrongs of the past the pendulum has swung too far the other way – that in giving exposure to the history of previously disempowered groups, the stories of others have

either been ignored or disregarded with disdain; one dominant narrative being replaced with another. As Weldon (2006 p.3) points out: "With the close link between political ideology and education transformation in developing countries there is a danger that the new ruling elite may construct a single, politically acceptable new national narrative that can become a new regime of truth equally as oppressive as that of the previous regime."

Human rights, diversity and good citizenship dominate the N.C.S - History as the curriculum requires learners to have "an understanding of our diverse past and a mutual grasp of how that informs our present reality" and "enables people to examine with greater insight and understanding the prejudices involving race, class, gender, ethnicity and xenophobia still existing in society and which must be challenged and addressed" (DoE, 2003, p.9). All this serves to support the fundamental knowledge focus of the curriculum which is "to build a new identity in South Africa" (DoE, 2003, p.4). As Siebörger (2008, p.1) points out fundamental to being able to understand the purpose and workings of democracy are a strongly formed sense of personal identity and tolerance of the standpoints of others.

The subjects of this study were all born in 1991 or 1992 - at the time of this country's political and educational transformation as described previously. In growing up they have known nothing but a democratic South Africa and their history education has been entirely in keeping with O.B.E and that of the official history curriculum as outlined in the N.C.S – History. However, these boys have also grown up male in this democratic South Africa characterized by, amongst other things, gender equality. What this study sought to uncover was how boys' understanding of history interplays with the construction of their personal and collective masculine identity. Furthermore this study also sought to understand whether boys in learning history come to some understanding of a just sense of masculine construction.

## **1.2 The Purpose and Focus**

Boys do not learn history in isolation. They learn history in genderised and genderising institutions. According to Connell (1995, p.35) “being masculine is an accomplishment which boys and men must constantly achieve in every situation they enter, a project by which they construct their life histories in particular social and institutionalized contexts” (1995, p.35). At the same time that they are coming to an understanding of history, boys are also constructing their own identities. Thus history plays a role in the construction of masculine gender identities. Few studies have sought to highlight the impact that masculine gender construction plays in boys’ understanding of history particularly within the context of an independent boys’ secondary school in South Africa. Conversely – and yet at the same time - the understanding of history within the context of a South African independent boys’ secondary school plays a role in boys’ construction of masculinity. This study attempted to highlight this and goes some way to close some of the gaps in the literature that will be reviewed in chapter 2.

In the process my study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What do boys understand about history and masculinity?
2. How does masculinity influence boys’ understanding of history?
3. Why does masculinity influence boys’ understanding of history the way it does?

## **1.3 The Professional is Personal**

Whether conscious or not, those who teach and those who learn in a single-sex school environment are part of the gender construction dynamic. There are those who, through their actions and attitudes, both enforce gender hegemony and those who actively question it. The vast changes in gender relations around the globe produce ferociously complex changes in the conditions of practice with which men as well as women have to grapple. We are all engaged in constructing a world of gender relations.

Gender relations - in particular the dynamics involved in the construction of masculinity - are also learnt. I have taught in boys-only schools for the past 14 years: 3 years in a state boys' school and more recently 11 years in an independent boys' school. In addition I am a product of a boys' state secondary school as was my father and his father before him. The same school in fact. I have many identities: I am a son. I am a husband and I am a father. As a male history teacher in a boys' school there are certain practices that I have both inherited because of the long-established teaching environments in which I have found myself as well as being the product of gender construction myself. Male teachers, however, "have to create bridges between educational approaches and their personal lives and to recognize that whether they like it or not they are giving out powerful messages about how to be a boy and a man in that institution" (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.15). I have been intimately involved – whether conscious or not – in both the teaching and learning of masculinity.

Martino and Berrill (2003) have pointed out that most male teachers have been unwilling to come to the fore in order to interrogate the social construction of masculinities that take place in schools. More often than not women are at the forefront of the gender critique. As a male history teacher I have always been interested in the concept of masculinity. Perhaps it is because it was in moving from a small co-educational coastal state primary school to boarding at a Pietermaritzburg state boys' secondary school that I first found myself at the mercy of gender regimes and masculine-construction practices. I know about the intimidation and the name calling. I know from my experiences as both a learner and a teacher in boys-only high schools how certain types of masculinities are exalted and others negated. I am therefore resolute in my belief that there are many ways to be a man. As a history teacher of boys only, I am acutely aware that boys are not all the same and should not be expected to be the same. However, until I embarked on this study into the construction of masculinity I had never formalised this understanding of masculinity and also had little concrete understanding of my teaching practice – whether conscious or not – that are both complicit and confrontational in the formation of gender patterns. As Salisbury and Jackson (1996, p.15) have stated: "Boys need an alternative version of being male. This

alternative vision cannot be achieved unless male members of staff take this challenge on themselves in their own lives.” I have tried, in my limited capacities as both researcher and teacher, to take up this challenge. As a teacher who is passionate about the teaching of history, I have sought to merge the various discourses in which I am immersed every day: masculine identity and the teaching of history – into one study which I have chosen to call **HIS**tory: masculinity and history in an independent boys’ school. This study seeks to uncover how boys’ understanding of history interplays with the construction of their personal and collective masculine identity and highlights how boys, in learning history, come to some understanding of a just sense of masculine construction.

#### **1.4 The Play’s The Thing**

When embarking on my initial research I found that whenever I entered the words ‘history’ and ‘boys’ into an internet search engine I would invariably be hit with a barrage of information on the play written by Alan Bennett in 2004 entitled *The History Boys*. At first I ignored these hits – dismissing as irrelevant references to this work of fiction. But time and again, as my research gained momentum, I would stumble on this play which was made into a film in 2006 and was directed by the same person who had directed the original stage production at the Royal National Theatre in London. Curiosity got the better of me so I first watched the film whilst waiting to receive a copy of the play which I had placed on order. Always at the back of my mind I thought it coincidence that the year in which the original play was written (2004) was in fact the same year in which I was appointed to head the history department of Balcomb Academy - an independent boys’ school.

As one can rightfully assume from the title of the play the major theme of *The History Boys* is history and how history is perceived by the major characters who are not only the eight boys but also the three teachers who have the responsibility of teaching history to these boys. The boys consist of: Dakin (leader of the pack, good-looking, a player who is quick to use his good physical appearance to his advantage); Posner

(intelligent, sensitive, enjoys singing and poetry and is a day-dreamer who does not seem to fit in); Scripps (a devout Christian who is level-headed and responsible) and Rudge (who is seemingly less intelligent than the other boys, is sporty and cultivates the image of being a jock). Akthar, Crowther, Timms and Lockwood make up the rest of the class and to a degree are lesser characters who are merely shallower variations of the leads.

Set in 1980s United Kingdom (U.K), the play begins with the boys and their rather eccentric history teacher, Mr Hector, preparing for the boys' final examinations. There is the added pressure of the boys' examination results determining which university they will get into. The school's reputation is built on the number of its boys obtaining entrance into prestigious tertiary institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge. Hector insists that his lessons are designed not to get the boys to just pass their examinations but are lessons for life. He has a passion for movies, literature and music – which he believes are more important than facts and figures. The headmaster, however, concerned for his school's reputation as well as wary of the boys' parents' expectations, brings in another history teacher, Mr Irwin, who is charged with the responsibility of getting the boys, to not only pass the examination, but to give their work flair in order for the boys to stand out. The headmaster believes that retention of facts is not enough – the boys need polish. This brings Irwin and Hector into conflict as they differ at times greatly in their educational philosophies:

IRWIN            Education isn't something for when they're old and grey and sitting by the fire. It's for now. The exam is next month.

HECTOR        And what happens after the exam? Life goes on (Bennett, 2004, p.49).

There is a third member of the history department – Mrs Lintott – who is a lot more traditional in her approach. Some might call her boring but she is what might today be called a solid teacher yet not good enough to ensure the boys' success in their forthcoming examinations. As one of the boys, Lockwood, states: "Mrs Lintott discourages the dramatic, sir. 'This is history not histrionics' " (Bennett, 2004, p.18).

Furthermore Mrs Lintott makes an interesting comment on history and gender: “Can you for a moment imagine how dispiriting it is to teach five centuries of masculine ineptitude?” (Bennett, 2004, p.84). She later clarifies her stance:

History's not such a frolic for women as it is for men. Why should it be? They never get round the conference table. In 1919 for instance, they just arranged the flowers then gracefully retired. History is a commentary on the various and continuing incapacities of men. What is history? History is women following behind with the bucket. And I'm not asking you to espouse this point of view but the occasional nod in its direction can do you no harm (Bennett, 2004, p.85).

Irwin finds that the boys are indeed intelligent but their answers - both oral and written - are essentially ordinary. He feels that the boys will be lost in the pack of applications to Cambridge and Oxford. His history pedagogy is made clear by his statement: “History nowadays is not a matter of conviction. It's a performance. It's entertainment. And if it isn't, make it so” (Bennett, 2004, p.35). The two male history teachers are not opposites of the same coin. They share some similarities but essentially Hector is the extreme of Irwin. Hector revels in the beauty of knowledge – knowledge for knowledge's sake. The two teachers' approach to the teaching of history comes to a head when they share a lesson on the Holocaust:

IRWIN	The scholarship questions aren't limited to a particular curriculum.
HECTOR	But how can you teach the Holocaust?
IRWIN	Well, that would do as a question. Can you ... should you ... teach the Holocaust? Anybody?
AKTHAR	It has origins. It has consequences. It's a subject like any other.
SCRIPPS	Not like any other, surely. Not like any other at all.
AKTHAR	No, but it's a topic.

HECTOR     They go on school trips nowadays, don't they? Auschwitz. Dachau.  
What has always concerned me is where do they eat their sandwiches?  
Drink their Coke?

CROWTHER The visitors' centre. It's like anywhere else.

HECTOR     Do they take pictures of each other there? Are they smiling? Do they hold  
hands? Nothing is appropriate. Just as questions on an examination  
paper are inappropriate. How can the boys scribble down an answer  
however well put that doesn't demean the suffering involved? And putting  
it well demeans it as much as putting it badly (Bennett, 2004, p.71).

Later on when confronted for his opinion on the Holocaust Irwin replies: "But this is history. Distance yourselves. Our perspective on the past alters. Looking back, immediately in front of us is dead ground. We don't see it and because we don't see it this means that there is no period so remote as the recent past and one of the historian's jobs is to anticipate what our perspective of that period will be ... even on the Holocaust" (Bennett, 2004, p.74).

This conflict as to what history is and how it should be taught to boys and learnt by boys is quickly picked up by the boys themselves. Rudge, in a state of frustration, yells: "How do I define history? It's just one fucking thing after another" (Bennett, 2004, p.85). Rudge's outburst is a modern spin on a statement made in the 1940s by Herbert Butterfield who was Professor of History at Cambridge: "History is one bloody thing after another" (Hytner, 2004, p.1). In the process Bennett is quick to give these teenage boys an authentic voice choosing to replace the antiquated 'bloody' with 'fucking.' Of course for modesty's sake it is interesting to note that that tagline that accompanied the posters for the movie *The History Boys* made use of the original expression!

Although fictional it soon became apparent that the play *The History Boys* highlights many of the issues that my study aimed to unpack: how boys' understanding of history interplays with the construction of their personal and collective masculine identity and how boys in learning history come to some understanding of the construction of



masculine identity. Using Connell's (1996) model of the four categories of masculinity, the main characters display many characteristics in keeping with this model:

Rudge undoubtedly represents hegemonic masculinity as he can claim authoritative status with his sporting prowess and aggressive demeanour. He frequently uses derogatory statements to subvert other masculinities: "I did all the other stuff like Stalin was a sweetie and Wilfred Owen was a wuss. They said I was plainly someone who thought for himself and just what the college rugger team needed" (Bennett, 2004, p.98).

Posner, on the other hand, represents marginalized masculinity: "I'm a Jew, I'm small; I'm homosexual, and I live in Sheffield. *[pause]* I'm fucked" (Bennett, 2004, p.42).

Dakin with his physical and sexual prowess represents the subordinate masculinity. Although he does not share the same gender practices and values as the hegemonic, as the ultimate heterosexual male his character serves to protect the masculinity hierarchy by exalting heterosexual men by placing this group at the top of the masculinity hierarchy with homosexual masculinity oppressed at the bottom: "Just wait till you get started on sex. You're making it up all the time. Being different, outrageous. That's what they go for. I tell you, history is fucking" (Bennett, 2004, p.76).

Scripps represents the domination of reason over emotion and as such fits into the complicit form of masculinity – the gatekeepers of the hegemonic form of masculinity. Whereas he does not necessarily advocate the domination of women or other forms of masculinity, his silence ensures the exaltation of the hegemonic masculinity: "It's this making it up I can't get used to. Arguing for effect. Not believing what you are saying" (Bennett, 2004, p.76).

Furthermore, I began to identify with some aspects of the characters of all three history teachers. Whereas I believe that in many respects I am professionally more like Irwin, I could not help being drawn on a personal level to the ideals of Hector. Lintott's

sensitivities towards the role played by gender in the teaching of history however appealed to my intellectual bias and the rationale for embarking on my research. And as such I could no longer ignore or dismiss *The History Boys* as merely entertainment or a work of fiction. I came to realize the truth in what Irwin said: “It’s just that the boys seem to know more than they’re telling” (Bennett, 2004, p.48). So I have chosen to use the script of the play as one of the mirrors against which I have held my study. Furthermore I have also made use of Lacan’s (1949) Mirror Stage model to make sense of the data generated by my research. This further accentuates the central theme of reflections that characterises the findings of this study.

According to Lacan (1949) every child passes through a stage in which an external image of the body – a mirror image - gives rise to the mental representation of an “I.” A child first becomes aware of his mirror image between the ages of 6 and 18 months. During this stage the child identifies with the image which serves as a mirror of the child’s perceptions of the self. This is the first time that the child sees itself as an entity instead of just fragmented movements. This is not a dispassionate experience – the recognition provides the child with joy. It is the child’s first experience of itself as a separate individual and is the beginning of the child’s formation of his or her own identity. Some of the more controversial and enticing quotations which appear above will be used to introduce the chapters of this dissertation. Embarking on the conducting of my research using the methodologies of a bounded case study, narrative inquiry and focus group interviews, *The History Boys* and Lacan’s (1949) Mirror Stage model will further serve as a play within a play and a mirror against which I will be holding up my study.

## **1.5 Conceptual Framework**

R.W Connell (1996) describes multiple masculinities that emerge and are either validated or negated particularly in a school context. This is built upon by Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) who agree that schools serve a major role in regulating how society encourages maleness and it is in this social context in which boys are forming their

futures and the understanding of themselves. Schools are places of power production and encourage certain forms of masculinity to the detriment of others (Fletcher, 1994). Although both boys and girls create their own gender identities under the influence of their bodies, families, religion, culture, race and ethnicity, schools with their academic subjects are places where these gender identities are turned into gender regimes. These regimes seek to create gender hierarchies. In the case of masculinity the most acceptable and exalted forms of masculinity are positioned at the top and the lesser forms at the bottom. Normally in such a setting one form of masculinity – the hegemonic – dominates the other (Connell, 1996). However, not only do institutions serve to legitimise or downplay forms of masculinity other than the hegemonic but also boys themselves are active in constructing hierarchies of masculinity. Boys' schools are battlegrounds on which boys negotiate or even fight to establish their masculinities. Masculinity forms the conceptual framework for this study.

In addition to looking through the lens of masculinity I have taken a pro-feminist (progressive male) approach to my study. Grounded firmly in sociology and characterized by the writings of a largely male group of researchers - Hearn (1996), Connell (1996), Mac an Ghaill (1996) and others - pro-feminism occupies the middle ground between the defensiveness of mythopoetical theorists; anti-feminist masculinity politics and anti-patriarchal radical feminist politics (Imms, 2000). Pro-feminism offers a pluralistic view of masculinity. It is aligned to feminism in its concentration on power and patriarchy and uses feminist theories of the marginalization of not only women but also men on the basis of race, class and sexuality in turn to form theories of masculinity.

Pro-feminist theory suggests that no one approach readily addresses current issues of masculinities in schools. However, it does tend to reject the so-called essentialist theory of the mythopoetics and the theories of the right way formula for the teaching of boys. What pro-feminist theory does espouse is that "each boy's masculinity is unique and his actions are responsible for its structure" (Imms, 2000, p.155). The multiple masculinities approach of pro-feminist theory encompasses four components: (i) Masculinity is not homogenous and cannot be reduced to a list of a few characteristics (ii) Gender is

constructed by social intuitions and the individual (iii) Masculinity is constructed in relation to women and other men and (iv) Multiple masculinities can exist and can challenge hegemonic power structures (Imms, 2000).

However, this framework is limited by the fact that there are a multitude of masculinities that cannot be defined because masculinities are flexible and ever-changing and secondly by a lack of ethnological data to further our understanding of this theory (Imms, 2000). The fixation on a hierarchy of masculinities at the same time does not take into account the fluidity and mobility of masculinity between these layers at different times and depending on different situations (Imms, 2000). Pro-feminist theory is also limited as it suggests that all men participate in hegemony when there are many men who do not subscribe to the domination of women and other men, choosing instead to view women and other masculinities as equal. Pro-feminism also fails to recognize the strong force that exists within many masculinities to counteract gender oppression.

Despite these limitations, pro-feminism gives voice to a multiplicity of masculinities which was the aim of this study. This approach is appropriate for a study that seeks to highlight how boys in learning history come to some understanding of a just sense of masculine construction.

## **1.6 A Route Map of the Study**

To achieve aims and to present findings comprehensively, this dissertation is organized into six chapters:

Chapter 1 sets the scene and introduces the study by describing the background, purpose and conceptual basis for the research. Chapter 1 also details the research questions. Furthermore the first chapter introduces the reader to the central themes of the play within a play and the mirror against which the findings of this study will be held.

Chapter 2 includes a review of selected literature appropriate to the topic. It provides an overview of the key concept of masculinity and the major developments in history education in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. This chapter then moves on to merging masculinity with history education in the quest to locate this study firmly within international and national scholarship as well as identifying the gap that this study seeks to fill in the literature.

Chapter 3 identifies the critical research paradigm adopted and details the research methods used in the design of this study by exploring the nature of qualitative research and the related methodologies of narrative inquiry and focus group interviews. Reasons for framing this study with pro-feminism and taking a post-structuralist approach are also discussed. Once again Lacan's (1949) Mirror Stage model is explained in detail and identified as the model that is used to make sense of the data generated by this study. Furthermore steps involved in the coding and data analyses processes are also described. Finally the advantages and disadvantages of insider research are highlighted as well as the ethical issues involved in undertaking this study.

Chapter 4 unpacks the research findings by detailing the categories that emerged following the open coding analysis of the data generated by this study. Some of these categories are broken down into various sub-categories in order to answer the first two research questions. This chapter also highlights the dual forces of official history and unofficial history that exist in shaping the boys of this study's understanding of both history as well as masculinity.

Chapter 5 returns to Lacan's (1949) Mirror Stage model in order to answer the final research question and in so doing compiles an image of the independent school history boy drawn from the analysis of the data generated. Chapter 5 itemises the common characteristics of the history boy that are thrown up by the boys' shared studying of official history and through their common understanding of unofficial history and masculinity.

Chapter 6 provides a conclusion to this study. It draws the findings together, reflects on the research process and makes recommendations as drawn from the research findings.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

MRS LINTOTT: History is a commentary on the various and continuing incapacities of men. What is history? History is women following behind with the bucket.

(Bennett, 2004, p.85)

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Each research study builds upon previous research. This previous research needs to be found and discussed in what is known as the literature review. There are two main reasons for literature reviews. Firstly one needs to read about pre-existing research in order to determine where one's own ideas fit – what other ideas influence one's own - and secondly to determine what ways one's own questioning, research and findings can contribute to this body of knowledge. One's own study "engages with the known literature and adds something else" (Wisker, 2001, p.127). According to Andersson and Beveridge (2007) a literature review is not a merely a historical summary of the topic under study; nor is it a summary of the sources used or a listed bibliography, instead it is an integral part of a dissertation as serves to describe, compare, contrast and evaluate the arguments, themes, approaches, theories and controversies in the scholarly literature on a subject. It is a "critical synthesis of previous research" (Hart, 1998, p.1). Essentially the literature review serves to identify what has been written before on the chosen topic and then evaluating this information to determine relevance as well as any gaps that may exist. For it is the gaps in the existing research that the new knowledge intended by the study hopes to fill. Without establishing what previous research has been undertaken, however, it is impossible to establish "how the new research advances the previous research" (Randolph, 2009, p.2).

By 'literature' I am broadly referring to all information that is relevant to the chosen topic. This information is drawn from a wide range of sources that are primary, secondary and tertiary in nature. By primary I am referring to original research that appears in journals,

articles or conference papers. However, these sources may also include creative works of art or creative writing as well as historical and other documents. By secondary I am referring to evaluations, reviews or descriptions of original research. And by tertiary I am referring to broader sources of information or overviews such as information that appears in textbooks (Andersson & Beveridge, 2007). There are a number of criteria that must be kept in mind when selecting literature. The first is relevance – the information should serve to contribute to the development of one’s argument or positioning. Second is authority - the information should be published in a reputable journal that has been peer reviewed or critically evaluated in other sources and the third is currency – the research should be recent and still hold weight in the field (Andersson & Beveridge, 2007). Furthermore, it should have appropriate breadth and depth; clarity and conciseness and detail rigorous and consistent methods (Hart, 1998).

When embarking on the literature review it is like climbing a tree – a tree that is continuously growing (Gravetter & Forzano, 2009, p.48). You have to climb onto the trunk of existing knowledge and then find your way along the branches in order to reach the tips – which is the cluster of the most recent and relevant research. The trunk represents the foundations of the research in one’s chosen area – “the classics” (Gravetter & Forzano, 2009, p.48). The branches represent more specific areas of research that takes one closer in both time and specificity to research aligned to one’s own study. In the case of my research I first had to climb onto the trunk of research making up masculinity. Thereafter I had to embark on the next branch, a foundation one from which other branches grew, that was the study of history education. Thereafter the climb moved from branch to branch each focusing on the connection of masculinity to history. It was no easy climb as I had had no previous experience in climbing a trunk of masculinity. I knew that the branch that I needed to climb onto next was history education but at times the stretch from the trunk to this branch was almost out of reach but once I had made this connection, the climb was a bit easier. However, as with all branches of trees, the climb along some of them took me closer to the centre and at times far out. All the time, however, I had to be mindful that in traversing each branch I



was ultimately trying to get to the top of the tree which was my study – how do boys understand history?

There are five C's that are critical to the writing of a literature review: compare; cite; contrast; critique and connect. The first is to compare the similarities in the various arguments, theories, methodologies, approaches and findings. The second is to cite the literature correctly. The third is contrast - the differences in the various arguments, theories, methodologies, approaches and findings should be contrasted. The fourth is to critique the literature in order to indicate which literature agrees with your standpoint and finally is to connect the literature to your research topic (Andersson & Beverdige, 2007). In the process it is necessary to be wary of a number of pitfalls too: vagueness and generalizations should be avoided; the range of research should not be limited; the material should be sufficient and relevant and finally there should be no omissions of contrasting views and recent research (Hart, 1998).

Literature reviews are organized chronologically, thematically or conceptually. My literature has been organized conceptually focusing on three sections: (i) masculinity (ii) history education and (iii) masculinity and history education. I have decided to structure my literature this way purposively as in order to come to some understanding of how and why masculinity influences boys' understanding of history. I first had to come to some understanding of what masculinity is. Masculinity is integral to the identity formation of boys. Masculinity informs who the boy is and who he is will come to bear on his understanding of history. But I needed to come to grips with this body of knowledge first. In order to do this I have structured my review of the literature by looking at the evolution of the study of masculinity. This is in keeping with my history background – I have to look back before I can move forward. Secondly I needed to find out what history education is – particularly who the major scholars are in the study of history education in the last fifty years and what the latest trends are in this field. Once again I hoped to reach an understanding by looking at the evolution of history education. Having done that I needed to find out what literature – if any - has been

produced in the interconnected field of masculinity and history education. This enabled me to then frame my study.

## **2.2 Masculinity**

The men's movement is not "independent of the women's movement" (Wood, 2009, p.95). Some men's groups have been formed in reaction to the strides made by some women's groups whilst other men's organizations work alongside feminist groups. Like the women's movement, the men's movement consists of groups that have diverse aims and strategies. Some men's groups aim to challenge the traditional notion of what masculinity is whilst others want to protect the traditional images of what it means to be a man by rejecting feminists and the gains made by the various feminist groups. The men's movement is ever changing with new groups constantly emerging (Wood, 2009). The 1980s, for example, were dominated in the U.S.A by the mythopoetic movement whilst the 1990s featured the largely Christian-based promise keepers group.

The group of male feminists known as the pro-feminist (or 'pro'gressive) men's movement was formed in the 1960s. These men essentially believe that men and women are equal and should enjoy the same privileges, opportunities, rights, roles and status in society (Wood, 2009). However, this group aims to develop "the emotional capacities that society approves of in women but discourages in men" (Wood, 2009, p.97). In particular they believe that societal expectations of men and masculinity force men to repress their feelings which in turn diminishes "men's humanity" and "making their lives less satisfying than they could be" (Wood, 2009, p.97). The pro-feminists aim to change this by encouraging men to be more sensitive, open, and caring.

The mythopoetic movement was founded by Robert Bly in the 1980s and aimed to "foster men's personal growth, wholeness and bonding in all-male gatherings" (Wood, 2009, p.107). This group believes that modern man is essentially "broken" so they aim to tap into the deep-down mythic roots of what it means to be a man in order for modern man to return to his emotional, spiritual and intellectual wholeness (Keen, 1991, in

Wood, 2009, p.107). Although the mythopoetics have commonalities with the feminist movement, they do not agree with the notion of the traditional man as being essentially bad. The mythopoetics believe that men were their happiest and fulfilled in Medieval times – at the time of King Arthur and the Round Table – when they had a connection to the earth; were in touch with their true character and had some meaning in the world. This was when the world was the most whole, they argue, when men and women were connected closely, when men had meaningful relationships with men. They blame the Industrial Revolution for ripping men away from the land and away from their families – to work outside the home. This in turn meant that boys were brought up without their fathers and were therefore denied the opportunity to learn what it was to be a real man (Wood, 2009). According to the mythopoetics, men need to reclaim their masculine qualities of courage, aggression and virility, and denounce the more feminine qualities as espoused by the pro-feminists. However, this movement has been criticized for being elitist – “mostly white and middle class” (Wood, 2009, p.108).

The pro-feminists, however, differ from the masculinists. Masculinists (or pro-masculine movement) believe that men are discriminated against because of their gender and they need to reclaim their manliness. This is in keeping with the aims of the mythopoetics. Whereas the pro-feminists believe that homophobia is the reason why men are incapable of showing their feelings, the masculinists denounce the fight for equal rights for gay men. Pro-feminists in turn have thrown their weight behind the gay rights movement. One group making up the masculinists is the free men group – a group that aims to restore pride in “being real men.” By “real men” they mean the traditional macho image of the “tough, rugged, invulnerable and self-reliant” man (Wood, 2009, p.104). The free men’s movement does not credit the pro-feminists as being a part of the men’s movement at all.

The men’s movement has also led to the development of schools of thought on masculinity. Journals such as *The Journal of Men’s Studies* and *Men and Masculinities* serve to publish research into the lives of men. Universities across the world offer courses in men’s studies. Although historically in South Africa the efforts of gender

equity campaigners have been directed at protecting and promoting the rights of girls and women, it is now accepted that boys too can be seen as victims of gender discrimination. By far the bulk of scholarship on masculinity has been produced in the U.K, Australia and the United States of America (U.S.A). Leaders in this field include Martin Mac and Ghail (U.K), R.W Connell (Australia) and Michael Thompson (U.S.A). However there are also a number of South African researchers – most notably Robert Morrell – who have made great strides in the past two decades to “recognize, theorize and work with masculinity” (Morrell, 1998, p.218).

Undoubtedly the strongest and most authoritative voice in pro-feminist scholarship is that of R.W Connell. Connell’s theory of masculinity (1996) describes four categories or groups that emerge in the analysis of different forms of masculinity and was alluded to in chapter 1 in relation to *The History Boys*. The first is hegemonic masculinity. This refers to the masculinity that is formed by the legitimacy of patriarchy. Because of the configuration of various masculine practices and values, this is the group that has traditionally been exalted as the dominant form of masculinity and in existing it serves to subordinate the other gender as well as other forms of masculinity. This group can claim its authoritative status through the institutionalized power that exists in places such as a boys’ independent boarding school. Such examples would include the celebration of athleticism over the arts; the emphasis of physical activity over academic pursuits; body strength over emotional strength; action over thought, older men over younger men and also men over women. However, as Connell points out, new forms of masculinity are always challenging the hegemonic – “it is a historically mobile relation” (Connell, 1996, p.207).

The second category according to Connell (1996) is subordinate masculinity. This category comes into existence through various gender relation practices that seek to establish a masculinity hierarchy with hegemonic masculinity at the top and various subordinate masculinities at the bottom. Historically this is played out by exalting heterosexual men by placing this group at the top of the masculinity hierarchy with homosexual masculinity oppressed at the bottom. Those boys who challenge the

hegemonic form of masculine behaviours are treated as outsiders and rejects of masculinity. This will consequently also affect those heterosexual men who do not share the same gender values or practices as the hegemonic form of masculinity. Homophobia is played out in order to naturalize dominant gender performances and to stamp out that which is different. It is a form of masculinity policing (Connell, 1996). The formation of subordination is often accompanied by labelling and name-calling such as nerd, gay, wimp, faggot, sissy, geek and the like.

The third category is that of complicit masculinity. This category exists because most men do not in fact attain the normative practices of hegemony. Although most men gain from the patriarchal dividend that comes from hegemonic masculinity through such practices as the domination of men over women, not all men embody the ideals or practices of the hegemonic man. Yet in order for the hegemonic form of masculinity to dominate, various complicit intermediaries – lesser masculinities that serve to highlight the subordinates – are required in order to exalt the hegemonic. This group constructs its masculinity by “gaining the patriarchal dividend without the tension or risks of being the frontline troops or patriarchy” (Connell, 1996, p.21). Hegemonic masculinity dominates because of the complicit masculinity’s silence. The fear of violence or rejection as outsiders often intimidate boys into becoming part of the group described as complicity masculinity. However, more often than not it is the popular boys, for fear of not being accepted as part of the group, who become “the gatekeepers of acceptable and desirable behaviours for boys” (Martino, 2000, p.105).

The last category according to Connell (1996) is the marginalized form of masculinity. This refers to the interplay between gender and other structures of society such as class and race. Marginalization is always in relation to the dominant form of masculinity. In the context of my research - an independent boys’ boarding school - the dominant form of masculinity will take the form characterized by those in the white, athletic, Christian, middle-to-upper class group. Any other classes or races or those who are not athletic or Christian will in turn be grouped into the masculinity known as marginalized as indicated in chapter 1.

Swain (2003) agrees with Connell (1996) that masculinities come into existence as people act. They are not predetermined. Masculinities rather are constructed by social and material practices that are informed by what boys do with their bodies – what Turner (2000) calls embodiment. Schools and academic subjects therefore, play an important role in the construction of masculinities in that they exist to control pupils and their bodies. “Children are watched, judged, measured, described, compared, trained, corrected, examined and classified” on an on-going basis (Swain, 2003, p.301). Bodies then are used in the construction of power relations. Building on Foucault’s philosophy of power, this is termed “bio-power” or “physical capital” (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998, p.12) and in institutions like schools this involves knowledge of and power over individuals because of their bodies. However, whereas many researchers focus on the role of the institution in constructing gender power relations, Paechter (2006) has sought to return the focus back to the body. According to Paechter, the masculinities that a boy can perform is largely dependent on the form of that boy’s body. To try and understand either masculinity or femininity without focusing of the physicality of the body is essentially problematic (Paechter, 2006).

Who teaches boys about masculinity? Schools, more than any other instructors, shape boys’ construction of masculine identities as they provide a set of meanings through the reinforcement and regulation of gender norm behaviours and performances (Swain, 2003). In order to belong to the normative group a boy will be required to draw on various social (interpersonal skills), cultural (fashion; choice of hobbies), physical (body toughness and sporting prowess), intellectual (the appearance of intellect or not) and economic (money) resources (Swain, 2003). However, more often than not a boy defines and establishes his masculinity through action (strength, skill, fitness, athleticism) and the body is the most powerful resource. This will mean that typically the boys with the highest status in a school are those boys who are described as being sporty or athletic (Swain, 2003). Power can also be channelled in other ways. There are also those who gain acceptance by “mucking around in class, giving crap and acting cool” (Martino, 2000, p.102). Every school will thus form its own hierarchy of

masculinities and will have its own dominant or hegemonic form of masculinity which will be located at the top of this hierarchy and this will exemplify what it is to be a real boy (Connell, 1996). This defines the norm. Every masculinity thereunder is not the norm or not quite the norm. As masculinity is defined in contrast to femininity, those masculinities that are more closely aligned to feminist attributes (soft, emotional, sensitive) will be positioned at the bottom of the masculine hierarchy and those associated with traditional characteristics of masculinity (toughness, strong and aggressive) will be placed at the top (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998). Those boys at the bottom of the masculinity hierarchy are often victimized by feminizing them or are the victims of homophobic attacks (Epstein, 1996).

Many all-boys' schools construct their own particular kind of masculinity that is unique to the school. This may be the result of the needs of the particular clientele or may have been constructed over time or in the case of long-established schools it may even be a by-product of a by-gone era. Thus the construction of masculinity is strategic. Boys' schools may celebrate "toughness and endurance, relentlessly promoting competitiveness and fear of losing and connecting a sense of maleness with a taste of violence and confrontation" (Kessler et al, 1985, p.40). Such institutions through practices involving the exaltation of sport over academic pursuits and marginalizing cultural or artistic activities thus promote a certain type of institutionalized masculinity or "gender regime" (Kessler et al, 1985, p.40). The dominant form of masculinity does not seek to obliterate the marginalized but by giving more honour and admiration to the activities commonly associated with the desired masculinity, the institutionalized hegemonic masculinity is established. Boys' schools therefore provide a setting in which one kind or another masculinity becomes hegemonic (Kessler et al, 1985).

This study took place in an all boys' independent South African school called Balcomb Academy. The boys, at the end of their secondary schooling, write the Independent Examination Board (I.E.B) National Senior Certificate (N.S.C) examination, an alternative to the state's N.S.C examination. Although both national senior certificate examinations require the teaching of the same syllabus based on the N.C.S, the I.E.B's

N.S.C examination makes use of its own Syllabus Assessment Guidelines (S.A.G) in order to produce an examination in keeping with the needs of South African independent schools within the South African education framework (I.E.B, 2011). Balcomb Academy, as described in its promotional material, is “home to young men who come to learn skills, forge lifelong friendships, acquire wisdom and are guided to become citizens who make a positive impact in our world. When a boy joins [Balcomb Academy] as either a boarder or a day scholar, he inherits the time honoured traditions and principles that have made [Balcomb] the remarkable school it is today.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore the school hints at what it upholds to be the most desirable characteristics in the development of boys into men: “It is here that new boys arrive tossed on an ocean of shock and change, soon to be transformed into young gentlemen and later into passionate, loyal Old Boys taking their place in the world economy.” It is therefore clear what characteristics of masculinity are placed at the top of the masculinity hierarchy by this school: endurance - boys who are able to survive and be “transformed” by some “shock”; “gentlemen” – a rather old fashioned notion of what it means to be a man (this notion differs fundamentally from “gentle man”); boys who will ultimately be able to fit into a group (as opposed to standing alone) that are loyal to their school for evermore and finally boys who have skills that will allow them to find a place and compete in a “world economy.” The importance of being able to compete and competitiveness is articulated a number of times in the school’s promotional material: “The academic ethos at [the Academy] is as competitive as the one enjoyed in sport and cultural arenas. Boys are encouraged to fulfil their potential and a programme of goal-setting is active throughout [the Academy] with a host of academic prizes awarded each year.”

Schools are “agents in the construction of masculinity” (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.21) and boys are acutely aware that masculine power is being enforced all around them. Some male teachers enforce their authority over their charges through aggressive, loud statements and assertiveness – the tough male approach – which is often received by silent docile acceptance (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996). Sometimes it

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<sup>1</sup> In line with the UKZN policy ethical clearance was obtained for this study - see appendix. As part of this policy pseudonyms for participants and institutions are used to ensure anonymity and protection.



may also involve the downgrading of the discipline styles of lesser males and female teachers behind their backs. Those teachers who can't handle their own discipline revert to the sending of troublesome boys to the aggressive male authoritarian figure and in so doing are "downgraded in such an atmosphere of masculine power and authority" (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.21).

Masculine power is also asserted through male conversations characterized by the putting down of women and homophobic jokes. These conversations take place both on the playgrounds as well as in the staff rooms. Often said in jest, such conversations all serve to enforce what a real man is. Boys are quick to pick up on this approach if they are to avoid ridicule and "the nightmare of being seen as different" (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.21). As a result they learn to hide their emotions and to reject the values of openness and sensitivity if they are to appear strong and successful. This pertains to their interactions with other boys as well as other male teachers. Being a real man means being in control.

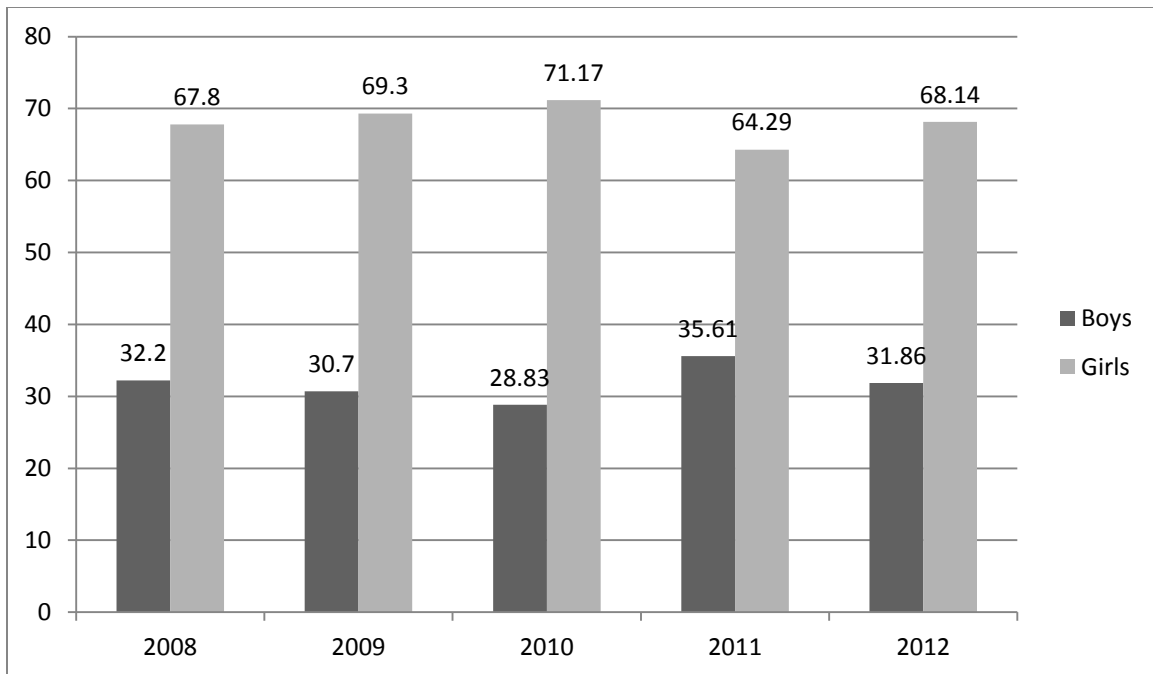
Masculinity is fluid. Men and boys can in any one lifetime subscribe to a number of different and varying masculinities. This is often where the confusion comes into play between the real me, the perceived me and the ideal me. This confusion is heightened by the pecking order or hierarchy of masculinities that a boy will face as he becomes a man who in turn navigates his way in the world of gender relations. Schools become the site for the "production, negotiation and policing of particular forms of masculinity" (Martino, 2000, p.106). But through a system of abusive practices such as name calling, pushing and shoving, laughing at another's expense and isolating others from group activities because they do not measure up to the ideals of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity, the dominant form of masculinity is thus set in place through boys' own practice. This practice, within the context of this study, includes the boys' shared studying of history which they use to construct their own form of hegemonic masculinity. Masculine hierarchies, therefore, are constructed by schools, subjects, teachers and boys themselves.

Masculinity, however, has found itself in a crisis of late. This crisis has manifested itself in a violent, lawless culture of masculinity as boys struggle to find their identity. This crisis is reflected in boys' poor academic achievement and behaviour problems in co-educational schools in particular. This crisis has come about because boys are much more interested in displaying and proving their manliness than performing academically. According to Connell (1996) the crisis that has occurred in masculinity has arisen out of one if not a combination of relations. First is power – which arose out of the challenge to the traditional patriarchal power base and the emancipation of women. This was met simultaneously by masculinities' attempts to reconfigure through domination, violence, and other strategies, the hegemonic masculinity. This was also in response to the feminist movement. Second is production – many women have taken up senior positions in the work place to the exclusion of their male colleagues. This in turn has shaken many men's notions of what it is to be a man as well as the traditional patriarchal power basis. Third is cathexis (emotional attachment) – the traditional patriarchal notion of what it is to be a man focused on the negation of emotions and seeking to break down attachments. However, at the same time many men today are asked to explain how they feel about something (Connell, 1996). Frustration and confusion have led to this crisis in masculinity.

The masculinity in crisis debate is highlighted by Salisbury and Jackson (1996) who too acknowledge that there seem to be a major problem with boys in the 10 to 16 age group. Writing in a U.K schooling context they believe that such a crisis has arisen following the demise of the “traditional male breadwinner, in regular work, bringing home a family wage” masculinity (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.107). In many U.K schools this has in turn become the hegemonic masculinity – characterized by violent, non-conformist behaviour that is associated with what it means to be a real man. Martino and Berrill (2003) refer to this crisis as a moral panic brought on by a perceived disadvantaged status relative to girls and the feminist approach which sought to highlight all that is bad about boys. As Roulston and Mills (2000, p.226) point out, recent writings suggest that boys are “now the most underprivileged group within the schooling process and that it is now time that boys perceive the benefits of gender equity

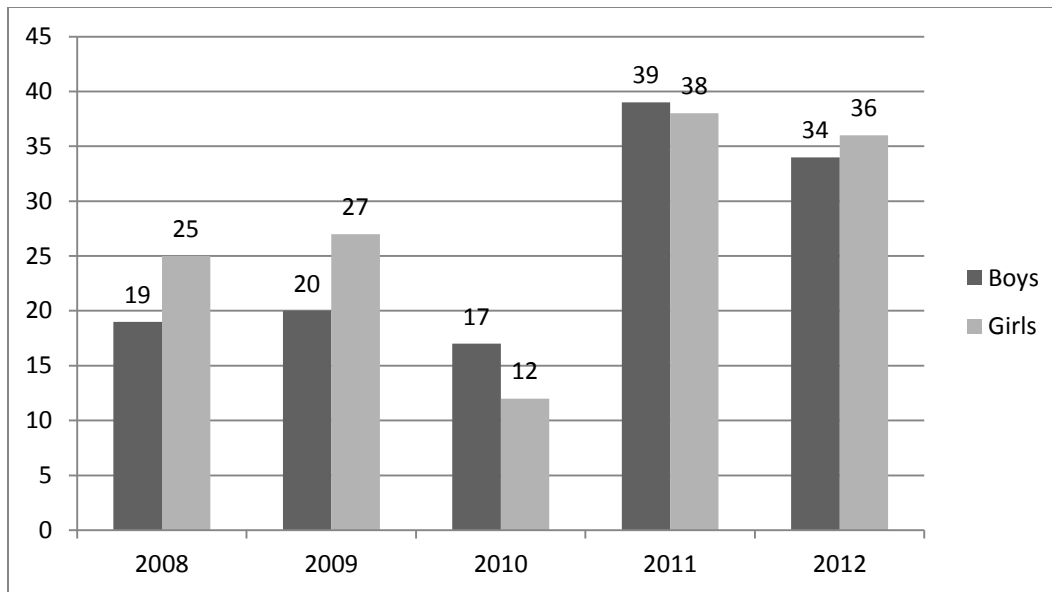
initiatives.” However, Roulston and Mills are quick to object to the focus on boys as victims or of crude statements insinuating that the state that boys now find themselves in is due to the gains made in girls’ education. Tosh (1994), however, warns that to talk about a crisis is to assume that prior to this advent there was stability. Masculinity, according to Tosh, is inherently insecure as boys in their lives are influenced at times more by their mothers than their fathers and then this dynamic changes as they get older. According to Tosh, the “feminine within” is ever-present (Tosh, 1994, p.192).

There has been much focus in recent years, largely dominated by the research undertaken in countries such as Australia, the U.K and Canada, on the underachievement of boys in the secondary schooling system. Although boys in the U.S.A are supposedly superior to girls in historical knowledge (Wineburg, 2001) this may be because the U.S.A’s history curriculum is dominated by the stories of men and marginalizes the lives of women although of late attempts have been made to address this (Wineburg, 2001). In South Africa despite the fact that boys make up just under half of those writing the I.E.B’s N.S.C history examination, on average only 31, 84% of those who obtain a distinction in history are boys (I.E.B, 2012). In other words for every 1 boy who gets a distinction there are 2 girls who obtain a distinction – see Figure 2.1 below. Girls are therefore more likely to obtain a distinction in the I.E.B’s N.S.C history examination than boys.



**Figure 2.1 Percentage of boys and girls who achieved a distinction (80% and above) in the I.E.B N.S.C history examinations 2008 to 2012 (I.E.B, 2012)**

When it comes to the number of failures the numbers are more evenly matched. Of the 267 failures in the I.E.B's N.S.C examination in the period 2008 to 2012, 129 were boys. Boys make up 48, 31% (girls make up 51, 69%) of these failures – just under half which is largely in proportion to the number of boy candidates writing the I.E.B's N.S.C history examination. See Figure 2.2 below.



**Figure 2.2 Total number of boys and girls who failed the I.E.B N.S.C history examinations 2008 to 2012 (I.E.B, 2012)**

In the U.K at the General Certificate of Secondary Education (G.C.S.E) level girls outperform boys in general but more so in the arts and humanities. History falls within the banner of humanities. Why is this? There are numerous possible explanations.

One explanation for girls outperforming boys in history is biological. There are gender differences in the structures and operations of the brain which allows girls to develop superior linguistic skills necessary for success in history examinations (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). Hormones in girls and boys can alter how well they can do particular cognitive tasks (Monastersky, 2005). The differences in the way boys and girls perceive the world is apparent from birth. In one study scientists at Cambridge timed how long one-day old babies looked at different objects. They found that baby boys tended to focus on three-dimensional objects longer than girl babies. Girl babies, on the other hand, focused on human faces longer than boy babies. Later on the same scientists found that one-year old boys liked to watch videos of cars moving with wiper blades more than the videos of human faces whereas girls preferred the opposite. The scientists explained this by measuring foetal testosterone levels and how they correlate with boys' and girls' behaviour after birth. Some girls and boys produce more

testosterone in the womb than others. The scientists found that those of either gender who were exposed to more testosterone than others were less likely to establish eye contact with their mothers. They also develop language later and on average have a smaller vocabulary at 2 years of age (Monastersky, 2005). Thus, one explanation for the difference in academic performance is biological – even genetic.

However, there is a growing body of research which refutes the dominance of biological differences in influencing boys' and girls' academic performance. A second possible explanation is a sociological one. Both boys and girls have been raised – at first by their mothers and then influenced by mainly female pre-school and primary school teachers – to see reading as a relatively female pastime. In addition parents tend to spend more time reading, teaching songs and nursery rhymes with their daughters whilst encouraging their sons to rather go and play outside. This sets up girls to have superior linguistic ability (Department for Education and Skills, 2007).

Is it because the various assessment tasks have a particular gender bias – better suited to girls than boys – that girls are outperforming boys in history? Because of their consistent academic performance and diligence, girls in general do better in continuous assessment than boys. In addition reading assessments which focus on narrative or of human relationships compared to factual-based assessment advantage girls over boys. Boys do better in reading comprehensions involving factual content than those with narrative content (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). A study by Oakhill and Petrides (2007) found that boys' comprehension of the texts they were reading depended on the content of the text and their interest in it, whilst girls' comprehension did not depend on the content of the text as much. They found that boys' reading scores improved by 14% when they read a text about spiders compared to reading the narrative of children being evacuated during the Second World War. In addition boys fair better in multiple choice questions whilst girls do better in essays (Powney, 1996). Girls perform well in open-ended writing which involves a personal response whereas boys do well in questions that require a fixed-choice or short answer (Department for Education and Skills, 2007).

But what of the role of masculinity in affecting the boys' academic performance? Undoubtedly one factor that negatively affects boys' academic performance is so-called laddish masculinity whereby some boys are negatively influenced by their male peer group to devalue schoolwork and put them at odds with academic achievement (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). Boys feel compelled to capitulate to a dominant form of masculinity which conceptualizes academic work as feminine. In conflict with this masculine identity is the pressure imposed by an academic structure which measures the merits of a boy through his performance in his end of Grade 12 examinations. In order to protect their self-worth and masculinity boys will commonly adopt four strategies: procrastination; withdrawal of effort and rejection of academic work; avoidance of the appearance of work and disruptive behaviour (Forde, Kane, Condie, McPhee & Head, 2006). Is it because, as the advocates of The Right Way have led us to believe, boys are not being taught history properly? Or are boys tuning out of their history classes because they do not identify with the history that they are being taught? Is history viewed as a feminine pursuit and not masculine enough? Or is the study of history really beyond the grasp or capabilities of boys? This study sought to answer these questions.

In short, many researchers believe that schools have in fact failed boys and not the other way round. Organizations such as the International Boys' Schools Coalition (I.B.S.C) have in the last decade sought to research the right way to teach boys in order to address this crisis. Much of what has been published by the likes of the I.B.S.C largely focuses on the physiological – boys' biological difference and make up; how they think and process information differently from girls. The conclusion reached is that teachers are not teaching boys using specific methodology optimally designed to make boys learn better. In addition, curricula are not "boy-friendly" (Pollack, 2000). Hence teachers, schools and curricula are failing boys and not the other way round. In 2002 the Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training put out a document entitled *Boys: Getting It Right* which detailed again the right way to teach boys. Amongst other things, the report claimed that boys learn best when they have a genuinely constructive relationship with a teacher as opposed to girls who,

according to the report, respond better to content. Furthermore, it was claimed that boys need more explicit teaching and structured programmes (Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education, 2002). Some recent research by the advocates of The Right Way details how boys acquire information best through kinaesthetic (hands-on) as well as visual (pictures, graphs and so forth) learning. These researchers have concluded that most boys do not acquire information well through listening. In addition they purport that boys learn best if they move around a lot yet in many boys' schools they are expected to sit still and listen to the teacher giving verbal instructions for long periods of time (James, 2007). In essence those in The Right Way camp warn that boys can quickly become uncontrollable. According to James (2007) this is not only because inappropriate methodologies and assessment tasks are sometimes being deployed in the teaching of boys but also because of the absence of key male role models within schools. Advocates of The Right Way point out that schools have become feminized domains causing boys to lack the discipline and structure that apparently are essential in the education of boys.

However, although their focus is admirably boy-centred, advocates of The Right Way again make the error of lumping all boys into one group and make an even bigger error by suggesting that boys behave the way they do because it is biologically determined and natural – what has been called “biological essentialism” (Martino & Berrill, 2003, p.112). Others, like Roulston and Mills (2000) challenge this claim and point out that demands for increasing boys' contact with male teachers is grounded in what they term men's politics dominated by the mythopoetic (or therapeutic) writings of Stephen Biddulph (2008) in Australia and Robert Bly (1990) in the USA.

However the conclusions drawn by the advocates of The Right Way are hugely handicapped by the assumption that there is a single masculinity and that all boys essentially are the same, predisposed to certain behaviours. One of the shortcomings of the research undertaken by the likes of the I.B.S.C is that boys have been examined and compared to the projection of the ideal boy even while there is little agreement on the characteristics of the ideal boy. In addition their findings do not take into account



different forms of masculinity nor is their approach grounded in a more sophisticated research-based knowledge about the ways in which gender construction affects boys' learning (Martino and Berrill, 2003). One of the criticisms of those who advocate a right way to teach boys is the assumption that all boys are essentially the same and learn in the same way - so-called normative assumptions (Martino and Berrill, 2003). According to Connell (1996, p.211) advocates of The Right Way are reinforcing the "existing social organization of masculinity."

In the view of Hoff Somers (2000, p.63) what is needed is "more sophisticated and nuanced research-based knowledge than what has been put forward by those in the category referred to as the Right." Martino and Frank (2006) also warn against adopting the tips for teachers approach which only serve to entrench the masculine hegemony. Furthermore, Imms (2000, p.159) points out, those who have worked so hard to bring to the fore the moral crisis have forgotten to shed light on the possibilities that many boys are okay and that there are certain aspects of the curriculum and certain schools that do develop "egalitarian concepts of gender." Similarly Salisbury and Jackson (1996, p.15) also reject the common sense approach as "reactionary." Instead, they argue that what is needed is a rejection of "the old equal opportunities approach to gender issues that, very often, only generate shame, guilt and hostility in boys" (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.14). As Epstein (1998) in Frank et al (2003) points out – some boys have always done well in school. The bottom line is that viewing boys as a homogenous group further dismisses the privileged elements of masculinities in which some boys have "a distinct advantage over others" (Frank et al, 2003, p.120).

At the same time boys are a lot more self-questioning and aware of the dynamics involved in the construction of masculinity than what researchers in the past have credited them with. According to Salisbury and Jackson we need to stop viewing boys as men as "exercising a monolithic, unchanging system of patriarchal power" (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.14). Boys are not credited with having any ideas of their own suggesting that they channel themselves into a set classification depending on the normative values of an institution (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.103). Boys are not

“passive victims of gender socialization” into categories that are fixed (Jackson & Salisbury, 1996, p.103). Boys’ masculinities are not fixed (Connell, 1996). They are more often than not “complex and contradictory; full of cracks and fissures, as they shift across history and different cultures” (Jackson & Salisbury, 1996, p.103). Besides, Salisbury and Jackson (1996, p.13) espouse the view that boys are not regularly and easily “brainwashed by macho values.” They have a “much more wary, contradictory approach” to the regulation and formation of masculinities.

In addition there are “counter-hegemonic masculine performances” that sometimes play out in schools and that are accepted as “alternative possibilities of masculine practice” (Frank, Kehler, Lovell & Davison, 2003, p.119). Masculinity is also played out differently across cultures, religions and even inter-culturally. This can disrupt the “conventional heteronormative masculinity” (Frank, Kehler, Lovell & Davison, 2003, p.124). This adds a further dimension to the pluralities and complexities of masculinity. But ultimately boys are aware of the dynamics of masculine identity formation. Teachers, according to Salisbury and Jackson (1996, p.13) “have to tune into that fearful self-questioning.”

## **2.3 History Education**

Wineburg (2001) describes how in the past adults came together to decide what historical facts all learners, which included boys, should know. They provided them with facts and then administered a test to find out whether the learners knew these facts or not. History education has evolved considerably since then. Before I could get to an understanding of contemporary debates regarding history education I had to first understand the evolution of history education from this content-driven approach.

It was Scheiber (1978) who first introduced the notion of historical literacy (Clifford, 1984 cited in Maposa & Wassermann, 2009). Unlike literacy which refers to the ability to read and write, historical literacy refers to what someone gains from studying school history (Maposa & Wassermann, 2009). It was Scheiber (1978) who first referred to the “competence that an individual displays in making sense of not only text, but also various other sources of history such as images, symbols and music” (Clifford, 1984 as

cited in Maposa & Wassermann, 2009, p.47). This was at the time when the debate of content versus skills or methods in school history began. However, as Clifford (1984) contends this debate had not been opened by Scheiber but by the American Historical Association (A.H.A) which had early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century taken up the fight to promote higher order cognitive skills such as inquiry methods and problem solving in order to promote “higher order literacy in 20<sup>th</sup> century American public schools” (Maposa & Wassermann, 2009, p.47). Scheiber’s (1978) notion of historical literacy did not find support in the 1970s. It would be a further 10 years before his concept would be built upon.

It was Ravitch (1989) who contended that historical literacy is equivalent to historical knowledge. Accordingly history education is about the accumulation of historical facts. Her stance was in reaction to the results of the newly introduced Scholastic Aptitude Tests (S.A.Ts) in the U.S.A which concluded that “American students displayed disappointingly deteriorating knowledge of historical information that is presumed basic and common knowledge” (Maposa & Wassermann, 2009, p.48). Ravitch’s notion of historical literacy is a conservative one and dismissed by critics as alarmist and “responding to the perceived threat of post-modernism which has served to undermine the meta-narratives of what should be known” (Maposa & Wassermann, 2009, p.48).

Criticism of Ravitch was largely articulated by Aronwitz and Giroux (1991) who contested Ravitch’s “museum of information” approach (Aronwitz & Giroux, 1991, p.49). Aronwitz & Giroux (1991) advocated that history should be a territory for academic struggle and any historically literate individual should be able to partake in this struggle. They pushed for the interrogation of historical knowledge and first introduced the notion of multiple literacies or different versions of history.

This was picked up by Wineburg (1991) who in response to Ravitch’s definition, argued that historical literacy goes beyond the mere recall of historical facts. Wineburg (1991) introduced three components to historical literacy: sourcing, corroboration and contextualization. He saw historical literacy as a process with sourcing at the first stage

progressing to contextualisation at the last. Wineburg (1991) contended that one had to be able to work with historical sources, as does a professional historian, in order to be described as historically literate. Instead of historical literacy he began to speak of historical thinking. This was a major breakthrough in the evolution of history education. Wineburg (1991), however, did not see historical knowledge as unimportant. Instead he maintained that “historical knowledge without the understanding and application of actual historical technique is not as useful as was assumed by Ravitch (1989)” (Maposa & Wassermann, 2009, p.51). Wineburg’s ground-breaking contention in turn led to the development of skills-based curricula in many countries.

History education in South Africa did not develop as dynamically. Largely content dominated, the history education landscape began to change in the late 1980s and early 1990s. One of the earliest attempts to produce a source and skills-based approach to the teaching and learning of history was the textbook *What is History?* (N.E.C.C, 1987) that had been produced by the National Education Crisis Committee (N.E.C.C). This textbook was influenced by the work done by the S.H.P. It was radically different to any history textbook that had previously been used. It challenged previously accepted history that had been taught in South African schools by encouraging pupils to evaluate and even question historical facts through the interrogation of a range of sources and perspectives (Dean & Siebörger, 1995, p.32). However, this textbook was not freely available to schools in South Africa. Nevertheless, shortly thereafter other source and skill-based textbooks such as *The Broken String* (Potenza, 1992) and *Hands-on History* (Potenza & Favis, 1994) started to find their way into more classrooms. These too were considered radical as they sought to highlight previously anonymous history such as slave narratives, dispossession of land from the San and family history from an African family’s perspective (Dean & Siebörger, 1995, p.32). However, other than considered to be radical, all three of the abovementioned texts were criticized for portraying the studying of history as “little more than a series of conflicting opinions and suggesting that history is merely a personal construct” (Dean & Siebörger, 1995, p.32). However, the dye had been cast and South African history education soon began to adopt the methods in keeping with Wineburg’s concept of

historical thinking. It also saw the start of a new model of textbook writing in South Africa based on what is termed history from below - “democratic history, which must teach historical skills and be sceptical and anti-establishment” (Dean & Siebörger, 1995, p.36).

C2005, the curriculum produced by the new democratically elected government in South Africa, was designed to reflect different perspectives including the views of liberal and radical historians. It also expected pupils to develop the skills of the historian (Siebörger, 2001, p.2). With the subsequent redesigning of the curriculum and the publishing of the N.C.S in 2000 the new curriculum sought to achieve a high level of both knowledge and skills necessary to achieve social justice. “Social justice requires the empowerment of those sections of the population previously disempowered by the lack of knowledge and skills” (DoE, 2003, p.3). Underpinning these skills are those of the historian which is detailed in the N.C.S – History (2003):

Learners who study History use the insights and skills of historians, They analyse sources and evidence, and study different interpretations, divergent opinions and voices. By doing so, they are taught to think in a rigorous and critical manner about society. Their work draws on and influences all fields of human endeavour. This process is enriched by the application of historical imagination (DoE, 2003, p.10).

The next phase in the evolution of history education worldwide was led by Taylor. He drew up an index consisting of a set of criteria which a scholar of history had to fulfil before being described as historically literate and placed knowledge of past events at the top of this index. Taylor placed importance in what he referred to as prior knowledge – the historical knowledge that pupils acquired from unofficial sources. Drawing on Wineburg’s emphasis placed on source work, Taylor went further by modifying Wineburg’s components of historical thinking. He retained the skills of sourcing calling them instead research skills (Maposa & Wassermann, 2009, p.52). However, he went even further than Wineburg arguing that a historical literate person needed to make

sense of historical sources using “historical reasoning, synthesis and interpretation to explain historical events” (Maposa & Wassermann, 2009, p.52). Taylor introduced the notion of historical understanding. By this he maintained a historical literate person should be able to understand change, be able to interpret multiple narratives and come to grips with open-endedness. However, as Maposa and Wassermann (2009) contend, historical understanding alone does not equal historical literacy. Taylor influenced by post-modernist philosophy, encouraged the challenging of grand narratives (or meta-narratives) in history. Instead he encouraged the use of multiple narratives.

These scholars - Scheiber (1978), Wineburg (1991) and Taylor (2003) - finally put to bed the emphasis previously placed on memorization and regurgitation of historical facts and instead moved forward with the emphasis on source work (Maposa & Wassermann, 2009, p.51). Often times this is referred to as doing history. However, there is also the aligned concept of historical consciousness that was introduced by Rüsen (1991).

Rüsen sees historical consciousness as the same as historical literacy whereas others such as Lee (2005) see historical consciousness as a component of historical literacy. According to Seixas (2006, p.58) historical consciousness is “individual and collective understandings of the past, the cognitive and cultural factors that shape those understandings as well as the relations of historical understandings to those of the present and the future.” Consequently it is not the same as historical literacy but instead is similar to just one of Wineburg’s (1991) components of historical thinking – that of contextualisation (Maposa & Wassermann, 2009). Taylor (2003) does not mention historical consciousness by name in his index but it is there when one refers to the notion of “connecting the past with the self and the world today” (Taylor, 2003, p.6). Lee (2004) argues that historical consciousness is integral to the conceptualization and development of historical literacy.

For the purpose of this study Wineburg’s concept of historical thinking will be used as it aims to get learners (and in the context of my study – boys) to think and question the

history that they are taught. Historical thinking means going beyond simple memorization and recall of historical facts, instead it involves “retelling the past essentially as it happened based on what can be constructed from residue, traces, artefacts and texts dealing with that past” (Vansledright, 1998, p.3). But there is more to it than just comprehending information from a variety of sources. Learners (and in this case – boys) are also expected to engage critically with the sources of historical information which means drawing on the cognitive skills of analysis and evaluation; to place events into a correct chronology and to construct and maintain a coherent argument of what they believed happened in the past. It involves seeing such historical sources in context.

According to Wineburg (2001, p.10) this historical thinking is “not a natural act.” Wineburg further describes it as “neither a natural process nor something that springs automatically from psychological development. Its achievement goes against the grain of how we ordinarily think, one of the reasons why it is much easier to learn names, dates and stories than it is to change the basic mental structures we use to grasp the meaning of the past.” Lee (2005) concurs that most adolescents have a limited epistemology. It is not always possible for them to do history and they do not see history as a common sense subject. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly students see the past as fixed – it is because the textbook tells us. There is, in their view, only one version of the past. Secondly students believe that the only way we know for sure what happened is if we saw it with our own eyes. As we cannot travel back in time, we cannot see it and therefore the past is inaccessible. Thirdly they align history to well-known events and finally they assume that everything historians say is testable by witness statements. “Because there is a fixed past, only one true account may be given of it” (Lee, 2005, p.32). However, historical thinking relies on an understanding that there are different and valid versions of the past and an understanding of how these claims can be supported. This, according to Lee (2005), Vansledright (1998) and Wineburg (2001) is virtually impossible for many learners (including boys) to grasp.

Even commonplace terminology can make the past inaccessible. Rosenzweig and

Thelen (1998), in their extensive questionnaire-based investigation into how ordinary Americans understand and use their history in everyday life, found that words like history, heritage and tradition all carry connotations depending on who you are addressing. They found that for a number of American adults history was “what famous people did” (Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998, p.20). These adults also associated like-minded words like heritage and tradition with something “formal, analytical, official or distant” (Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998, p.20). From this study “the past” was a more comfortable and inclusive word as it was more accessible, seen to meaning “where people had come from and what they had learnt along the way” (Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998, p.20). The word that best described history that mattered to those interviewed was connection. Thus the most accessibly way to talk about the past, the researchers found, was to ask “to which pasts do you feel most connected?” (Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998, p.20). And these were adults. Adolescents, according to Wineburg (2001) can find themselves completely unconnected to history.

According to Lee (2005) what is essential for the ability to demonstrate historical thinking is the ability to use historical imagination – an ability to imagine or empathize with the lives and thoughts of historical characters. Historical imagination is also referred to in the N.C.S – History in which learners are encouraged to think in a critical manner about society: “This process is enriched by the application of historical imagination” (DoE, 2003, p.10). Lee (2005) believes that only once a learner is able to empathize with the historical situation can he then begin to demonstrate historical thinking. However, at the same time, Lee (2005) also warns that historical imagination used concurrently with historical thinking is potentially problematic as it means that students would disengage with the historical sources of information. According to Rüsen, our interests drive our historical understanding, which in turn enables us to “orientate ourselves in time” (Rüsen as cited by Lee, 2005, p.32). Furthermore, the accumulation of historical knowledge is not an objective process – it should “play a role in the mental household of a subject” (Rüsen as cited by Lee, 2005, p.32). Vansledright (1998, p.3) concurs: “In this process of making meaning, all of us as historical thinkers interpret historical data in ways that make it relevant and intelligible from our present



positions.” This is what he refers to as positionality - who the learner is brings great bearing onto his historical thinking. In keeping with the focus of this study this means that a boy’s masculinity influences a prior set of historical knowledge that the learner brings to the history classroom before even accessing the task of understanding history. This is supported by Salisbury and Jackson (1996, p.13). According to them boys “learn best when they can start from their own personal histories, feelings, curiosities and actions.”

If history is everything that ever happened to anyone anywhere then that is a lot of history to try and study! The choice of what is worth studying or even remembering is considered to be significant. According to Phillips (2002) historical significance lies at the very heart of the subject of history. Partington (1980) argued that historical significance was a vital element of a historical education but in order to understand what historical significance means, it should be understood what makes an event significant. According to Partington (1980) there are five factors that determine whether an event is historically significant. Firstly is whether it was important to the people living at the time. Secondly, whether the event had profundity meaning how deeply it affected people’s lives. Thirdly the number of people’s lives that were affected by the event. Fourthly the durability of the event – how long the impact of the event lasted and finally the relevance of the event – the extent to which the event contributed to an understanding of life today. Seixas (1994, p.285) concurs: “a historical phenomenon becomes significant if and only if members of a contemporary community can draw relationships between it and other historical phenomena and ultimately to themselves.” According to Seixas there are only two criteria to determine historical significance. Firstly whether the historical event resulted in change – deep consequences for many people over a long period of time and secondly how revealing the event is. This means how the event or person’s actions shed light on emerging issues in history as well as contemporary life. Obviously any statements about significance will be an interpretation of history. An event only becomes significant if people decide it to be. Historical significance is contested but not decided. It involves debate (Bradshaw, 2006). Counsell’s model of what constitutes historical significance involves her five r’s: a historically significant

event or development is one that is remarkable (people commented on it at the time); is remembered (by a group or groups of people); resulted in change; has resonance (people connected them with their own experiences or beliefs) and finally, revealing some other aspect of the past (Counsell, 2004). According to Cercadillo's definition: what is important = significant in history (Cercadillo, 2001, p.6). Cercadillo asserts that significant is subjective. Factors such as race, ethnicity, social class (and in the case of this study also gender) moulds a person's historical thought and indeed even their ability to learn and understand history. According to Cercadillo historical significance should not be treated as a given condition but a process of reasoning (Cercadillo, 2001). Boys should be able to decide for themselves why an event was important and is therefore significant.

## **2.4 Masculinity and History Education**

According to the historian John Tosh, any attempt to view history through the lens of masculinity is objectionable as it is seen as "an unwelcome take-over bid, is unacceptably subversive and is a modish irrelevance" (Tosh, 1994, p.179). Connell (1996, p.211) disagrees: "To recognize gender as a social pattern requires us to see it as a product of history. To recognize masculinity and femininity as historical then is not to suggest they are flimsy or trivial. It is to locate them firmly in the world of social agency. And it raises a string of questions about their historicity." History essentially teaches us how to humanize ourselves (Wineburg, 2001).

Wineburg (2001) contends that instead of focusing on what learners do not know about history, adults should in fact focus on what learners do know. More importantly history teachers should be interested in what sources beyond history lessons and history textbooks, contribute to students' understanding of history. This is in keeping with Taylor's (2003) conceptualization of historical literacy too – history learnt from unofficial sources. It was Wineburg who asked the question "how do students 'navigate between the images of the past learned in the home and those encountered at school?" (Wineburg, 2001, p.4). And of vital importance to this study – how do boys in particular

situate their own personal narratives within the context of the national and international history that they are exposed to in the history classroom? This is where there is a large gap in the literature. Few, if any, literature exists to highlight what prior understanding of history boys bring to the history classroom. As Wineburg (2001, p.5) has stated: “The familiar past entices us with the promise that we can locate our own place in the stream of time and solidify our identity in the present.”

At this point it should be reiterated that Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) had contended that historical literacy should not be separated from power. It is the powerful who construct historical literacy for others – often using historical literacy to legitimise existing political positionings (Maposa & Wassermann, 2009). However, as Maposa and Wassermann challenge it is not only the politicians who wield the power but also history scholars who through the writing of textbooks dominate with their conceptions of historical literacy. Decisions as to what is deemed historically significant involve both power and historical literacy. This is evident in the selection of certain images for the sake of nation building or the emphasis of certain historical figures or events over others (Maposa & Wassermann, 2009). This is also evident in language such as the use of the first person or “we” (Maposa & Wassermann, 2009, p.60). Chipondo (2011), citing Apple & Christian-Smith (1991), describes that what is seen to be official history or legitimate knowledge can be found in textbooks and is the product of complex power relations in society involving race, class, gender and religion. Giving the example of women and people of colour in the U.S.A, Chipondo (2011, p.5) describes the on-going struggle to include women’s history in textbooks. They battle, she argues, because these two groups are politically, economically and socially powerless and therefore their knowledge achieves merely a passing mention. What is deemed to be historically significant or not will depend on whether the group has power in society or not. According to Bradshaw (2007 cited in Maposa & Wassermann, 2009, p.54) learners should be empowered to choose for themselves what is historically significant as in so doing they will become historically literate.

Sometimes alternative histories develop within the margins or below the surface of the

official school curriculum. This alternate or unofficial history curriculum is more often than not disseminated through family, cultural and religious associations. At other times they are created through cultural means such as museums, magazines, film and television. In multicultural societies tensions can start to arise because of the possibility of the conflict between official school history curricula and unofficial histories (Stearns, Seixas & Wineburg, 2000, p.285). Students from different racial and cultural backgrounds at times find it difficult to reconcile their own perspectives on historical significance with those presented in the official school curriculum. As a result they can begin to resist what they encounter at school, choosing instead to draw on what they have learnt through unofficial history from visits to historical sites and through their interactions with family members (Stearns, Seixas & Wineburg, 2000, p.286). According to Partington (1980) unofficial history has greater influence than official school history in shaping the idea of a historical education. Phillips (1998) draws on Partington's conclusions and in so doing describes the emergence of a border pedagogy that results in a historical understanding gained through the merger of official and unofficial histories.

The regulation and shaping of masculinity also involves power and happens both in the official academic curriculum as well as the unofficial or hidden curriculum – the latter through jeering, teasing, bullying and pushing around (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996). According to Salisbury and Jackson (1996, p.250) history taught in classrooms is heavy with the exploits of warriors. The warrior is “the most extreme example of virile manhood – the ultimate in power and ruthlessness.” He is a man without feelings – strong, powerful, and decisive with the power to determine who lives and who dies. “The warrior pattern is at the heart of patriarchy” (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.250). It has been played out generation after generation – the deployment of war as a justifiable means for the greater good and “with world wars and mass conscription, the tighter the net of aggressive masculinity draws” (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.250). Warfare involves the military which encourages conformity, discipline, control and camaraderie. To function successfully as a warrior any empathy with the enemy must be squashed (Stouffer, 1949, in Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.253). The historical narratives of such warriors

have served to “guard the sense of masculine heroic toughness, softer, gentler feelings and emotional complexities are cut off and signed to women and lesser men” (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.253). Masculinity and the glorification of war are inextricably intertwined in the narratives of official school history. This is despite of, or because of, the content of the N.C.S – History which was selected in order to understand our world today: “In understanding our world today and the legacies that shaped our present, the broad themes of power alignments, human rights, issues of civil society and globalization were used in suggesting areas of content” (DoE, 2003, p.30).

These narratives are played out time and time again not just in the history classroom but also on the playgrounds – another source of unofficial history. From an early age boys play games like Cowboys and Indians where the last boy standing is declared the victor. Plastic and mechanised toys are also deployed on boys’ playgrounds and are often accompanied by the sound of warfare – either emanating from the toy itself or through the use of oral sound effects. Comic books and young readers detail the exploits and adventures of heroes who overpower nature and villains – the so-called John Wayne syndrome (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.255). The range of war toys, films, cartoons, comics and games seductively ensnares boys to behave in dehumanized, aggressive and war-like ways and to value physical strength, power and violence (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.260). These victories are then played out on the playground. The military or physical victories in turn are associated with feelings of strength, power and fulfilment. These games are all part of the learning process. At the same time they are learning to shut themselves off from their emotions particularly if they are playing with other boys. Men fighting is a gender role model that boys aspire to (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996). History is heavy with the narratives of these male role models and this history has become the grand narrative or official school history. Nationalistic courses of history in particular encourage this view – to go out and fight for what is yours (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996).

Prior to 1994 the history curriculum was characterised by Christian National Education and focused on the political history of western civilisations and the minority group of

white South Africans (Dean & Siebörger, 1995). White men were portrayed as taming the rugged terrain and civilizing the local inhabitants using both superior military skills and religion. However, the portrayal of men as warriors is not limited to archaic curricula or past grand narratives that characterised Christian National Education. Unterhalter (2000) shows that even after South Africa's new democratic and equal rights-for-all country was established in 1994, the years that followed shortly after were littered with the publishing of historical narratives that celebrate what she terms heroic masculinity. Heroic masculinity is characterized by masculine "autonomy, adventure, comradeship and a self-conscious location in history" (Unterhalter, 2000, p.157). She finds a common thread in the autobiographical writings of male anti-apartheid politicians and liberation figures that highlight "danger, daring in thought or deed" and loyalty to the cause as well as their struggle comrades (Unterhalter, 2000, p.163). In her study she analysed the writings of men like Mandela (1994), Sachs (1990), Kasrils (1993), Slovo (1995), Chikane (1988) and numerous others through the lens of masculinity. In almost every narrative she found common threads. Heroic masculinity involves a link to work and in Unterhalter's (2000) study, this work was the political struggle. This work involved bravery – "secrets have to be kept; everyday comforts have to be foregone, fear and anxiety have to be endured" (Unterhalter, 2000, p.164). Unterhalter also makes the point that masculine identity is interlinked with the political work. This political work involved the noble fight to end oppression but also the aim to build a better society for all. Another central idea is the notion that being a man means going on daring escapades that in all likelihood will end in death or very best, prison. Many of these writers spent time in prison and like Nelson Mandela (1994), this was when their autobiographical writings started. Prison was on the one hand, the loss of independence but on the other, it was where male friendships were made and where masculine identities were asserted. Despite the attempts to break their political resolves by those in authority as well as the oppressive South African society at large, the heroic masculinity within the autobiographical writings all "seek to narrate the spirit of male autonomy and heroism" (Unterhalter, 2000, p.163) which is resolute in fighting to end the oppression of apartheid. It is this quest that is heroic.

Unterhalter warns that these narratives detailing heroic masculinity have come to dominate the commonly accepted history of the struggle against apartheid. This is what Chipondo (2011) refers to as legitimate history. No other versions can be given voice because of the domination of these narratives which have themselves now become grand: “The statement and restatement of this history is crucial to formations of heroic masculinity, because it outlines the conditions which make heroism, comradeship and adventures necessary, dangerous and fulfilling” (Unterhalter, 2000, p.166). Yet, as Salisbury and Jackson (1996, p.13) have pointed out, boys are not cultural dopes. Boys are aware of the dynamics of masculine identity formation. They are aware of the kinds of masculinity that are celebrated in their schools which means they must surely be aware of the messages of masculinity that they are receiving in the grand narratives of history too. Teachers, Salisbury and Jackson (1996, p.13) argue “have to tune into that fearful self-questioning.”

One of the criticisms of the history that is taught in schools is that there is an overwhelming sense that it is natural for men to fight and that many areas of conflict are settled by warfare. Alternatively boys may already be attuned to the narratives of different kinds of men and are constantly questioning what kinds of masculine models are being communicated both covertly and overtly in the history classroom. Salisbury and Jackson (1996, p.12) advocate the questioning of curricula that “divorces itself from students’ critical understanding of the everyday circumstances and conditions that they find themselves within.” In particular they highlight the need to question “the selection of archaic contents that favour the interests of white, middle-class, male students” as this “muzzles the alternative curricular agenda” (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.12). They advocate a curriculum which encourages critical thinking – a questioning of the glorification of war and a questioning on the portrayal of masculinity as being intertwined with war. This is echoed by Dean and Siebörger (1995, p.37):

Free access to the past, together with the development of historical skills, form the best defence against the past being used as propaganda. Only by being encouraged to question and analyse a range of evidence and

perspectives will teachers and their pupils be able to come to terms with their history as the basis for decisions about the present and future.

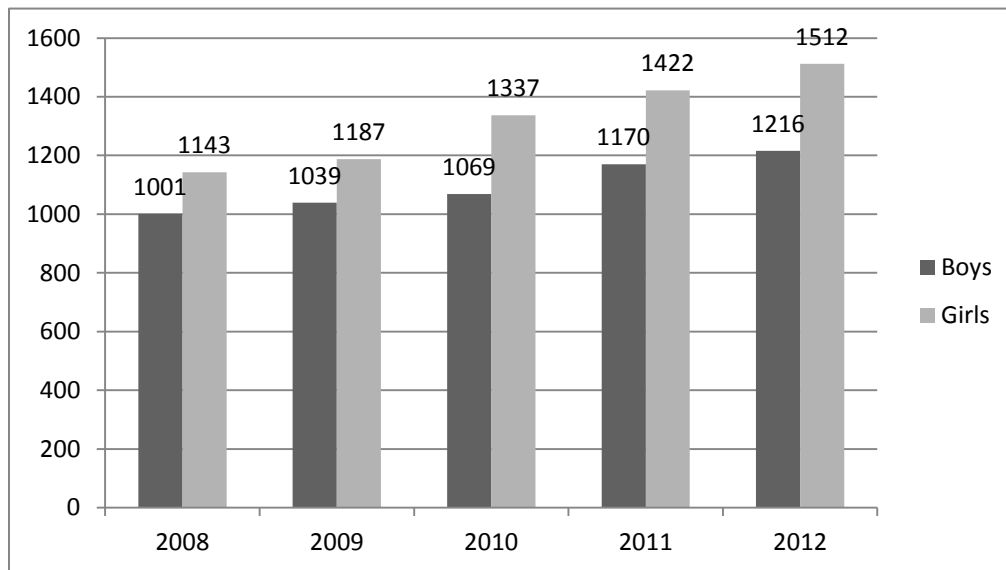
The school curriculum in any context is gendered and hegemonised (Roulston & Mills, 2000, p.225). Like masculinity, the curriculum too is subject to gendering regimes and is constructed in a hierarchy with the very elite or most difficult subjects placed at the top and the easier subjects at the bottom (Roulston & Mills, 2000). Mathematics and science, therefore, have come to be placed at the top of the curriculum hierarchy and have come to be perceived as masculine subjects with the arts at the bottom seen as feminine (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996). This is not unique to the South African context but in many Western settings such as Canada, Australia and the U.K. According to Salisbury and Jackson (1996) in the U.K subjects such as mathematics and science receive the greatest allocations of time within a school timetable when students' attention spans are at their optimum. Subjects like social education are allocated potentially the most difficult times such as the last lesson of the day (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996). The subjects at the top have tended to be taught by men and those in the arts by women (Roulston & Mills, 2000). The subjects at the top are associated with high-status traits such as rationality and objectivity; while the arts are associated with subjectivity and emotion. Mathematics is "hard" but history is "easy" (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.21). However, as Kessler points out, those subjects that involve clear distinctions between right and wrong with no area for ambiguity, flexibility or multiple, open-ended responses such as mathematics and science reflects a masculine perspective of knowledge (Kessler, 1985). It is the construction of these traits as gendered which leads to these classifications of subjects as masculine and feminine (Francis, 2000). According to Davies (1992) dominant sections of society tend to capture knowledge groups and manipulate them in their favour. Not so long ago classical subjects and languages were deemed to be the preserve of men and keyboard skills were downgraded to women-only preserve of typing. Now with the advent of the computer, keyboard skills are seen as essential information gathering requirements and thus are no longer associated with women. Thus curriculum genderisation too is the product of history but perceptions of subjects also change.



In Whitehead's (1996) study she found that boys and girls in the U.K do indeed have a sex-stereotyped view of subjects. Mathematics and science are seen as masculine but the languages and arts are seen as feminine. History – because it is about people - puts it into the feminine domain. These attitudes are linked to boys' and girls' views on the types of jobs and professions that men and women traditionally undertake. Boys are more likely to choose subjects that are rational or vocational – career-orientated (Whitehead, 1996). This is backed up by Stanley who found that girls are more orientated toward social services and aesthetics while “boys are more orientated towards theoretical concerns, factual concerns, economics and power” (Stanley, 2005, in Monastersky, 2005). This might explain why academically gifted girls tend to go into medicine, psychology and biology rather than physics or engineering. Girls want to be able to help people but boys want to be their own boss and make lots of money (Monastersky, 2005). But what Whitehead found is that girls are more likely to break the gender-stereotype by selecting A-level subjects commonly viewed as the domain of the opposite gender but not so boys. Boys are conscious of their masculinity and this affects many of their choices. One aspect of the construction of masculinity is the avoidance of the feminine. Boys, therefore, avoid choosing subjects that are viewed as feminine: “Boys showed much more bias in their subject choices and those choosing exclusively masculine subjects were much more likely to support traditional sex roles and to conform to traditional notions of masculinity” (Whitehead, 1996, p.147). Girls who choose feminine subjects, however, do not subscribe to traditional gender roles or stereotypical notions of what it means to be feminine. Boys therefore choose subjects that define themselves as masculine thus strengthening their gender identity (Whitehead, 1996).

In South Africa and largely within independent schools, on average boys make up 45,49% of the candidates entering the I.E.B N.S.C examination in history. Girls on average make up 54,51% (I.E.B, 2012). This percentage has remained relatively constant over the 5 years from 2008 to 2012. As the number of candidates writing the I.E.B N.S.C's history examination has increased so too has the number of boys entering

the examination. On the whole history as a subject remains more popular for girls but only marginally so as can be gleaned from Figure 2.3.



**Figure 2.3 Total numbers of boys and girls who entered the I.E.B N.S.C history examinations 2008 to 2012 (I.E.B, 2012)**

This seems to be an international trend. In a study conducted in the U.K at the G.C.S.E level it was found that the following subjects were likely to contain more boys than girls in the classes: information technology, physical sciences, mathematics, economics, physical education, music, business studies, political studies and technology. History was found to be one of the subjects that contained a fairly equal mix of boys and girls within its classes (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). This is borne out in the close to 50:50 split in the numbers of boys and girls that choose to write the I.E.B N.S.C examination in South Africa. It is within this context that the boys of this study are located.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

Feminism has done much to draw our attention to gender construction and power relations. It has also done much to focus on the impact of masculine norms in our

schools and society. But at the same time feminism has done boys a great disservice by assuming that all boys and men are universally privileged and not going far enough to problematize the construction of masculinity. Boys are a lot more self-questioning and aware of the dynamics involved in the construction of masculinity than what researchers in the past have credited them with. There are very few studies that have focused on the rejection of patriarchal hegemonic versions of masculinities and the acceptance of other forms of masculinities by boys in the classroom in general and in the history classroom specifically. This study seeks to articulate this.

Who teaches boys about masculinity? Schools, more than any other instructors, shape boys' construction of masculine identities as they provide a set of meanings through the reinforcement and regulation of gender norm behaviours and performances (Swain, 2003). Many all-boys' schools construct their own particular kind of masculinity that is unique to the school. This may be the result of the needs of the particular clientele or may have been constructed over time or in the case of long-established schools it may even be a by-product of a by-gone era. Thus the construction of masculinity is strategic.

Connell's (1996) theory of masculinity describes four categories or groups that emerge in the analysis of different forms of masculinity: hegemonic masculinity; subordinate masculinity; complicit masculinity and the marginalized form of masculinity. Masculinity, however, is fluid. Men and boys can in any one lifetime subscribe to a number of different and varying masculinities. This is often where the confusion comes into play between the real me, the perceived me and the ideal me. This confusion is heightened by the pecking order or hierarchy of masculinities that a boy will face as he becomes a man who in turn navigates his way in the world of gender relations.

Masculinity has also found itself in a crisis of late. This crisis is reflected in boys' poor academic achievement and behaviour problems. This crisis has in part come about because boys are much more interested in displaying and proving their manliness than performing academically. The school curriculum in any context is gendered and hegemonised (Roulston & Mills, 2000, p.225). Like masculinity, the curriculum too is

subject to gendering regimes and is constructed in a hierarchy with the very elite or most difficult subjects placed at the top and the easier subjects at the bottom (Roulston & Mills, 2000). In Whitehead's (1996) study she found that boys and girls in the U.K do indeed have a sex-stereotyped view of subjects. History – because it is about people - puts it into the feminine domain. Boys are conscious of their masculinity and this affects many of their choices. One aspect of the construction of masculinity is the avoidance of the feminine.

In the past adults came together to decide what historical facts all learners, which included boys, should know. They provided them with facts and then administered a test to find out whether the learners knew these facts or not. History education has evolved considerably since then. Wineburg (1991) has argued that historical literacy goes beyond the mere recall of historical facts. He contends that one has to be able to work with historical sources, as does a professional historian, in order to be described as historically literate. Wineburg (1991) introduced the concept of historical thinking to characterise the aims of a history education.

If history is everything that ever happened to anyone anywhere then that is a lot of history to try and study! The choice of what is worth studying or even remembering is considered to be significant. Decisions as to what is deemed historically significant involve both power and historical literacy. What is seen to be official history or legitimate knowledge can be found in textbooks and is the product of complex power relations in society involving race, class, gender and religion (Chipondo, 2011). According to Salisbury and Jackson (1996, p.250) history taught in classrooms is heavy with the exploits of warriors. Masculinity and the glorification of war are inextricably intertwined in the narratives of official school history. This is despite of, or because of, the content of the official South African N.C.S – History which was selected in order to understand our world today: "In understanding our world today and the legacies that shaped our present, the broad themes of power alignments, human rights, issues of civil society and globalization were used in suggesting areas of content" (DoE, 2003, p.30).

Wineburg (2001) contends that instead of focusing on what learners do not know about history, adults should in fact focus on what learners do know. More importantly history teachers should be interested in what sources beyond history lessons and history textbooks, contribute to students' understanding of history. This is unofficial history – history learnt from unofficial sources. This alternate or unofficial history curriculum is more often than not disseminated through family, cultural and religious associations. At other times they are created through cultural means such as museums, magazines, film and television. However, in multicultural societies tensions can start to arise because of the possibility of the conflict between official school history curricula and unofficial histories (Stearns, Seixas & Wineburg, 2000, p.285). It was Wineburg who asked the question “how do students ‘navigate between the images of the past learned in the home and those encountered at school?” (Wineburg, 2001, p.4). Moreover, of vital importance to this study – how do boys in particular situate their own personal narratives within the context of the national and international history that they are exposed to in the history classroom? This is where there is a large gap in the literature. Few, if any, literature exists to highlight what prior understanding of history boys bring to the history classroom.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

IRWIN            It's just that the boys seem to know more than they're telling.

HECTOR        Don't most boys? Diffidence is surely to be encouraged.

(Bennett, 2004, p.48)

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter identifies the critical research paradigm adopted and details the research methods used in the design of this study by exploring the nature of qualitative research and the related methodologies of narrative inquiry and focus group interviews. Reasons for framing this study with pro-feminism and taking a post-structuralist approach are also discussed. Lacan's (1949) Mirror Stage model is explained in detail and identified as the model that is used to make sense of the data generated by this study. Furthermore, steps involved in the coding and data analyses processes are also unpacked. Finally, the advantages and disadvantages of insider research are highlighted as well as the ethical issues involved in undertaking this study.

#### 3.2 Research Design

This chapter is the blueprint of my study. Immersing myself in boy-centred research, I have chosen to make use of qualitative methods of narrative inquiry and focus group interviews in order to answer, as fully as possible, my first two research questions as outlined in chapter 1.

##### 3.2.1 Boy-Centred Research

In their 1998 article *Developing "boy-centred research"* or studies of boyhood, Pattman, Frosh, and Phoenix for the first time gave name to a new academic field to emerge

within men's and feminist studies. The development of this field was met with concern by feminists engaged in feminist studies who for so long had had to compete for limited resources as well as institutional recognition. They objected to this field on the basis that men (and boys) are not as oppressed as men (and boys) the way that women (and girls) are. They did not need liberating as women (and girls) do, they argued. However, because of the work of Connell (1996), Mac and Ghail (1997) and others, boy-centred research has only recently been accepted as a credible field within gender studies.

Pattman, Frosh, and Phoenix (1998) defined boy-centred research as involving the understanding that masculinities are plural and "addressing them as relational identities which boys construct and inhabit." Although such research is largely interpretative and empathetic to understanding what it is to be boy from the perspective of the boys themselves, at the same time such research is also critical. Boy-centred research is critical of the ways that masculinities come to be constructed "as if they were pre-given identities with essential attributes inhering in them, necessarily different from the femininities of girls and women" (Pattman, Frosh and Phoenix, 1998, p.5). However, boy-centred research treats boys as active subjects in order to understand how masculine identities are "asserted, proved, performed and consolidated in relation to girls and other boys" (Pattman, Frosh and Phoenix, 1998, p.5).

Cox (2010, p.3) agreed that instead of focusing on what boys know or how badly they perform in the classroom, researchers should instead seek to focus on how boys "construct significance and discover purpose in their lives." By significance he implies "meaning and value beyond the immediacy of the moment; experiences that shape boys' minds through the power of insight, inspiration, and meaningful changes in their subjective perspectives of themselves and the world." The role of history education points boys "toward the type of self-realization that is the foundation of identity, achievement, and well-being." He argued that all teaching and learning should provide boys with an opportunity "to find transcendence." Boys are constantly involved in self-questioning and negotiating their masculine identities - "their self-doubts, their puzzled

contradictoriness, their spontaneous questions and their active sense of being able to change themselves and others” (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.14).

This study has been undertaken within the scope of boy-centred research. I have chosen to make use of qualitative methodology using a critical research paradigm to frame this study. Thereafter I have used the lens of pro-feminism and the Mirror Stage model (1949) of the post-structuralist Lacan through which to analyse my data. The analysis of the results of this study, it is hoped, will go some way to contribute to the studies of masculinity in this regard.

### **3.2.2 Research Paradigm**

A research paradigm or perspective is “the underlying set of beliefs about how the elements of the research area fit together and how we can enquire of it and make meaning of our discoveries” (Wisker, 2001, p.123). Epistemology refers to a group’s knowledge of the world and is derived from the Greek word for knowledge. Epistemology, therefore, is the philosophy of knowledge or how we come to know (Trochim, 2000, cited in Krauss, 2005). Epistemology is intrinsically linked to both ontology and methodology. Ontology refers to the philosophy of reality whilst epistemology refers to how we come to know that reality (Krauss, 2005). Since we each experience reality from our own perspective, each of us experiences a different reality. Critical theorists “use a relativist ontology, transactional epistemology and hermeneutic, dialectical methodology” (Wisker, 2001, p.123). The critical paradigm is a perspective or set of beliefs that aims at the production of reconstructed understandings. The focus is on how meanings are made through relationships. Transactional means that a set of actions causes other interactions and responses (Wisker, 2001). Dialectical methodology means that as different readings and arguments are presented and set up against each other, knowledge and versions of the world are created through this dialogue or make different or new understandings of the world (Wisker, 2001). Post structuralism is borne out of these methodologies and epistemologies. In addition I drew on the epistemology of the pro-feminist theorists in order to frame my research. The



critical lens of pro-feminism through which I conducted my research allowed me to look for meanings made through relationships (Wisker, 2001). Critical theory is both historical and structural and “relates to the possibility of causing change” (Wisker, 2001, p.124). My research, using a critical paradigm, therefore aimed at the production of reconstructed understandings – in this study it involved the understanding of both masculinity as well as the understanding of history and the intertwining of the two.

I used a critical paradigm in my research because “critical researchers see the world as being divided and in constant tension, dominated by the powerful, who oppress” (Sarantakos, 2005, p.51). Critical theorists “seek to produce transformations in the social order, in the way things are in society, and produce knowledge which is situated historically” (Wisker, 2001, p.124). In particular I undertook a critical study of masculinity and how masculinity influences boys’ understanding of history.

Within the critical research paradigm I chose to make use of pro-feminism - which advocates a multiple masculinity approach – to frame my study. Pro-feminism offers a pluralistic view of masculinity. There are two main areas of focus of pro-feminism: the power relations that play out in the construction of masculinity and the complex social hierarchy that is established in the construction of masculine identity (Imms, 2000). Pro-feminist researchers aim to “show that constructions of knowledge and of value, representations of versions of readings of the world, lives, are relative to who is doing the constructing and representing, where and when” (Wisker, 2001, p.22).

The multiple masculinities approach characterized by the pro-feminist framework offers practical suggestions that in turn can affect teachers’ best practice. Boys can be challenged to deconstruct characters’ femininity or masculinity in texts or analyse the many masculinities embodied by influential men in history. This in turn can serve to challenge boys’ own ideas of what it is to be a man. However, Nilan (1995) warns that one should be careful not to risk the outright rejection of such ideas which can happen if boys perceive ideas to be forced on them. Connell (1996) - a leader in pro-feminist writing - highlights a number of methodologies that can be employed as part of the

multiple masculinity approach and that have already been introduced into boys' programmes in Germany, Australia and the U.K.

Boys are not made masculine. They learn what it means to be masculine. This learning process is essentially invisible. Although schools are places in which gender power hierarchies are created, they also "have the capacity for being forces of emancipation" (Morrell, 1998, p.219). Oppressive gender practices that take place in schools can be changed (Connell, 1987, in Morrell, 1998). For this to be achieved not just research into masculinity but also the design and development of programmes in boys' schools that engage hegemonic masculinity and promote an allowance for alternative masculinities need to be implemented (Morrell, 1998). Studies of masculinity help to open up a new way in which we theorize gender studies but also provide practical ways in which to teach boys from an understanding that there is not one masculinity or even a right masculinity but many masculinities each possessing a voice that must be heard for "underneath boys' brave mouthings you can hear other choked voices straining to come through" (Jackson & Salisbury, 1996, p.109). There can be no more powerful rationale for my study. I want to hear these voices.

Delving deeper I have also made use of Lacan's (1949) Mirror Stage model as a metaphor through which I have made sense of my data. A model is "a term used to describe the overall framework that we use to look at reality, based on the philosophical stance" (Walliman, 2001. p.70). My study therefore involved a post-structuralist stance as Lacan's work epitomizes that of the post-structuralist thinkers.

Post-structuralism is a school of thought that came to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s and was led predominantly by French philosophers such as Kristeva, Derrida, Foucault and Lacan. Post-structuralism grew out of, and in response to, the philosophy of structuralism. Structuralism looks at the foundational structures implicit in all productions of a culture and undertakes an analysis of the many parts that create something to get a better understanding of the creation (Moses & Knutsen, 2007). The post-structuralists reintroduced the importance of context in understanding a social

situation (Moses & Knutsen, 2007). They were critical of the structuralists' perceived assumption that its own system of analysis was essentialist. The post-structuralists rejected the idea that there is any truly essential form to a cultural product as all cultural products are by their nature formed, and therefore are artificial (Moses & Knutsen, 2007). They asserted that the only way to properly understand the productions of a culture is to deconstruct the assumptions and knowledge systems that produce the illusion of singular meaning. In other words, to really understand a cultural phenomenon in the case of this study - boys and history - you have to study both the phenomenon itself as well as the systems of knowledge that produced the phenomenon. As a result the post-structuralists emphasised the importance of history to understand cultural constructs. By studying how cultural concepts have changed over time, post-structuralists sought to understand how those same concepts are understood by readers in the present. The post-structuralists believed that in examining a phenomenon or structure a number of biases or misinterpretations are introduced. They sought to find contradictions in the research process. They further used these inconsistencies to show that the interpretation and criticism of a phenomenon is in the hands of the reader and is influenced by the reader's own cultural biases and assumptions (Moses & Knutsen, 2007).

Lacan (1949) critically reinterpreted the work of Freud. According to Lacan (1949) every child passes through a stage in which an external image of the body – a mirror image - gives rise to the mental representation of an “I.” A child first becomes aware of his mirror image between the ages of 6 and 18 months. During this stage the child identifies with the image which serves as a mirror of the child's perceptions of the self. This is the first time that the child sees itself as an entity instead of just fragmented movements. This is not a dispassionate experience – the recognition provides the child with joy. It is the child's first experience of itself as a separate individual and is the beginning of the child's formation of his own identity.

It is, however, also the child's first identity crisis. When a baby sees itself in the mirror again it both recognizes itself and misrecognizes itself. The image is psychologically

integrated and physically coordinated in a way that the baby does not feel. The image in the mirror comes at a time when the infant does not have control of his or her own body yet and therefore the original image in the mirror is a mirage of control of the perfect self or imago (Lacan, 1949). Because the image of the unified body does not match with the underdeveloped child's physical vulnerability and weakness, this mirror image is established as an "ideal me" toward which the child will forever strive to achieve throughout his life. The imago creates a permanent sense of being imperfect but looking forward to perfection (Lacan, 1949). The mirror image is an artificial projection of the self-modelled on the visual images of objects and others that the individual confronts in the world. The image in the mirror is, however, always changing as it contrasts "with the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him" (Sheridan, 1977, p2). The original image in the mirror – or gestalt – is the mental permanence of the I. The ideal I – "the statue in which man projects himself" (Lacan, 1949, in Sheridan 1977 p. 2). The image seems to be perfect – an ideal ego – that is appealing, to be loved and emulated in a narcissistic fantasy. The perfect other also creates envy, confusion and tension between the two opposite images. In particular it creates fear in the child that it will regress to its previous imperfect state of erratic, uncontrolled movements. The mirror does not reflect feelings and lies about the apparent independence of the image that the child does not have (Lacan, 1949). This misrepresentation leads to further crisis when in taking the subject position of the image and looking back on its actual self, the baby contrasts what it sees with the ego ideal and the baby casts itself as imperfect and inferior leading to self-loathing and the desire to become the unattainable ideal (Leader & Groves, 2000). The child continues throughout its life to build its self-image moving between alien images, the ideal image and fragments of the real body. Lacan's Mirror Stage (1949) is therefore a metaphor that I have used to better understand the pro-feminist lens.

The reason why I have chosen to make use of Lacan's (1949) Mirror Stage model is that it goes some way in reflecting the concept of masculinity. Masculinity is fluid. Men and boys can in any one lifetime subscribe to a number of different and varying masculinities. This is often where the confusion comes into play between the real me,

the perceived me and the ideal me. This confusion is heightened by the pecking order or hierarchy of masculinities that a boy will face both inside and outside the history classroom as he becomes a man who in turn navigates his way in the world of gender relations. History education serves as a mirror into which the boys of this study peer. At times the mirror image reflected by the official school history is clear and in keeping with the boys' perceptions of masculinity. At other times the mirror images are blurred. Lacan's (1949) Mirror Stage model is therefore a powerful metaphor which will serve as a mirror against which I will be holding up my entire study.

### **3.2.3 Qualitative Methodology**

Qualitative research is "pragmatic, interpretive and grounded in the lived experiences of people" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.27). I have chosen the qualitative research methodology as it allows a "broad approach to the study of social phenomena" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.27). Qualitative researchers believe that the best way to research a phenomenon is to "view it in context" (Krauss, 2005, p.759). In my particular study this phenomena involved the study of masculinity within the context of a history classroom in a South African independent boys' secondary school. Furthermore, qualitative research allows the researcher to "understand meanings, to look at, describe and understand experience, ideas, beliefs and values" (Wisker, 2001, p.22). Many qualitative researchers work with the ontological assumption that there are many different realities or multiple realities (Krauss, 2005). Qualitative research involves "the complexity of social interactions expressed in daily life and by the meanings that the participants themselves attribute to these interactions" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.27). According to Krauss (2005) the best way that a qualitative researcher can understand a phenomenon is to be immersed in it.

Methodology identifies the means used to get the knowledge of this reality (Krauss, 2005). The method/s used must match the phenomena. Different phenomena may require the use of different methodologies. According to Falconer and Mackay, (cited in Krauss, 2005, p.761), by "focusing on the phenomenon under examination, rather than

the methodology, researchers can select appropriate methodologies for their enquiries.” In order to find out the answers to my first two research questions I made use of a case study qualitative methodology using narrative inquiry and focus group methods to generate my data.

### **3.2.4 Case Study**

I made use of a bounded case study in my investigation. Case studies are a common form of social research making use of a qualitative methodology. They are not, however, a method of data collection but are “a research model that employs a number of methods of collecting data and analysis in a variety of contexts” (Bromley, 1986, in Sarantakos, 2005, p.211). Case studies involve the “in-depth study of a single example of whatever it is that the sociologist wishes to investigate. This may be an individual, a group, an event or an institution” (McNeill & Chapman, 2005, p.120). A case study served my purpose well as case studies “investigate social life within the parameters of openness, communicability, naturalism and interpretability” (Sarantakos, 2005, p.212). Case studies are popular with social scientists in order to examine contemporary real-life situations (Soy, 1997). In addition case study research “excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research” (Soy, 1997, p.1). One of the strengths of the case study method is that it allows for a number of ways that data can be gathered. As I will be discussing a little later, I made use of both narrative inquiry and focus group interviews in which I gathered my data. Case studies allow for the gathering of qualitative data (Soy, 1997) and as such are popular research models employed by feminist researchers as they are a tool that gives focus to specific units regardless of whether they are representative or not, yet they provide voice to the often voiceless as well as depth and detail needed for the research (Sarantakos, 2005). This case study sought to give voice to boys’ experiences in order to investigate the impact of masculinity in their understanding of history.

However, it must be acknowledged that case studies only provide results that are

specific to the unit of study and cannot always be used to induce generalized understandings. Case studies therefore “make no claim to representativeness because the essence of the technique is that each subject studied is treated as a unit on its own” (McNeill & Chapman, 2005, p.121). By their nature they also yield findings that are personal, full of biases and often cannot be replicated. Some critics maintain that because of the intensity involved in their use, the findings are made biased (Soy, 1997). There is also a limited access to the field and to the personal and subjective information that constitutes the basis of case studies (Sarantakos, 2005). Furthermore, other critics maintain that case studies involving a small number of cases “can offer no grounds for establishing reliability or generality of findings” (Soy, 1997, p.1). Case studies are limited because they are useful merely as an exploratory tool. However, this is the very reason why I want to make use of it – to begin the process of exploring masculinity and how this impacts on boys’ understanding of history and in that sense it served the purpose of this project.

### **3.2.5 Purposive Sample**

I made use of a purposive sample in order to obtain the rich, thick data that was needed for my case study. A sample is “a selected and chosen group upon which you carry out your research” (Wisker, 2001, p.138). As a sample they are chosen to indicate the larger whole of which they are but a small part (Wisker, 2001). Any research method depends on the ability to gain access to a sample. I chose to make use of a purposive sample as I had a ready access to an appropriate sample. I taught two grade 12 history classes in the year in which this study was conducted. Timetable constraints dictated that whereas my one grade 12 history class consisted of 23 boys, the other history class consisted of only 9. I had never taught a class that consists of so few boys. This class was therefore quite unique in my experience. As I taught this class every day, they were easily accessible. Hence my sample is purposive. All of the boys in the class (9 in total) formed the group that made up my case study - my assumption being that the boys who made up the members of this group were a good cross spectrum of the various masculine profiles or masculinities that exist at this all-boys’ independent school. In

addition, I had built up a good rapport with the boys in this class over a number of years. I thought that as a result the boys in this class would be open to sharing their thoughts and stories with me in order to gather the valuable data that I needed for this study. As it turned out the class in its entirety proved to be a useful sample of the multiple masculinities that cohabit this all-boys' independent school. This purposive sample provided me with the opportunity of giving voice to many masculinities in this study. Finally, the case study using the purposive sample is suitable because it is bounded: it allowed for the dual investigative focus on both masculinity and the learning of history. Furthermore, it fitted in within my research paradigm.

However, it may well be that the purposive sample making up this case study is not typical of the many masculinities to be found in this independent boys' school or other independent South African boys' schools. However, it is expected that this case study will make a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge on masculinity and specifically the impact that masculinity has on boys' understanding of history.

### **3.2.6 Ethical Issues**

The first rule of ethics is do no harm. As such I tried to ensure that as much as possible no harm came to the participants in my study. In so doing I followed the University of KwaZulu-Natal criteria and policies regarding ethical clearance and ensured that ethical clearance was obtained before I embarked on my study (see appendix). Provided that the data generated from the study can be used to benefit society "it is acceptable to ask questions, if you first obtain the respondents' informed consent" (Kumar, 2005, p.81). As will be described later in this sub-section I did obtain the respondents' informed consent. Once ethical clearance had been obtained and before undertaking the research I first obtained the consent of the school's headmaster. As this is an independent school, the Department of Education was not contacted. "It is important that the consent should also be voluntary and without pressure of any kind." (Kumar, 2005, p.81). As most of the boys' in the study were over 18 I asked them directly for their consent to be involved in my study. In giving their consent they were asked to sign a form indicating their



willingness to be involved in the study. This was deemed necessary since “Informed consent implies that subjects are made adequately aware of the type of information you want from them. Why the information is being sought, what purpose it will be put to, how they are expected to participate in the study, and how it will directly or indirectly affect them” (Kumar, 2005, p.82). The letter requesting consent outlined the reason for the study, the time that the interviews and personal narratives were likely to take up and the scope of the study. At no time were the participants threatened to provide information. Although the provision of information is critical to the data collection process, had a participant not wanted to provide a response to a question, I endeavoured to respect the participant’s choice. Likewise participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage.

According to Walliman (2001) ethical issues involve two broad issues. One is responsibility to the subjects of the research and involves privacy, confidentiality and courtesy. Some of the information obtained through the written narratives and the focus group interviews was to some degree sensitive, particularly since it involved the masculine identities of boys as well as their personal and family histories. Although in the narration of their stories none of the boys alluded to overtly sensitive or even illegal practices that they had encountered at the boys’ school in which the study took place, nevertheless their narratives and responses in the focus group interviews were by their nature personal and as such respect for privacy was paramount. In so doing I decided to protect the identity of the boys’ school as well as the boys’ individual identities through the creation of pseudonyms for both the school and the boys. In addition every effort was made to accurately record and interpret the data received. The digital video recordings were safely secured and only taken out to be transcribed. Thereafter they were once again secured away from general access and in time will be destroyed in order to respect the boys’ privacy. Confidentiality was maintained at all times.

The other issue according to Walliman (2001) involves the values of honesty, frankness and personal integrity. Honesty is essential to illicit responses from the subjects but is also needed in order promote a level of trust and credibility in the promotion of debate and the production of knowledge. The worst case of dishonesty involves plagiarism. At

the beginning of this thesis I declared that this dissertation is my own work. It has not been submitted before, in whole or part, for the award of any degree at any other university. Where use has been made of the scholarship of other authors, they have been duly acknowledged.

Honesty is also required in the accurate descriptions of how the research was conducted; the data obtained; the methods used and analysis of the data. I have tried my best to be as accurate as possible in the descriptions in every stage of the research process. Every attempt was made to avoid bias as “a deliberate attempt either to hide what you have found in your study or to highlight something disproportionately to its true existence” (Kumar, 2005, p.82). Bias can also involve the selection of data. Silently rejecting or ignoring evidence that is contrary to one’s own beliefs is also a breach of honesty. It is difficult to be completely free of bias. However, every attempt has been made to not distort the data. Nevertheless, there was one aspect of this study which was a potential threat to this study and that was my conflicting role as both researcher and insider.

The term insider research is used to describe studies where the researcher has a direct involvement or connection with the research setting (Robson, 2002). This contrasts with the traditional notion of the researcher as being an objective outsider studying subjects external to him or herself. An insider is “someone whose biography (gender, race, class, sexual orientation and so on) gives him a lived familiarity with the group being researched” (Griffith, 1998, p.361). An outsider is “a researcher who does not have any intimate knowledge of the group being researched, prior to entry into the group” (Griffith, 1998, p.361). There are a number of ways in which a researcher can be categorized as an insider. For example a study that takes place in a researcher’s place of work or when the researcher him or herself is the subject of the research or when the researcher is partisan to the emotional, political or sexual affiliations of the subjects. I am acutely aware of the role that I, as researcher, played in this study. I am an insider researcher on many levels. Firstly this study took place in my place of work and specifically within one of the classes that I teach. Furthermore, the focus of this study is the learning of

history which is directly linked to my job which is teaching the boys of this study history. Finally, the second focus of this study is masculinity and as a man I am aware that my own masculine identity was interrogated as well as impacted on the research process despite my attempts to try and avoid bias. As a result there were times when I too became both the researcher and the subject of this study.

With insider research the concept of validity comes into question as the researcher is intimately involved with the subjects of the study. Validity is associated with objectivity and as such some may claim that the research conducted by an insider researcher is invalid. Being an insider may influence both observations and interpretations. This is particularly true if the researcher's relationship with the subjects impacts on the subjects' behaviour or responses. A further negative is if the researcher's inside knowledge leads to a misinterpretation of the data or if the researcher's political or sexual orientation leads to distortions of the data. Being an insider may make the researcher uncomfortable to ask certain questions and likewise the subjects of the study might find it difficult to answer certain questions because of the researcher's insider position. Familiarity with a group may lead to the researcher taking things for granted, developing myopia and assuming his own perspective is far more wide spread than it actually is (Mercer, 2007). Obvious questions might not be asked, sensitive topics might not be raised and assumptions might not be challenged (Hockey, 1993).

Others might argue that objectivity is impossible to achieve (Kvale, 1995). One can never guarantee the honesty and integrity of subjects or researchers. Researchers' subjectivities always play a part according to the post-structuralists. However, it is important to the research process that in an attempt to minimize bias as much as possible that the researcher makes known his or her position in relation to the subjects of the study. This makes the research process as transparent as possible and allows the readers to construct their own perspectives.

In spite of the above, some point to the advantages of insider research. Tedlock (2000) argues that insiders have a wealth of knowledge which outsiders may not be privy to.

According to Hockey (1993) as an insider the researcher does not have to deal with culture shock, enjoys enhanced rapport with the subject, is able to measure the accuracy of the responses to questions and is seen by the subjects as empathetic. Subjects might also be more comfortable with inside researchers and may talk freely. One's membership of the group provides a level of trust and openness. In addition an insider researcher has ready access to the group (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2007). As a result insider research has the potential to add to increased validity due to the added richness, honesty, fidelity and authenticity of the information acquired (Mercer, 2007). According to Wicks (2009) insider status helps more than hinders the research process. Mercer maintains that the more we focus on insiderness and outsiderhood as an "either/or duality, the more we are tempted to judge one as better than the other" (Mercer, 2007, p.13). Instead, Mercer (2007) argues, we should see insider and outsider research as points on a continuum that we should value equally. There are points in favour of being either an outsider researcher or an inside researcher. And there are also negatives. Ultimately the final word on this matter is succinctly summarized by the qualitative researchers Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p.56): "As a qualitative researcher I do not think being an insider makes me a better or worse researcher; it just makes me a different type of researcher."

Every attempt has been made not to allow my insider status to cloud the research process. At the same time my role as insider, I believe, allowed me to gain easy access to my sample group and my relationship with the participants created a relaxed enough atmosphere to yield the data that I was hoping to obtain. In addition to counteract my insider status I made use of two methods of collecting the research data – namely narrative inquiry and focus group interviews. By using two different methods I attempted to validate the data that would have otherwise been brought into question had I made use of just the focus group interviews for example. Furthermore, I have made my insider status known to the reader from the beginning of my study.

### **3.3 Research Methodology**

“Methodology is the third member in a trio involved in the philosophy of science” (Moses & Knutsen, 2007, p.5). Methodology refers to the ways in which we “acquire knowledge” (Moses & Knutsen, 2007, p.5). In the case of this study methodology means the qualitative umbrella under which the methods I have used to collect my data by means of the two methods discussed below as well as the manner in which the actual data was analysed.

### **3.3.1 Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry is the method of using storytelling in order to gather data for the purpose of research. The stories – or narratives – can be written, oral or visual in format. Narrative inquiry is based on the epistemological assumption that people live “storied lives and that telling and retelling one’s story helps one understand and create a sense of self” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.30). We, therefore, think narratively (Singh, 2009). This method also seeks “to describe the meaning of experience for those who frequently are socially marginalized or oppressed as they construct stories [narratives] about their lives” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.30). Consequently, this research method is popular with feminist researchers. I am particularly interested in the stories of how boys have come to understand themselves as emerging men and their journey of learning how to be masculine and how it is shaped by their understanding of history. According to Salisbury and Jackson (1996, p.232): “Boys are often more prepared to open up about the problems and contradictions of traditional manliness through the emotional commitment of their own personal stories about growing up masculine.”

Narrative inquiry was first used in the 1970s by Pinar and Grumet as an autobiographical method to specifically understand how experiences shape curriculum thought and action (Singh, 2009). This method has been used successfully in psychology by Polkinghorne (1988). Narrative inquiry has largely been used in the research of teacher education and specifically looking at how teachers’ narratives have informed their practice (Sinclair Bell, 2002). It was Connelly and Clandinin (2000) (cited

in Sinclair Bell, 2002) who adapted this methodology to suit educational research purposes. Narrative inquiry rests on the assumption that stories do not exist in isolation but are “shaped by lifelong personal and community narratives” (Sinclair Bell, 2002, p.208). Often times these stories are based on deeper stories that people are often not aware. Narrative inquiry connects the inner and outer experiences, “so narratives should not be seen as separate from real life, but as a way of forming meaningful connections to life” (Singh, 2009, p.3).

Narrative inquiry, however, goes beyond just the telling and listening of stories. “It is the analytical examination of the underlying insights and assumptions that the story illustrates” (Bell, 1995, cited in Sinclair Bell, 2002, p.208). The method goes beyond the stories themselves to deeper within in order to analyse the assumptions on which the stories are constructed. Stories offer a “window into people’s beliefs and experiences” (Sinclair Bell, 2002, p.209). The data that was generated using narrative inquiry was based on the participants’ own words. Researchers in the analysis phase pay particular attention to how the facts contained in the story are assembled and how the story is constructed (Trahar, 2009). This method is further favoured by sociologists who “need to understand how people interpret social reality by using methods that allow researchers to see the world through their eyes” (McNeill & Chapman, 2005, p.122). In so doing, the narrative inquiry method places great emphasis on the person’s own interpretations and explanations of their choices, actions and beliefs. This provides researchers with “very personal and richly descriptive narratives which gives us great insight into everyday social life across time” (McNeill & Chapman, 2005, p.123).

In my study I sought to elicit the autobiographical details of the participants through the writing of their personal narratives or stories. In so doing, the use of past experiences to explain present day behaviour and attitudes sought to challenge the familiar common sense of a “boys will be boys” approach (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.233). The narrative inquiry method can be justified if it is one’s aim to question these normalizing assumptions about boys as “it can scrape beneath the false bravado to expose the daily routines and rituals that have built up these assumptions and hidden fears, uncertainties

and anxieties, which many boys feel about not coming up to expectations” (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.233).

Narrative inquiry is, however, not suited to all research. Often narratives have been ignored because of a “traditional modernist-empirical view” (Singh, 2009, p.11). Because of the time commitment it requires, it is not conducive to research involving many people (Sinclair Bell, 2002). On the negative side, narrative inquiry, like life histories, can sometimes be side-tracked, focusing more on the individuals involved rather than on the social context (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Stories can also be “multilayered” and “ambiguous” (Sinclair Bell, 2002, p.210). Because this method depends on the memories of the participants, it comes up against a number of difficulties: recalling selectively and memory gaps as well as reinterpreting the past for example (Ross & Conway, 1986 cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This also opens up the method to a number of biases and distortions such as self-glorification or the idealization of the past.

This method also involves the close collaboration of researcher and participants. Successful storytelling often is dependent on the friendship that exists between the teller and the listener and as such the researcher finds it difficult to be removed from the research (Sinclair Bell, 2002). The real danger of narrative inquiry comes when the researcher seeks to analyse the participants’ stories as part of a larger narrative and therefore attempts to give the narratives greater meaning. The subsequent analysis of the data, therefore, may be open to bias (Sinclair Bell, 2002). In addition, if used on its own, narrative inquiry is seen to not be representative or valid. However, narrative inquiry is an effective means to elicit voice. This methodology draws attention directly to the voice – who is speaking and what are they saying.

My attraction to this method is because it bridges the two focuses of my study: history and masculinity. As Gough (1998) (cited in Singh, 2009) reminds us, that in education in addition to our own personal narratives, we also tell stories in textbooks, policy documents as well as journal articles. My study aimed to find out how boys create a

historically grounded narrative of themselves and their learning of history: their past; and current place in South Africa and the world. Narrative inquiry “offers teachers the possibility of understanding their students in new ways” (Sinclair Bell, 2002, p.211). The real benefit of narrative inquiry is when the participants “go beyond the literal and make sense of their stories in a critical light” (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.234).

There is no single narrative inquiry method but a number of methods (Singh, 2009). Various activities have been used in similar studies to investigate how boys learn to become masculine using the narrative inquiry method were undertaken by Salisbury and Jackson (1996). One method involved giving a group of boys a large sheet of paper and felt tip pens. Boys were asked to use the entire area of the sheet to draw a map of their life’s journey. They were asked to detail all the masculine things that they encountered along the way. They were told to begin with their birth and to end with the present day. Another study undertaken by the same researchers involved boys being asked to compile a list of first time experiences – such as the first time that I learnt that sewing was for girls and not boys. Another study involved boys being asked to bring to class toys that they had played with in different stages in their lives. The boys were put into groups and told to tell the stories of their toy playing. The final study undertaken by Salisbury and Jackson (1996) involved the bringing to class of family photograph albums. Boys were asked to tell the stories behind the photographs.

In line with the above my use of narrative inquiry involved using a written task to generate the data needed. Participants were asked to write the story of their lives and their learning history – the topic that they were given was: “History and Me – a story.” They were given a double-sided page on which to write this story in a 50 minute lesson. No further instructions or explanations were given. This method was designed in order for boys to stand outside of their lives so as to identify key moments or turning points in their life journeys that have helped shape who they are. The intention was for these boys to deconstruct “the masculine mystique” – how boys become masculinized (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.233). As Wineburg (2001) has pointed out, the role of history “is a tool for changing how we think, for promoting a literacy not of names and



dates but of discernment, judgment and caution” (Wineburg, 2001, p.6). Ultimately by studying history, boys are able to confront and interrogate the world in which they live. “By tying our own stories to those who have come before us, the past becomes a useful resource in our everyday life; an endless storehouse of raw materials to be shaped or bent to meet our present needs” (Wineburg, 2001, p.6).

Narrative research does not seek to produce any “conclusions for certainty” yet at the same time it seeks for its findings to be “grounded and supportable” (Singh, 2009, p.12). It does not purport to uncover the exact truth but “aims for verisimilitude – that the results have the appearance of truth or reality” (Singh, 2009, p.12). It must further be acknowledged that the conclusions drawn using the methodology of narrative inquiry tend to stay open-ended (Polkinghorne, 1988, cited in Singh, 2009, p.12).

### **3.3.2 Focus Groups**

A focus group “is a type of interview which involves a group discussion led by a facilitator whose job it is to manage the group dynamics by establishing trust and rapport in what people hopefully interpret as a secure, comfortable and confidential environment” (McNeill & Chapman, 2005, p.65). Focus group members are required to talk to each other rather than to the facilitator. In so doing a lot of rich, qualitative data is produced. I held two focus group interviews – the one group consisting of 4 boys and the other of 5. This ensured for greater intimacy allowing for as many boys’ voices to be heard. The groups were decided by my subjective assumption of the boys belonging to one in the range of masculine categories as described by Connell (1996). Although not definitive this was done for the sake of the research process so as to ensure that each group was as representative as possible and was not dominated by one type of masculinity. However, it should also be noted that focus groups work best when the members feel that they are surrounded by those most like themselves which will allow for freer expression of opinions. I video-taped the focus group sessions in order to not only hear what each of the boys was saying but also to observe the group dynamics. This group discussion allowed for the construction of meanings as the members

addressed, discussed, explained or negotiated different views on issues related to history and masculinity.

Focus groups, as a form of qualitative research, should be approached with the understanding that results cannot be measured with a fixed instrument or set of questions (Krauss, 2005). Instead, the researcher should allow the questions to “emerge and change” (Krauss, 2005, p.760). I, however, had a few set questions which I used to validate the analysis of the results yielded by the written narrative such as: Why did you choose to study history?; who influenced you in this choice?; what have you learnt in your study of history over the past five years?; what do you understand by the word masculinity? and how has your study of history shaped your understanding of masculinity? It is the intention of the qualitative researcher to find out why people give meanings to certain events, objects and people. This can be done by talking to them in formal or informal contexts (Krauss, 2005). As Krauss (2005) again points out, the rigour of the data analysis depends on whether the researcher is able to immerse him or herself into the research setting. An objective, distanced approach will not lead to this rigor.

It must, however, be pointed out that whereas these focus groups sought to validate the data yielded by the narrative inquiry, like the former method, the focus group was not representative of the larger social group or general population. In addition, the data obtained from the focus group interviews depended on the atmosphere of comfort and trust created by the facilitator. Some members at the outset did shut down when they realized, despite consenting to it as part of the ethical clearance process, that the discussion was being video-taped. Some members of the group did dominate and others did shy away. At the same time my dual roles as insider and facilitator is brought into question, influencing the members’ responses by asking leading or loaded questions. It is equally up to the facilitator as to whether discussions stay on track or whether they are hijacked by a dominant member of the group (Sarantakos, 2005).

### **3.3.3 Triangulation**

Used as a standalone method, narrative inquiry is not reliable enough and the results yielded may not be valid. Reliability means that “anybody else using this method, or the same person using it another time, would come up with the same results” (McNeill & Chapman, 2005, p.9). This is not likely by making use of the single method of narrative research. As this method involves a lone researcher in a situation that may not be able to be repeated exactly, it is not a reliable enough. Validity refers to the problem of whether the data collected is a true picture of what is being studied. I have already discussed the fact that case studies are not necessarily representative of the entire population, institution or phenomena and the same is true for the use of this method of narrative inquiry: the boys could write complete fiction or may write what they believe the researcher wants to read. In order to give the study greater validity, trustworthiness and reliability, I made use of a second research method. In addition to the use of narrative inquiry I followed up the writing of the personal narratives with the hosting of two focus group interviews. This provided for a fuller and more comprehensive picture of social life (McNeill & Chapman, 2005). Such a triangulation of methods of research “allows the researcher to cross-check and verify the reliability of a particular research tool and the validity of the data collected” (McNeill & Chapman, 2005, p.23). The focus group interviews provided a greater depth and clarity to the concepts unearthed by the narrative inquiry method.

However, it must also be stated that there are a few disadvantages to the use of multiple research methods. The first difficulty is that they amass vast amounts of data that might be difficult to analyse. Secondly, quite often the same importance is not given to both methods – I admit that the use of the focus groups was undertaken solely to verify the data yielded by the narrative inquiry – a secondary method and not my first choice of method. Equal status, however, should be given to both methods. Finally, a combination of methods may yield completely contradictory data which poses a number of difficult questions such as: Should the data be discarded or how should the data be reconciled? (McNeill & Chapman, 2005). These are questions that needed to be answered in the undertaking of two methods of research: narrative inquiry and focus

group interviews. However, very few reliable, authentic and valid case studies today make use of a single research method. More often than not multiple methods are used to provide meaningful insight into people's lives (McNeill & Chapman, 2005).

### **3.3.4 Data Analysis**

The construction of meaning is the ultimate aim of qualitative research. This meaning is achieved in the data analysis process. This process is "highly intuitive" and "it is the epistemological nature and assumptions that make qualitative data analysis a rich and often intricate exercise" (Krauss, 2005, p.763). Furthermore, the analysis process has been described as "eclectic", having "no right way of conducting it" (Creswell, 1994, cited in Krauss, 2005, p.764). However, any conclusions drawn from the analysis will remain unclear until the researcher has declared the means by which these conclusions were derived. In my study the narrative inquiry and focus group responses were analysed using the open coding analysis method. These results were then analysed through the lens of pro-feminism using the Lacanian Mirror Stage (1949) model as a metaphor to find out what boys understand about masculinity and history, whether through their studying of history their narratives legitimised their current position as emerging men in an all-boys' independent school in South Africa or whether their studying of history problematizes their identity creation.

#### **3.3.4.1 Open Coding**

A coding system facilitates the organization of copious data and is the first step in conceptualization (Walliman, 2001). Coding is "the formal representation of analytical thinking" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.124). It requires the assigning of categories and themes which involves categorizing the qualitative data as well as describing the implications and details of these categories. The researcher goes through the data and assigns codes to the various responses or passages. Codes are "labels or tags used to allocate units of meaning to the collected data" (Walliman, 2001, p.262). This serves to avoid data overload resulting from mounds of unconnected data.

Miles and Huberman (1994) list four general categories that should be used to formulate codes: descriptive, interpretive, explanatory and astringent. This was built upon by Lofland who constructed a classification of social phenomena for which it is possible to devise a coding scheme. This classification consists of acts, activities, meanings, participation, relationships and settings. The process involves reviewing, selecting, interpreting and summarizing the data without distorting it (Lofland, 1971). Codes can sometimes be devised before conducting the study and then to be refined during the data collection process. Open coding, however, opens up lines of enquiry. It is a system “used as an index for ideas: reflective notes or memos, rather than merely bits of text” (Walliman, 2001, p.263). One begins with analysing the data in minute detail before moving onto a more selective coding where one codes according to a core concept (Trochim, 2006). The researcher looks for conceptual patterns, for what is central, while labelling the data (Sarantakos, 2005). In so doing what will emerge are concepts that will eventually become the basis of the theoretical model (Bohm, 2000, in Sarantakos, 2005). Thereafter these newly emerged conceptual categories will be tested within the data to see whether they have the explanatory power that they are supposed to have. Finally, concepts will be compared against others in order to decide which have depth and need further analysis and which ones should be discarded (Sarantakos, 2005). This enables a rapid retrieval of selected information from the mass of data collected (Walliman, 2001).

In the data analysis process the researcher has to try to not impose his or her own views on the data, should set aside any previously obtained knowledge or views and should be “open, sensitive and empathetic to the participants’ responses” (Krauss, 2005, p.764). Researchers are also expected to declare their biases, thoughts and feelings in the research report (Krauss, 2005).

In this study open-coding was used in order to bring to light the core concepts of history, masculinity and history and masculinity. The aim of this study was to investigate how the construction of masculine identity impacts on boys’ understanding of history. A single document was drafted and a grid designed in order to enhance readability of the

coding yielded by an analysis of the written narratives. The headings of the columns in the grid were Character; Events; Actions & Settings that fell under the broader heading of Personal History. Under the next broad category of Official & Unofficial History I headed the columns Family; Primary School; Secondary School; Skills and the Future. The final column I headed Men & Masculinity. Through a careful combing through each of the nine personal narratives I wrote down notes in each of the columns. For example if reference was made to a boy's grandfather I wrote 'grandfather' in the Character column under the Personal History banner.

When it came to the focus group interviews the video footage was transcribed verbatim into a word document. Track changes were then used to highlight key words or phrases associated with men; masculinity and history and notes made commenting on these words or phrases. These notes were aligned to the column headings from the personal narratives and notes were made following a cross reference to the personal narratives. Having analysed both the personal narratives and the focus group interview transcripts a comparison of the individual responses was then undertaken to draw out commonalities and to then highlight differences or silences. Following this process a number of themes were identified which are used as sub-categories in chapter 4 in order to answer the first two research questions.

Lastly, I analysed the results from the open coding using Lacan's Mirror Stage (1949) model to facilitate the boys' deconstruction of their masculine identities. This model furthermore was used to locate what these boys held to be significant in their study of history as well as significant characters and events in their development from boys to emerging men.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have described the research paradigm and the methodologies that I have used in this study. Immersing myself in boy-centred research I have described my

use of a bounded case study using a purposive sample. Furthermore, I have explained that I have chosen to make use of qualitative methods of narrative inquiry and focus group interviews in order to answer, as fully as possible, my first two research questions as outlined in chapter 1. I have also shown how the study was designed, the data coded and analysed using open coding. In addition I have drawn on the epistemology of the pro-feminist theorists in order to frame my research. Reasons for using the critical lens of pro-feminism and taking a post-structuralist approach were also discussed. Once again Lacan's (1949) Mirror Stage model was explained in detail and identified as the model that has been used to make sense of the data generated by this study.

The main reason why I chose to make use of Lacan's (1949) Mirror Stage model was that it goes some way in reflecting the concept of masculinity. Masculinity is fluid. Men and boys can in any one lifetime subscribe to a number of different and varying masculinities. This is often where the confusion comes into play between the real me, the perceived me and the ideal me. This confusion is heightened by the pecking order or hierarchy of masculinities that a boy will face both inside the and outside the history classroom as he becomes a man. History education serves as a mirror into which the boys of this study peer. Ultimately this case study has sought to give voice to boys' experiences in order to investigate the impact of masculinity in their understanding of history.

Finally, I explained how I subscribed to ethical practices when conducting my research. Furthermore, I highlighted that every attempt had been made not to allow my insider status to cloud the research process. At the same time my role as insider, I believe, allowed me to gain easy access to my sample group and my relationship with the participants created a relaxed enough atmosphere to yield the data that I was hoping to obtain.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

SCRIPPS     It's this making it up I can't get used to. Arguing for effect. Not believing what you are saying. That's not history. It's journalism.

DAKIN        Just wait till you get started on sex. You're making it up all the time. Being different, outrageous. That's what they go for. I tell you, history is fucking  
(Bennett, 2004, p.76).

#### **4.1     Introduction – Let's Hear It For The Boys**

Boys do not learn history in isolation. They learn history in genderised and genderising institutions. At the same time that they are coming to an understanding of history, boys are also constructing their own identities. Thus official school history plays a role in the construction of masculine gender identities. Few studies have sought to highlight the impact that masculine gender construction plays in boys' understanding of history particularly within the context of an independent secondary boys' school in South Africa. This is the impact of unofficial history on a boy's history education. As the analysis of the data will show, although official school history has an impact on these history boys' understanding of masculinity, the converse is stronger: masculinity (as a component of unofficial history) has a greater impact on these history boys' understanding of history.

The data analysed in this chapter came about through the application of the research methodology as described in the previous chapter. The analysis of the data generated from this study sought to answer the following research questions in this chapter:

1. What do boys understand about history and masculinity?
2. How does masculinity influence boys' understanding of history?

I am aware that this chapter is rather lengthy but it has come about because I have



resisted the temptation to break the chapter into two as this would have fragmented my argument. In the analysis of both the boys' narratives as well as the focus interviews using open coding a number of broad categories emerged, namely: Making A Man Out Of You (self-perceptions and the impact of intimate role models on the boys' masculine identity); Manning Up (the impact of the school on the boys' masculine identity); Every Man For Himself (reasons why boys choose history as a subject in grade 10); Man Made History (the role of official history in history education); Going Down In History (history education and the impact on masculinity); History In The Making (deconstructing unofficial history) and finally Boys Will Be Boys (unpacking the findings used to answer the two research questions outlined above). Some categories have been broken down further into a number of sub-categories. By listing these broad categories from the outset I aim to provide the reader with a blue-print to navigate this lengthy chapter.

## **4.2. Making a Man Out of You – Self Perceptions and the Impact of Personal Role Models on Boys' Masculine Identity**

Masculinity is fluid. Men and boys can in any one lifetime subscribe to a number of different and varying masculinities. This is often where the confusion comes into play between the real me, the perceived me and the ideal me. This is in keeping with Lacan's (1949) Mirror Stage model as the boys in this study had a blurred vision of what masculinity is. Their perceptions of themselves were in contrast to their common perception of what the ideal or 'real' masculinity means.

### **4.2.1 'Real' Men**

In finding out what the history boys understood about masculinity as a key concept to this study, the focus group yielded a variety of responses. The boys' initial responses to what it means to be a man were archetypically in keeping with hegemonic masculinity:

Jeffrey: Ego. Like men thinking they're superior, men showing they're physically superior

and stuff like that.

Brad: I always think of men as like aggressive, and I like always think of like conflict, fighting.

Ian: How men just thought they were better, like they could only get a job, be the bread-winner and stuff.

Allan: Being hard, manly and tough and stuff.

Ryan: Be the dominant power, and just conflict generally.

Thabo: Strength ... taking charge of situations... the one to take the bullet for the family, if for instance if some-one were to die, you the one to die first.

Michael: Power ... like a dominant figure, the provider, someone that, obviously the bread winner, and in the women's sense it would be the care-taker.

Sipho: Male figure. Being a man means to me being at peace with yourself, and having people that you feel you have to protect, people that are close to your heart, people that you really love, and feeling that you have to be there for some-one, and doing your best to try to protect them.

Jaryd: Strength. I think being able to look after and protect a family and a wife, and then, to that extent a community or whoever you may have authority over, and just being that patriarchal figure.

So these boys' understanding of the concept of masculinity means being able to dominate. But this understanding is based on a very outdated conceptualization of masculinity. However, without fail, all of these boys seem to have the same understanding. According to the boys, a typical man is aggressive and taps into this aggression in order to dominate over others. Conflict is an unavoidable part of the domination process. Strength is an essential component of being a man. This strength

can be found in undertaking physical acts as well as physical confrontations in order to assert dominance but also strength of character – being brave and being willing to protect those closest to you. This is in keeping with hegemonic masculinity. This refers to the masculinity that is formed by the legitimacy of patriarchy. This group can claim its authoritative status through the institutionalized power that exists in places such as a boys' independent boarding school. Such examples would include body strength over emotional strength; action over thought and also man over woman (Connell, 1996). According to these boys being a man also means being the provider – ensuring those closest to you are never left wanting for anything.

When questioned whether they believed that there is only one form of masculinity the boys were conflicted. They were quick to see the one form of masculinity (tough, aggressive) as a stereotype yet their notions of what it means to be a man were largely stereotypical: the bread-winner, the protector and the provider. As Ryan stated: “There is only one way to be stereotypically masculine, but there are, I’m sure that there’s some alternative use to that, but I think the common stigma like attached to being masculine is like hard, strong, well-built.”

According to these boys a man’s qualification for domination is because of his physical strength. It is this physical strength that gives men power and differentiates men from women. As Jeffrey stated, “men are still seen as more powerful and stuff.” This was echoed by Ryan: “Man’s ability to be physically stronger, in a different sense, and be able to go to war and fight our battles.”

However, when trying to think of alternate forms of masculinity instead of thinking of other attributes that are perhaps more often associated with femininity, some of these boys chose mental dominance. Thus, for the history boys masculinity means dominance - be it physical or intellectual. A man dominates. By implication this means dominating other men as well as dominating women.

Where do these boys’ draw their understanding of masculinity from? Why do they

without exception all tap into the same traditionally hegemonic understanding of what it means to be a man? Have these boys picked up their ideas from South African society at large; their families or have these ideas been shaped by the all-boys South African independent boarding school in which they have all found themselves in? What role does history play in shaping these boys' understanding of masculinity? According to Michael it is both the school and society that determine what it means to be a man. These lessons are therefore learnt through unofficial history sources. He had learnt what it means to be a man within the all-boys' independent boarding school but the school serves only to espouse the views of society at large. In his view being a man is both "physical and intellectual."

Thus for these boys their understanding of what masculinity is is based on a stereotypical, hegemonic view: man is the provider; he is aggressive; he dominates through the use of force and physical strength or intellectually. Man can also dominate through the use of all three. Ultimately, a real man dominates over others. Another aspect that these boys all share is their study of history. How then does the study of history contribute to boys' understanding of masculinity? This will be analysed further in the chapter.

#### **4.2.2 'Own' Man**

When they were asked how they defined themselves as men, these history boys' responses were quite different. Many defined themselves as quite the opposite of the archetypical view of masculinity as explained above, particularly when it came to conflict situations involving violence and aggression.

Interviewer: What type of man do you think you are?

Thabo: I'm a peaceful one, I just stay away from trouble and that type of thing, trouble that would harm me in the future.

Sipho: I'm the type of guy who would try to avoid trouble at all costs. I try to do right, that wants

to be helped by a higher person than me, and always willing to learn.

Although a couple of the boys hinted at the use of violence to make a point, most of the history boys suggested that they would always avoid violence. However, most of them suggested that they would stand up for a principle they valued. Loyalty to one's friends was another issue which they would be prepared to defend. Thus, being a man according to these boys does not require the use of violence but it does involve emotional or moral courage and the defending of ideas.

Many of the history boys described themselves as open-minded and accepting of others, suggesting that they did not have the desire to dominate others be they men or women. Honesty was a word often used to describe their form of masculinity. Honesty takes courage. Courage was also associated with masculinity. However, the history boys of this study acknowledged that masculinity does not always need physical or violent confrontations in order to display courage. As Jaryd stated: "I think I'm the kind of guy who, like these guys, doesn't like conflict but if it's for something I don't stand, then I'll stand up for what is right and I'll try to help people as much as I can, but sometimes to the detriment of myself, as long as other people are ok then its hundreds." Siphos agreed with Jaryd that emotional strength is strength nevertheless.

So if all of these history boys shared a common, hegemonic understanding of what it means to be a man, why do they almost all not see themselves in this reflection? Why do most turn their backs on this notion of masculinity when defining the types of men that they perceived themselves to be? Do they reject this hegemonic masculinity outright seeing themselves as different? Do they subscribe to another more superior or evolved form of masculinity or do they in fact feel inferior, seeing themselves as lesser than the hegemonic, not being able to match up to the traditional more commonly accepted view of masculinity? In order to answer such questions one needs to again refer to the work of Lacan (1949). The boys in this study described themselves as rather complex and the product of various tensions. At the same time they all shared a similar image of what a man is supposed to be. There is a tension that comes into being

between the identity that the boys have built of themselves and the identity of what it is to be a man. The tension is created because these two identities do not match up. This tension in part is caused by the conflicting lessons taught by unofficial history and official school history.

### **4.2.3 Man's Man**

Men learn what it means to be a man from other men. These lessons are not taught through the official school curriculum but through the unofficial curriculum. These history boys were no exception. They defined their masculinity in relation to other men and they were acutely aware that masculine power was being enforced all around them through their relationships with other boys and the school as a genderising institution. Some of the boys in this study referred to the roles that their fathers and male friends had played in their development from boys to young men. These relationships had a powerful and profound effect on these boys – more so than the lessons taught in the official school curriculum. Whether the history boys were conscious of it or not, women seldom featured in the writing of their personal narratives. When women did feature it was largely as a result of the absence of a father figure.

#### **4.2.3.1 Fathers**

In Allan's story it was his father who had decided to send him from his co-educational pre-school to an all boys' primary school. In telling him of this decision his father described this opportunity as "lucky" which suggests that it was something to be celebrated and an opportunity that not every boy has. By attending this all-boys' primary school Allan's sporting prowess was brought to the fore and he became popular with the other boys. This reaffirmed his masculinity and also determined the next stage in his life's journey into secondary school.

Both Jaryd and Michael's fathers are Old Boys of the school which were the reasons why they both ended up attending Balcomb Academy. In Jaryd's case: "My father would

intrigue me with stories about his experiences at [Balcomb] when he was a boy which attracted me to the school.” The need to follow in a father’s footsteps strengthened the acceptable masculine formation as it served to repeat the experiences involved in what it means to be a man. In Jaryd’s case his father’s masculine identity was forged at this independent secondary school to such an extent that he lived his experiences over and over again through the stories told to his son. Thus by attending the same school as his father not only legitimised this boy’s masculine formation but also that of the father who had a second opportunity of living out the masculine gender practices through his son.

For Michael, however, his father’s presence – although seldom physical – was overpowering: “Going to [Balcomb] in Grade 8 was my father’s choice, it was the school he attended and I guess he wanted me to follow in his footsteps.” A successful businessman, his success meant that Michael and his family got to live in a wealthy secure estate in Johannesburg and allowed Michael to attend two independent primary schools. However, Michael’s father’s success cast a shadow over his son who, despite stating the opposite, quite clearly felt that he could never amount to what his father had become. Michael felt powerless and, despite his bravado, was overcome by his obvious fear of failure: “Some sons feel inadequate because of their father’s successes, but not me, although I am uncertain what is to become of me, I know I’ll be Titanic in life, it is something I ponder on every day of my life, it is like trying to pick the lock to a Tittanium [sic] safe that even a \$1000000 diamond core drill cannot even penetrate.”

In two of the history boys’ narratives there was an obvious absence of father figures. No mention was made of the boys’ fathers at all. In Sipho’s story he highlighted the impact that his mother’s success in her job had on his life as it “meant she could afford to send me here.” Although Jeffrey did not mention his father, he did describe the fact that he lived with his mother in the U.K for two years

#### **4.2.3.2 Friends**

Friendships with boys played an equally important role in the development of these

history boys into men. Despite being awarded sports scholarships at a number of independent and state secondary schools, Allan chose Balcomb Academy because that was where his friends were headed. His popularity meant a lot to Allan as he referred to his great number of friends at numerous stages in his narrative. On enrolling at his secondary school Allan was quick to describe the fact that he “had plenty friends.” His story ended with the sentence: “My learning at school has been made into a great experience and I have made friends that will stay with me for life.” Being popular means being accepted as a man – subscribing to the acceptable form of masculinity shared by other boys in the group.

However, losing these friends can have a detrimental effect on a boy’s character. Michael’s father’s success resulted in his family moving to the U.S.A - “the only downfall is that I had to leave my entire life and friends behind.” Despite the excitement of moving to a new country Michael saw this life-changing event as “a downfall” and the end to the life that he had known. This life had been defined by the friends that he had had.

According to Brad one of his most valuable lessons learnt at Balcomb Academy was “you make friends with like the same kind of, the same circle as you, but being like boarded in different houses, it taught me to like, I was like forced to get to know like different people, and you make friends with people you never thought you’d be friends with ...”

These history boys therefore learn what it means to be a man through their relationships with other boys or men. Fathers play a very strong role in the formation of the boys’ masculine identity. What featured strongly in the data was the pride that some of the fathers had in their sons following in their footsteps and likewise the pride of a son in walking down the same path as his father. Such stories legitimise boys’ and men’s masculinity – “I must be alright if he wants to be like me” or “I am alright because I am like him.” This serves to create the mirror image of what it means to be a man. However, relations with other boys play just as important a role in masculine identity as



relationships between fathers and sons. Being accepted as part of a large friendship group is seen as an acknowledgement of the sharing of a similar sense of what it means to be a man. Those history boys who spoke of losing their friends or being rejected by other boys undoubtedly suffered setbacks in their masculine gender identity – “there must be something wrong with me if I do not have friends.” This leads to a feeling of being different or not the same as other boys – the perceived me versus the ideal me comes into conflict. This is when the boys’ perception of their own reflections do not match up to the mirror image of the ideal boy. However, it is clear that boys are profoundly affected by their relationships with male family figures and male friends as these unofficial lessons have the greatest influence on these history boys’ masculine identity.

#### **4.3 Manning Up – The Impact of the School on the Boys’ Masculine Identity**

Schools as institutions shape boys’ construction of masculine identities. They form part of the unofficial curriculum. They reinforce and regulate gender norm behaviours and performances. Furthermore schools become the places where particular forms of masculinity are negotiated and even policed. Every school forms its own hierarchy of masculinities and has its own dominant or hegemonic form of masculinity located at the top of this hierarchy. This exemplifies what it is to be a real boy. This defines the norm. Furthermore this serves to create the ideal mirror image of the ideal man. Balcomb Academy’s masculinity hierarchy was identified by Jaryd: “I think there is a definite emphasis on sport, and I think that that’s quite a big marketing point for the school, and I think that’s why it gets driven quite a lot.”

Other history boys disagreed. They felt that the school allowed boys to excel just as much in other spheres not just sport. However, they stressed that the emphasis is on excelling nevertheless. Balcomb Academy emphasizes the need for excellence. The most masculine are those boys who are achievers – regardless of category - be it sport, cultural activity or academic studies. According to Jaryd, “you don’t have to be the first team rugby player, you don’t have to be the gym culture, you can also be whatever you

are, in your own right, in your own life, in your own talent, and that you can still have from that your own authority and reputation.”

However, in essence the institution serves to produce boys who essentially are the same; with the same values; the same outlook and ultimately the same masculinity. Conformity serves to achieve that. Those who conform are accepted and those who do not are rejected. The one way that a boy can get accepted is if he conforms to the masculine ideal as espoused by the institution. But this is where the conflict begins. More often than not the conflict resides within the boy as he struggles to define his own masculinity in the face of the masculine hierarchy. This was touched upon by Jaryd: “[Balcomb’s] got this wonderful kind of habit where boys all expect each other to fit into this line or box, and everybody’s concept or image of what the box looks like is completely different and that causes tension.” This leads to the conflict of the real me versus the image of the ideal me.

In addition the masculinity hierarchy is supplemented by the unofficial lessons that the history boys picked up on what it means to be a man. At Balcomb Academy the ability to stand on your own two feet, to become independent of your parents, to face consequences for your actions and to control your emotions are characteristics of the ideal boy. In short, this is what it means to “man up!” Independence is a value emphasized particularly as the institution is a boarding school and the boys are physically separated from their parents. They are required to grow from boys to men without the constant presence of their parents. The institution with its masculinity hierarchy takes over the role of moulding the boys. It is a hugely impactful source of unofficial lessons on what it means to be a man.

Punishment is the means by which the institution enforces its rules but was also used by the boys to regulate desirable attributes of masculinity. This was highlighted by Allan: “Sort of overcoming difficulties and if you get a punishment just take it and grow from it.” The ability to own up, stomach punishment without complaint achieves stoicism which was another attribute associated with the form of masculinity valued by this institution.

Complaining or showing emotions were considered to be undesirable or weaknesses. As Jeffrey stated: "I'll own up and take the punishment for it rather. I think like I'm gonna get in trouble if I do this and decide whether it's worth it or not instead of just doing it and just crying when I get the punishment." In so doing the history boys learnt that real men do not complain or show emotions but accept hardship. However, this is not natural for the boys and is a hard lesson. Thabo described his confusion seeing other boys crying when such things were considered taboo at the school especially from those at the top of the masculinity hierarchy: "Every man has emotions ... black people say 'ja men don't cry. Why you crying? You supposed to be a man. That type thing, but then recently we went on like a choir tour we came second by 0.5% and it was amazing to see which guys actually cried, because the people you'd actually think were the hard ones like the guys you'd never ever seen cry, they're just men, the one's that play first team rugby, so ja." Paradoxically the history boys also learnt that if there was an issue on which they disagreed with someone, they should not ignore it but should rather confront the person. However, this did not seem to extend to the person within whose authority the boys fell. Once judgment is passed and punishment given there is no longer any speaking out. To do so would not be masculine. Such are the contradictions within the formation of the masculinity hierarchy.

The history boys therefore learn many lessons on what it means to be a man from the independent boys' only boarding school in which they all find themselves and which forms part of the unofficial history curriculum. These lessons, however, are contradictory: being independent but learning how to be accepted as part of the group; accepting your punishment like a man but confronting those who have caused you an injustice. However, in a sense these contradictory lessons all lead to the conflicting and ambiguous notions of what it means to be a man. Through their definition of their own masculinity some of the history boys hinted at a rejection of patriarchal hegemonic versions of masculinities and acknowledged other forms of masculinities. Through their narratives of the lessons learnt at their independent boys' boarding school some of the history boys had begun to see through the false conclusions drawn by the masculine hierarchies that are established within all-boys' schools. Furthermore, these history

boys were able to determine for themselves the existence of hegemonic masculine gender construction and some suggested a rejection of it as they determined for themselves a fair and just sense of masculine construction. There is therefore a clash in the lessons learnt through the official school history curriculum and the unofficial masculine gender forming curriculum.

#### **4.4. Every Man for Himself – Reasons Why Boys Choose History as a Subject in Grade 10**

There are many reasons why the boys of this study chose to study history from grade 10. The reasons ranged from personal to vocational. At the core of their decision to study history after grade 9 was an understanding that history would shape their education in a certain way. However, it was apparent that the boys were not prepared or expecting the obvious impact that the studying of history would have on their masculine identities. History furthermore contributed to the creation of the mirror against which these history boys viewed their masculinity. The reasons for choosing history in grade 10 are therefore not random or arbitrary. They are in fact significant.

##### **4.4.1 Personal Significance**

Significance for the boys in this study was determined by whether they could relate to the subject of history; whether it had a personal meaning to them and ultimately whether it mattered to them as emerging men.

In Allan's story he went as far as saying that "History was apart [sic] of my life as I had to do it every year since grade 4. I rather enjoyed the subject and used to do really well." Although written erroneously suggesting that history was "apart" from his life (suggesting separation), Allan in fact meant the opposite. It was an important part of his life. He reaffirmed this towards the end of his narrative when he stated: "History has been a great part of my everyday life and at [Balcomb] it is made out to be as exciting every day." Ryan, too, saw history as having had personal relevance: "History has

shaped who I am here today.” Jeffrey also highlighted the fact that he had gained a lot of knowledge through his study of history. History had relevance for him because it interested him. His interest in the subject resulted in him gaining historical knowledge: “History is mostly the only subject that I have learnt anything in, in my entire school career and maybe that’s because its one of the only subjects that interests me, but whatever the reason, history has been an interest of mine and will continue to be.”

The fact that these boys achieved well in the subject was an important reason why they seemed to have enjoyed studying history. Perhaps the converse is truer: these boys found history interesting and that is why they did well in studying it. Jaryd stated that history “has always been one of my favourite subjects.” However, within the next sentence he could quite clearly recall “achieving high marks and remember getting 100% for the end of year exam.” Ryan stated that “History is a subject that definatly sticks out as one that I enjoyed the most at school.” Sipho described his study of history at secondary school as enjoyable because he got “well above 60% for it.” So why did these boys find the subject so interesting and why did they see history as being significant?

One possibility lies in the fact that the studying of history is integral to the boys’ formation of their own identities – their masculine identities. Remembering that when asked to describe what it means to be a man most if not all of the boys described a man in hegemonic terms. However, going back to the image of the mirror inspired by Lacan’s (1949) model, when asked to describe themselves as men the image was distorted. This distortion saw the beginnings of a third masculine identity and that is of “the history boy” – a young man aware of the ambiguities involved in masculine identity. Through the study of history these history boys have accredited significance to men or events in history that have somehow influenced a deeper understanding of what it means to be a man.

Brad chose history because he had found it “interesting.” This was echoed by Jaryd who also chose history “because of my interest.” History was one of Jaryd’s “favourite”

subjects. Allan in the focus group interview also described history as “interesting.” Ryan described the subject as “one that I enjoyed the most at school” as the studying of history was a “meaningful and exciting way of life.” Jeffery admitted that history had been “an interest of mine and will continue to be.”

For Allan the reason why he chose to study history in grade 10 was because of the history teacher that he had had in grade 9: “I had Mr [Y] for the rest of my [Balcomb] career and when I was in grade 9 he was the one who influenced me to take History as a grade 10 subject.” Enjoyment as well as the role played by the teacher were two reasons why Sipho also chose history: “the fact that I enjoy it plus I’ve got a good teacher.”

The history boys found the studying of history as interesting because it was meaningful to them. It mattered. By implication it meant that the studying of history was relevant. It played some important part in not only their education but also their personal development. Another word associated with meaningful is significant. Historical significance refers to historical knowledge (people; events) that are deemed to be relevant or important and involves the emphasis of certain historical figures or events over others. This sub-category of historical significance will be analysed later in more detail. Suffice to say at this stage that most of the history boys acknowledged that their study of history was significant. Why was this?

To know is empowering. To know more than others means to dominate others intellectually. For some of the boys the desire to know what happened before they were born was one of the reasons why they chose history after grade 9. Not studying history is to remain forever ignorant. It also means to be dominated by those who know more historical knowledge. As Thabo stated: “I chose history because I had a general interest in history. I wanted to learn about what had happened in my country when I was not born and not around to see what had happened.”

For these history boys the gaining of historical knowledge furthermore added to a

broader understanding of the world today. It was knowledge not just for knowledge's sake but knowledge that can be applied in an everyday setting. Brad recalled a moment when his knowledge of history ensured his intellectual domination over others: "It helps with like your talking. We were having a conversation the other day [John] doesn't do history and he didn't know what we were talking about, we were talking about communism and all of that, capitalism and stuff, and he didn't even know what we were saying." The possession of significant historical knowledge therefore places these boys within the masculine hegemony as it means that they can dominate other boys.

This need to know more and to find out the truth that remains hidden was the reason why Jeffrey chose to study history. The more he found out, the greater was his desire to find out more. History and the quest for answers are infinite and this was an attraction for Jeffrey: "the more I find out the more I want to know, it's like a circle of history." History therefore fuelled something within Jeffrey. Choosing to study history was deeply personal: "Throughout my life I have changed and become a person who wants to know everything about everything thanks to history." This need to know more was also articulated in Ian's narrative with his statement "my study of history through schooling has given me a bigger outlook on the world and its past." Knowing more and retaining this knowledge had earned Jaryd the respect of his peers which was further empowering. Knowing more set him apart from the other boys and gave him credibility. In fact it earned him the nickname of "the Oracle." In addition knowing of the mistakes made in the past gave these history boys further credibility amongst their peers. Knowing historical knowledge therefore was empowering for these history boys. It allowed them to dominate intellectually and therefore serves to construct a hegemonic masculine identity for these boys.

Being accepted and popular is important to boys in general and this was true of these history boys. It reaffirmed their masculinity and was empowering. Knowing more than others is equally empowering. Historical knowledge was also seen as relevant knowledge – it could be applied and had significance for these history boys – knowing what had come before them gave these boys greater insight into the world in which they

found themselves. This knowing more than those who have not studied history is a form of dominance that the boys had earlier characterized as a core component of hegemonic masculinity, not the physical dominance but an alternate form of masculinity: intellectual dominance. Thus knowing history enables a boy to intellectually dominate other boys who do not have this kind of knowledge. This resulted in these boys seeing history as relevant or significant. However, there are other aligned reasons why these boys were drawn to the studying of history.

#### **4.4.2 Man for the Job**

Law and history seem to have had an association in the minds of these history boys. Ryan, Sipho and Jeffrey all indicated their intention to study law after school and all three admitted that this was one of the reasons why they had chosen history after grade 9. They saw the studying of history as training for a career in law. Jaryd saw history as a subject which offered both an academic attraction as well as providing “hands-on” skills that are needed after school. He saw history in the curriculum as being positioned half way between science and fine arts, offering both logical and creative thinking needed for his chosen career. Vocationally, Jaryd indicated his intention to study architecture – a course that required both logic and creativity - and he saw history as part of his course. Unlike the other history boys, Michael’s decision was not greatly influenced by any interest that he had in the subject or because of a vocational focus. He admitted that his decision was based on a choice between accounting and history. He admitted that he “took the lesser of the two evils.” Michael did not know what he wanted to study after school. However, he admitted that the study of history had provided him with some insights into human behaviour which had given him some direction. History therefore had further relevance or significance for these boys as they perceived it to have a positive influence on their tertiary studies or career path. In particular there was a strong association of history and law.

Another component that the boys had earlier associated with being a man was standing up for what is right. This defence of justice - which was seen as synonymous with a



positive masculine identity – made the studying of law seem as a positive masculine career choice. History, with its association with the studying of law, was therefore seen to be a relevant or significant subject. It provided the historical knowledge that could be used to dominate others intellectually and also prepared these history boys for a career in law – a credible masculine profession in which a man is seen to be standing up for what is right. History therefore played a part in these boys' understanding and negotiating their own masculinity. This made the studying of history at school – the embodiment of official history - both significant and empowering. It ensured that for these boys they found their place within hegemonic masculinity.

#### **4.5 Man Made History – The Role of Official History in History Education**

Official history refers to the history learnt in the history classroom - the formal academic curriculum – as embodied in the N.C.S – History. It has already been established that to know more historical knowledge empowered these history boys to dominate others intellectually but what of the process of doing history? Is the doing of history seen by these history boys as equally empowering? Essentially the question that I was hoping to answer was what did these history boys really understand about the studying of history? The answer to this question will later inform how the studying of history in turn influenced these history boys' understanding of their own masculinity.

Having chosen the subject of history in order to gain relevant historical knowledge and seeking a positive masculine identity, the boys were then expected to master the skill of historical thinking. Historical thinking means going beyond simple memorization and recall of historical facts. Instead it involves constructing the past from historical texts, artefacts and other forms of historical evidence. However, it also involves engaging critically with the sources of historical information which means drawing on the cognitive skills of analysis and evaluation; placing events into a correct chronology and constructing and maintaining a coherent argument of what they believed happened in the past. Furthermore, it requires that sources are interpreted in their historical context. Essentially the history boys were required to demonstrate the skills of the historian.

They were therefore involved in doing history. However, is this process readily brought to mind when the boys were asked to describe their relationship with history? On looking back on their relationship with history would they describe the process of understanding history or would they merely focus on the content that was covered in their lessons?

The answer to the question of what these history boys understood about the studying of history lay in the verbs or actions that the boys themselves chose to describe their association with history. In analysing their personal narratives the following verbs were used: (I have used bold to highlight these verbs):

Brad:           **learnt** about the French revolution

Ian:             I have **travelled** on the road of historical education  
my **study** of history  
**finding** out the past  
**gain** more historical knowledge

Jaryd:          **investigating** the history  
I can **remember** a bit about African history  
Process of **investigation** in grade 8  
**Learning** of history

Thabo:         **study** history  
**learn** about what had happened

Ryan:          **coming into contact** with history

Sipho:         **learning** about Protest movements  
**learning** how different people reacted

Jeffrey:        history is how we **learn**  
History is mostly the only subject that I have **learnt** anything in

The more I **find** out the more I want **to know**, it's like a circle of history

Michael: I became so **absorbed** in it  
I **learned** everything about Ancient Egypt

Verbs associated with historical thinking or the process of being a historian would be “find out,” “investigating”, “finding” and “travelled the road.” These history boys therefore saw that they had been involved in the process of seeking historical knowledge in the quest to know more. It had not just been handed to them for them to memorize. The verb “studying” was commonly associated with history. Studying is more than memorizing. It implies a focus on the topic at hand. This process was a personal one as they had become “absorbed” in the process which at times had been quite challenging suggested by the words “coming into contact.” However, in doing history the boys came to see the process of finding historical knowledge as the process of learning. Learning is a much higher-order cognitive skill than just memorizing and by implication is something that can be applied far beyond the classroom context. This provides further relevance or significance to the studying of history. Learning was the most common cognitive term associated with history by these history boys.

The focus group interviews provided an opportunity to drill deeper into which skills the boys readily associated with the learning experience. The boys showed a definite understanding that history is more than just the memorization or recall of pre-existing knowledge. An understanding of cause and effect is a skill unique in the learning of history. What motivates man's actions and the consequences of these actions is something that only the learning of history provides. According to Jaryd: “History's taught me that everything you do will impact everything else, even if you don't do anything.” Ryan immediately picked up on the skill of critical thinking and admitted that he saw the studying of history as more than just about the dates. Critical thinking according to the boys was a requirement for the successful studying of history. The skill of critical thinking is part of the process of historical understanding. One of the ways in which critical thinking is demonstrated is by discerning fact from opinion. The ability to

study something from multiple perspectives is also a requirement of critical thinking and was a skill that the boys claimed that they had acquired through the learning of history. According to Jaryd he was able to demonstrate the skills of critical thinking through the construction of an argument. In the pursuit of acquiring historical knowledge these history boys came to a historical understanding of what they were studying. Historical understanding is a higher-order skill involving both historical thinking and historical knowledge based on a varying nature of evidence from primary and secondary sources. Historical understanding ultimately provided these boys with more than just historical knowledge – they, through the process of doing history, came to understand historical knowledge. This furthermore empowered these history boys to dominate others intellectually.

Having determined what these history boys thought about the process of doing history in order to come to a historical understanding, the next category will seek to answer the question: what historical knowledge do these boys determine to be historically significant? This is an important aspect in understanding, in the context of this study, how masculinity influences boys' understanding of history and how history influences a boy's understanding of masculinity. As previously highlighted, history was seen by these boys as having relevance. By inference this means that historical knowledge plays a role in these boys' understanding of themselves – in particular their masculinity. However, of all the historical knowledge and historical understanding gained, what was determined by these boys to have the greater relevance? By greater relevance I am referring to historical significance.

#### **4.5.1 Historical Significance**

Decisions as to what are deemed historically significant involve both power and historical literacy. What is seen to be official or legitimate knowledge can be found in the history curriculum, textbooks and is the product of complex power relations in society involving amongst others power, race, class, gender and religion. Why did the event or historical person end up being discussed in the public domain long after the event? As

stated in the previous category, significance for the boys in this study was determined by whether they could relate to the history that they were studying at school; whether it had a personal meaning to them and ultimately whether it mattered to them. This determined whether it had had an impact on them and their emerging masculinity.

In order to ascertain historical significance, the boys in the focus group setting were asked what their immediate association was with the word history. Their responses will be analysed further in the various sub-themes. In doing this I have chosen to itemize some of their responses individually by way of introducing the theme of Historical Significance.

Interviewer: If I were to say the word “history” to you, what’s the first thing that comes to mind?

Jeffrey: Past.

Brad: Important, important dates.

Ryan: Spies and like weapons and stuff like that.

Jeffrey: Mistakes.

Allan: Old things.

Ryan: Hitler.

Ian: Mostly war.

Thabo: War.

These responses were both similar and yet different. Most of the boys’ initial responses revealed an association of history with some sort of conflict – more specifically, war. Both Ian and Thabo mentioned war specifically and Ryan suggested this with the

mention of Hitler. Hitler was the only historical character that was mentioned by name in the boys' initial responses. Ryan did qualify his association of history with war as he mentioned "spies and weapons." War and conflict featured predominantly in the boys' recollection of the history studied at school. For Ryan: "History is stereotypically violent. Like what we learn about in school, it's not necessarily all about peace and stuff like that, there's always conflict." Brad, Jeffrey and Allan did not, however, associate history with war but instead mentioned more generic, neutral words such as "the past"; "old things"; "dates" and "mistakes." So why is it that half of the boys associated history with war and the other half did not and how did these two streams of thought play itself out in studying official history?

#### **4.5.1.1 South African History and Historical Significance**

Despite history at primary school not having had a strong identity of its own within the primary school curriculum Jaryd could recall studying Mapungubwe. This was easy to remember possibly because Jaryd's family lives in Gauteng and thus this topic had more of a geographical significance for him. For Ryan, having moved from Zimbabwe, he detested learning South Africa's history in primary school "with the Zulus and the Afrikaners. I found this incredibly boring. It was not interesting in the slightest." Because his interest in history had been forged by his grandfather's stories of his previous country of residence as well as the Second World War in which his grandfather had fought, South African history was foreign to Ryan. He could not identify with it. History was not relevant. None of the other boys made any reference to learning about South African history at primary school. There are a number of reasons for this. One is that they failed to find the South African history that they learnt relevant and therefore interesting or that they did not study much South African history at all. The latter is hard to accept as the primary school history curriculum is full of the history of South Africa's indigenous peoples in particular. However, at the same time this might account for why these boys did not find the history learnt in primary school interesting or relevant. Most of the boys taking part in this study were white, middle-class English speaking boys and thus the history taught in primary school did not speak to them. It had no historical

significance for them.

However, the perception of South African history changed for many of the boys by the time they reached grade 12. For Brad his favourite section in his grade 12 curriculum was “South Africa’s Emergence as a Democracy” as he found this section “interesting and relevant.” He saw relevance as being synonymous with interest. A number of the boys in the focus group interviews agreed with Brad’s sentiments, finding contemporary South African history interesting. Why had the boys’ attitudes to South African history changed? Why had South African history become significant? One possible reason for this change in attitude is that being more contemporary in nature the boys could see the legacy of South Africa’s emergence as a democracy being played out in their everyday lives. Much of the political landscape in the South Africa of today can be explained through the study of South Africa’s history of the 1980s and 90s. So this history immediately became significant and in so doing, interesting.

However, this section also taught the boys lessons of masculinity which brings a double significance. It featured strong male characters who displayed courage and conviction. This was highlighted by Jeffrey who, when asked which section of the grade 12 curriculum he enjoyed the most, stated: “Apartheid, because of like how De Klerk eventually released Mandela, unbanned the ANC. Like it shows like how the mistakes they made and how things could have changed and the way decisions made lead to resolving the conflict.” Although Jeffrey admitted that there was conflict, the most relevant and interesting lesson learnt was that this conflict was overcome and “resolved” through the negotiation process. There was a solution and this solution was not achieved through conflict. Conflict is synonymous with hegemonic masculinity. Another way to resolving issues without using conflict hints at an alternate form of masculinity. This history, therefore, was significant as it played a role in the boys’ masculine gender formation. At the same time that these boys were learning about this period in South Africa’s history a mirror was being held up to their own masculine identities and a connection was being made. This connection resulted in what was determined to be historically significant.

#### **4.5.1.2 World History and Historical Significance**

Ryan disliked having to study the Vikings and the Aztecs in primary school as he “had a special interest for the weapons” of the Second World War as his grandfather had fought in the war, Ryan wanted to learn about the Second World War. However, it seemed that he did not get this opportunity at his primary school in Zimbabwe. Siphoo too could recall learning about the Vikings in primary school. He also remembered a focus on the “Voyages of Discovery” with a specific reference to Vasco da Gama and his crew coming to South Africa.

A highlight of Michael’s study of history in primary school was learning the history of Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece, Ancient India, Ancient Rome, Norse Mythology and Greek Mythology. He came to be passionate about Ancient civilisations and his primary school history had obviously left an indelible impression on him. In Brad’s narrative he suggested that he did not do well in history because of the choice of the French Revolution in his grade 8 year at his independent boys’ school in Zimbabwe. This topic, coupled with what he remembered as poor history teaching, resulted in him failing the entire year: “I did 2 years of grade 8 and in my first year at St Johns Senior I did history not by choice and my history teacher was not very good, we learnt about the French revolution, I failed that year.”

A number of the boys remembered learning about Jack the Ripper in their first year of secondary schooling at Balcomb Academy. This topic clearly made an impression on them possibly because it appealed to a sense of mystery, intrigue, danger and sensationalism. Ian described this topic as “exciting” and Jaryd associated the topic as the start of “the process of investigation.” This topic seemed to have been the turning point for many of the boys as they turned from seeing history as being disengaging and irrelevant in primary school to engaging and relevant in the latter phase of secondary school. It also marked the beginning of what could be termed their historical literacy.



This shift is evident in Brad's experiences. Despite not enjoying history in grade 8 at his previous school, by the time that Brad was in his final year of secondary school he suggested that he may even continue to study history at tertiary level "as I now know what communism and capitalism is." For Brad significance was of paramount importance in the study of history. It can be surmised therefore that he did not see the study of the French Revolution as relevant. Relevance was significant for Brad. Furthermore an ability to apply an understanding of concepts learnt in the study of history to everyday life ensures greater significance as it reinforces the history boy's masculinity by empowering him to dominate other boys intellectually thereby finding his place within the masculine hegemony.

Ryan enjoyed the theme of "Popular Protest" which appeared in his grade 12 year. This theme appealed to his contempt of authority and he admired those who stood up to challenge those in power in the USA: "History taught me to be more liberal minded and to always question authority." This theme was also a favourite of Sipho's. He could identify with the black historical characters wanting an end to discrimination. People held a particular fascination for Sipho and he enjoyed learning about how people in history dealt with adversity: "What I enjoy about history is learning how different people reacted to different situations and what the outcome of every situation was." However, he also enjoyed the theme entitled the "Collapse of Communism" "as I think it's quite an amazing story." This was echoed in the focus group interview when he was asked to justify his association of history with communism: "I really enjoyed the section on Communism. I think that was my favourite, and every time I think of history that just comes to mind." Because "The Cold War" and the follow-on theme of "The Collapse of Communism" dominate half of the grade 12 curriculum it is not surprising that the boys saw significance in these two themes.

When asked to reflect on the history that they had learnt in the past year (in other words, in grade 12) the following responses were offered:

Michael:       the fabric of our existence.

Sipho: Communism.

Michael: Understanding.

Sipho: How a trickle became a flood.

Jaryd: Power. I think power, looking back on history comes in different forms, whether its ownership of land, or influencing people politically, even though to having the kind of luxury of knowledge, knowing what's going around in the world around you, that all comes down to power, and kind of empowerment of some kind, and always there's somebody trying to take that away from someone else in order to dominate them.

The absence of direct confrontation or violence sticks out in most boys' memories when they described the history learnt in their last year of secondary school. In particular they referred to the clash in ideologies (Cold War) and the role of protest in bringing about a change in attitude and behaviour. It seems that when recalling what was studied at primary school the history learnt there seems to be about war and violence without resolution or context but not so in secondary school. There is violence but there is more: there is context to this violence; resolution; ideologies; alternate means to finding solutions.

Perhaps it is with maturity or perhaps it is the result of the official history learnt in the secondary school curriculum, particularly in grade 12, that the boys were able to identify the more subtle lessons of history to do with power and influence – “the fabric of our existence.” Conflict, when it is detailed, is an intellectual one: a clash of ideologies, beliefs and the need to dominate. The boys came to understand the subtle power plays in history. Change, when it does occur, is not the result of one violent act, but a slow process over time: “How a trickle became a flood.” At the same time the boys have come to realize the restorative process following the conflict. The focus in secondary school history is not the conflict alone but the results of the conflict and resolutions to years of conflict.

Brad: Conflict is always the prime root to it.

Ian: And how they fix it and that.

Jeffrey: All about resolving conflict and stuff, but it's not, mainly about conflict and decisions.

The history learnt in primary school on the other hand, seems to be less subtle, involving all-out war and the use of physical violence in order to achieve dominance. The focus is on the conflict itself. At the same time the focus in primary school history is on men's actions rather than ideas. The boys picked up on this shift in emphasis within the curricula from primary to secondary school. According to Ryan, "I think it changes in time, like in different periods of history. I think like, in sort of, ancient history it's more of a physical sense than anything else, and slowly its moved like as we progressed and it's become, and technology has developed, it's become more of an intellectual thing as well, I think, than just physical." By the time that the boys are in grade 12 they learnt to differentiate between different forms of conflict, realising that for change to occur conflict is unavoidable. However, this conflict does not always take physical form.

When pressed to identify a conflict that they had studied in the last year, the Cold War and the associated collapse of Communism were the unanimous responses. For most of the boys the greatest lessons learnt in history involved mistakes committed and the need to avoid them. For these boys in Grade 12 wars are mistakes that should be avoided hence the true significance of history which according to Jeffrey is "to learn from mistakes." By coming to an understanding of how these conflicts occurred and how they can be avoided is the greatest lesson of history. The boys were able to take the lesson learnt in the historical context and apply it to their own lives. Furthermore they were able to understand how each of the themes studied is intertwined with the other whereas it seems that history at primary school is unconnected, an isolated conflict - a war for a war's sake.

One can therefore conclude that these boys hold those themes that have personal relevance to be significant. They in turn find it easier to do well in history when the history they are studying is significant to them. Interesting history is significant history as it is used by these boys to hold up a mirror against which they formulate their masculinity. Looking back over a significant part of 12 years of formal education in official history much of the history that characterized their primary schooling and the early part of their secondary schooling was that of conflict and violence. But as they got older the history seemed to change from conflict to resolution; from violence to negotiation. History no longer seemed to just be about wars and the physical clash between men. It then became ideological clashes and attempts to resolve disputes through non-conflict means. This had personal significance for the boys as they came to identify the hegemony of what it means to be a man (aggression, conflict and physical dominance) learnt through the unofficial curriculum versus an alternate form of masculinity involving courage still but courage of conviction and the need for co-operation not conflict and this mirrored what played out in their official school history curriculum. In so doing these boys started to see more of themselves or saw themselves differently in the history that they were studying at school. The history that they had learnt in the final years of secondary school served to give voice to and legitimized other forms of masculinity rather than just the hegemonic. But one should also remember that at the same time that these boys are studying history they are also constructing their own masculine gender identities; coming to an understanding of themselves as they come to an understanding of history. In addition the study of history at secondary school aims not for learners to acquire historical knowledge alone but instead for learners to demonstrate historical literacy. So perhaps it is the acquisition of historical literacy that has brought a deeper understanding of historical significance and in so doing the history that they studied at secondary school took on personal significance: a mirror to hold up against these history boys' own masculine gender formation. Alternatively the boys had already acquired lessons on what it means to be a man gained through unofficial sources and these lessons superimpose those learnt in the history classroom.

#### **4.6. Going Down in History – History Education and Masculinity**

The regulation and shaping of masculinity involves power and happens both in the formal academic curriculum as well as the unofficial and hidden curriculum. One of the criticisms of the official history that is taught in schools is that there seems to be an overwhelming sense that it is natural for men to fight and that many areas of conflict are settled by warfare. Alternatively boys may already be attuned to the narratives of different kinds of men and constantly question what kinds of masculine models are being communicated both covertly and overtly in the history classroom. In all of the boys' narratives and their responses in the focus group interviews men and history featured strongly but not every historical character was associated with war or physical conflict. In coming to understand this the theme of history education and masculinity will be further broken down into sub-categories: Good Men of History; Bad Men of History and Men Teachers.

##### **4.6.1 Good Men of History**

The "Great Men historiography" dominated the history boys' narratives. In particular famous white military leaders featured in many of these boys' stories. None of the history boys mentioned what could be regarded as obscure or lesser known historical characters. Most of the characters were associated with wars and conflict of some kind which reinforced these boys' assertion that the study of history was somehow synonymous with conflict and wars. The only exception was provided by Jaryd - because of his interest in art and architecture - who made mention of Leonardo da Vinci, a Renaissance man who was not only a scientist but also an artist. Most of the historical male figures mentioned by the history boys in their personal narratives were white which is not surprising since most of the boys in this study were white. Allan mentioned being related to General Louis Botha and Jeffrey remembered being interested in Winston Churchill – both white male military and political figures. Jeffrey qualified his fascination with Churchill for the "choices he made and why he made

them.” This further reinforced his greatness and power as, according to Jeffrey, Churchill alone made the choices. Many of the history boys saw the famous historical figures as acting alone. By acting alone it implied that these men were endowed with great skills and abilities which reinforced the Great Men historiography. It also reinforced the hegemonic form of masculinity of the strong, powerful, rugged white male going it alone and dominating his adversaries.

Men such as Mikhail Gorbachev were mentioned for their courage and singled out for doing something momentous which had changed the world. As Sipho had said: “it took guts to do that because like everyone else went against what he, what was gonna work, because he came from a family or like hard-line Communists so when he started to introduce these reforms I think he must have been a real man cause everyone was against him.” Oskar Schindler was singled out as an ordinary person doing something great. They were the heroes of history: “different individuals, Schindler, and those kind of guys, they all made a difference in their own capacity that they had. So everyone can make a difference.” In Gorbachev’s case he ended the Cold War. F.W De Klerk was mentioned because he had ended apartheid and for changing his country’s path. It was because he had released Mandela and had unbanned the A.N.C that a change had come about. De Klerk was further given hero status because he righted the wrongs of the past. As Jeffrey pointed out “de Klerk released Mandela, unbanned the A.N.C. Like it shows how the mistakes they made, and how things could have changed, and the way decisions made led to resolving the conflict.” Such men were considered to be heroes by the history boys because they had read the situation at the time and had made a call. They changed their countries’ direction. They had the almost superhuman ability to be able to see what other men could not see and this made all the difference to the path of history. This was articulated by Jaryd: “I think we’ve learnt that, looking at men in history, some of the greatest men are not just innovators, but rather the people that can stop and say this isn’t working anymore.” The history boys, in studying history, were also a step above those who did not have this historical knowledge. This further empowered these history boys – they knew more. This historical knowledge empowered them to dominate those who did not have this historical knowledge. This is termed

intellectual dominance.

Within the focus group interviews some of the history boys made reference to struggle icons or men who had been influential in the civil rights movement in the U.S.A. Martin Luther King Junior and Malcolm X were mentioned as was Nelson Mandela. However, whether intentional or not, black leaders who sought an end to human rights abuses were not credited for singlehandedly being responsible for an end to suffering. Mandela was not credited for doing anything in his own right. This was highlighted by Thabo: “But then you look at the people that were successful in the world, they were people who had support of others behind them, he couldn’t just take them on by himself, he had to have a group of people to take on this formidable force, such as Mandela and Malcolm X, Martin Luther King.” So the Great White men of history were viewed as having been endowed with the skill and ability to go it alone and in so doing, achieved greatness. Black men on the other hand were not seen in the same light. They were only able to achieve greatness because of the support of others. Who or what is responsible for this thinking? Is it the unofficial history that these boys bring with them to the history curriculum or is it the official school history which continues to glorify the exploits of white men over black men? Through the analysis of the history boys’ narratives and their responses in the focus group interviews it appears that it is official school history that is responsible for creating, via the curriculum and textbooks, this view of masculinity. However, one cannot negate the influence of the lessons learnt through the unofficial curriculum and which the boys have acquired before even entering the history classroom.

#### **4.6.2 Bad Men of History**

The history boys did not only make mention of the good men of history. The bad men of history were also mentioned. Jack the Ripper was particularly notorious and held fascination for these boys possibly because of the fact that it is an enduring mystery as he was never caught. Ryan mentioned Hitler as being synonymous with his understanding of history. Ian highlighted “harsh regimes like Nazism” as making history.

However, the history boys suggested that once again these men of history alone had been responsible for the atrocities that had been committed. P.W Botha, for example, was blamed for apartheid and Joseph Stalin for Communism.

However, at the same time the history boys believed that what had characterized their study of history over the past 5 years was the wrong doing of men. Essentially the history boys' view of history was that of the wrong doing caused by some men and then the courage displayed by other men to stand up and end the wrong doing. This was similar to their boyhood games in the school yard playing "Goodies and Baddies"; "Cowboys and Indians" and "Cops and Robbers."

Decisions as to what is deemed historically significant involve both power and historical literacy. This is evident in the emphasis of certain historical figures or events over others. The data from both the focus group interviews and the personal narratives supported this claim. Specifically official school history informed the boys' perception of what was historically significant: characters and events involved in South Africa's emergence as a democracy; Gorbachev and the collapse of the U.S.S.R; key figures in the civil rights movements for change in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; Hitler; Churchill and the events leading to World War II. It was clear that within the official history there were those who were deemed to be powerful and those who were seen to be powerless. Males were on the whole depicted to be powerful. There was little to no mention of women historical characters in the personal narratives or the focus group interviews until the interviewer specifically asked for knowledge of historical women characters.

More importantly white historical men were seen to be more powerful than black historical men. This was evident in the boys' perceptions that Gorbachev, Churchill, Hitler and De Klerk all possessed the almost superman ability to stand up in the wake of adversity and to turn the tide of history with their decisions and actions. Black historical men did not have as much power and needed the mass support of the people to change history: the likes of Martin Luther King and Mandela. At the same time white historical characters had the ability to be both good and bad (Hitler, Stalin and Jack the Ripper)



such was their power. Black historical characters on the other hand are one dimensional – mostly good and supported by the people in almost martyr like fashion. Official school history contained within the curriculum must share some of the blame for these boys' perceptions. However, on the other hand, these perceptions are also borne out of what the history boys believed to be the characteristics of masculinity learnt through the unofficial or hidden curriculum. Discussed earlier has been the mirror that the boys hold up against their study of history. It is clear that the mirror that the boys had previously created of what it means to be a man is used to reflect their understanding of history.

#### **4.6.3 Men History Teachers**

Men history teachers featured prominently in the history boys' narratives. No women history teachers were mentioned at all. The men history teachers had left an indelible impression on the history boys to the extent that they mentioned them by name. Some went as far as describing these teachers' characters and attributes. It was clear that this further supports the claim that boys learn about masculinity through their interaction with men.

Only two boys made mention of their men primary school history teachers. No mention was made in any of the boys' stories of any women primary school teachers. This was either because they had forgotten those women who had taught them so long ago or because they did not leave any lasting impression on them. Brad mentioned Mr [W], his grade 7 history teacher. He associated Mr [W] with teaching him about the Second World War and described him as having a "different way of teaching" which had involved explaining events of the Second World War; writing sub headings on the board which would later be used by the boys to write an essay and then watching a movie at the end of a section. By implication no other primary school history teachers had approached the teaching of history this way. Mr [L] had had a profound impact on Michael at primary school. He had "inspired" Michael to learn about the intricacies of Indian culture, belief and mythology. However, these were the only boys who mentioned their primary school history teachers. Yet at the same time it was clear that these two

men teachers taught these boys important lessons of both history and masculinity: the ability to be inspired; to have the courage and confidence to do things differently; to delve deeper into historical events and to not accept historical detail passively.

Many of the boys mentioned their secondary school history teachers. It was obvious from their descriptions and the fact that they had mentioned their teachers at all that these men had been instrumental in the boys' study of history at secondary school. Allan mentioned having had Mr [X] in grade 8 as did Brad. However, they did not make any further description or association with him. Suffice to say that he had made an impression on them as it had been Mr [X] who had introduced these boys to secondary school history.

For Ryan, his introduction to secondary school history had been Mr [Y] who "managed to change my stereotyped views on history as a dull lifeless subject to a real meaningful and exciting way of life." Mr [Y] was strongly associated with Allan's study of history and he remembered Mr [Y] as having "the most passion I have ever seen for the subject and loved to share his passion with his learners." This similar quality in the same history teacher was mentioned by Jaryd: "I know a large part of enjoying history was the teacher who really made history 'come alive.'" Brad also referred to Mr [Y] and his four year association with him. Ryan detailed that he had had Mr [Y] for four and a half years. He too made use of the word passion to describe him: "His passion for the subject has rubbed off on me and I think that he was just the spark to my fire." Passion and the belief that they had received "good" history teaching in secondary school for many of the history boys meant that they had enjoyed history.

The men history teachers played a significant role in the boys' decision to take history as a subject for grades 10 to 12. Allan admitted that it had been Mr [Y] who had influenced his decision and in the focus group interview Jaryd also highlighted the role played by the same teacher in his subject choice.

It was clear that like the impact that men family members had on the boys' early

introduction to history, the impact that men teachers had on these boys was significant. These history boys associated their study of history with a personal connection to the men teachers teaching them the subject. History once again was something personal for these boys. History, because of the teacher teaching it, became significant. Those attributes that were held to be significant in the man teaching history were: changing perceptions; having passion; bringing knowledge to life and influencing life directions. These are powerful attributes – almost superhuman and reinforces the fact the teachers are immensely powerful figures in the lives of these history boys. In their descriptions of their men teachers, the history boys attached the similar attributes as they did to powerful male historical characters. For these history boys there was no such thing as neutral knowledge. Historical knowledge for these boys was significant, making such knowledge personal. Only that that was considered to be significant by the history boys could be acquired as knowledge. Therefore, unless personal significance was attached to what is being taught and who is teaching it, for the history boys there could be no learning. Historical knowledge cannot be acquired in isolation. The history boys' perceptions of what it meant to be a man therefore impacted on their historical understanding and were shaped by their male history teachers as powerful figures. Unofficial history therefore plays a greater role in a boy's education than the official school history although as this study has shown, the two are intimately connected.

#### **4.6.4 Women and History**

For one of the boys, his understanding of the concept of masculinity was in relation to women. When asked what masculinity meant to him, Ian stated: "I just think of women's rights, how they weren't even allowed to vote and stuff." Thus a study of masculinity has to also include the boys' relationship with women and their understanding of femininity. For Ryan, masculinity meant "unemotional, cold, sort of no feeling, what is done is more rational thought put behind everything" whereas femininity was associated with "emotional, feeling." Compared to femininity, masculinity for Jeffrey meant dominance both physical and intellectual.

Some of the boys seemed quite torn in their traditional views of what it meant to be a man and what it meant to be a woman. At times this conflict was caused by what they had brought into the history classroom with their preconceived ideas or unofficial history and then what they come to learn about men and women in official history. At other times what they had learnt in the history classroom reaffirmed some of their traditional and conservative views of what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman gained through unofficial sources. At the beginning of this analysis chapter the boys believed men to be dominant because they are physically stronger. According to Ryan physical strength determines dominance and “society is still patriarchal, it won’t change in my opinion because men aren’t equal to women.” Brad justified the domination of men over women through the execution of physical tasks which he believed women had been unable to perform: “Like when they say like men used to be the hunters and women used to be the gatherers, like I always see like the men doing all the hard work, all the physical work and the women do all like the easy kind of work, less violent, less physical, less everything.”

Despite the fact that women played significant roles in the history boys’ personal narratives, this did not translate well into their study of history. They did not see women as having played a significant role in history although they equally admitted that they had not studied women’s role in history in enough detail. According to Thabo “You learn more about how women are like indirectly.” Many of the boys believed that women had only played a supportive role in history and did not have much impact. This was articulated by Brad when asked whether he thought that men were more powerful than women: “I still do, but women do have the odd say here and there I think.” He went on to say however that “women are trying, but they won’t even get to where the men are.”

According to some of the history boys, women played a limited role in history. One reason for this lies in the fact that women do not feature prominently in the official history curriculum. This sentiment was articulated by Michael: “We don’t really learn about the bad things women have done.” Brad admitted that the official school history had taught him that women “did protest, and they did make a change, but I always see

men as the more dominant, like they did more than the women did.” For the history boys protest seemed to be associated with women alone. It was not something that men were associated with. Michael stated that women played a significant role in securing human rights because they had used protest as a means to achieve this: “obviously men can’t like protest, but it just shows that even [though] they are seen in society as inferior, can even make a difference.” However, when men did protest they were seen to be more effective than women largely because they came across as more threatening. According to Brad: “if like 50 men go protest, and 50 women go protest, I think it would be a lot more scary if men are actually doing it.”

When pressed to mention by name the women whom they had studied in history these boys mentioned women who by and large were associated with the fight for human rights: Rosa Parks, Helen Suzman, Helen Zille, Amy Biehl and Hillary Clinton. Again most of these historical figures were white although there was a mix of international and South African figures most of whom could be found in the official history curriculum. There was also a mix of historical and more contemporary political figures which leads one to believe that these boys were drawing on their contemporary South African and world general knowledge rather than their historical knowledge. However, when probed to assess the role played by someone like Rosa Parks who featured in the official history curriculum, Ryan suggested that “she started something” indicating that she had been the spark to the Civil Rights Movement but it had been left to men to achieve anything of significance. Ryan stated: “I’m not saying that they don’t do anything, they do do stuff but it’s just more of a man’s part.” This was echoed by Sipho who, having assessed the role played by Rosa Parks in the Civil Rights Movement, admitted that she had “started a revolution where other activists such as Martin Luther King joined in and eventually black people got their civil rights.” However, these rights would not have been achieved had men not joined the fight. Women were unable to do it alone. Women therefore, according to these history boys, are powerless without men.

Ryan went on to say that women did feature in his study of history “but there are none that made like a difference like the likes of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, you know

those sort of figures, you don't see any women political figures of that fame and calibre." Ryan did not see Rosa Parks as having played as significant a role in the Civil Rights Movement. According to him had Rosa Parks delivered a speech at the Lincoln Memorial "you'll mainly have half of that thing filled up." Anything significant achieved by a woman, according to Allan, was through influencing men "to do stuff for them, and they get what they want." Thus women were unable to achieve anything in their own right. They needed men to achieve their intentions. Jeffrey stated that in his opinion "women use the ways of seducing and stuff, they use what they have to get what they want and people acknowledge that like how men use our strength and stuff."

Once again, according to the history boys, men are powerful because they are physically stronger. White men in particular possessed individual skills and ability that enabled them to change history. Women, like black men, were unable to do anything significant on their own – they needed the support of a lot of people to achieve their aims. These beliefs were formed from the official school history yet fed into the history boys' preconceived hegemonic notions of what it meant to be a man – to be able to dominate others – learnt through unofficial history. This domination is achieved through physical strength or by possessing superior knowledge. For these history boys the official history curriculum served to validate this belief. The lessons of unofficial history have the greater impact on these boys and they seek to validate these lessons through their interpretation of the official school history curriculum.

#### **4.7 History in the Making – The Role of Unofficial History in History Education**

Important to this study is what historical knowledge beyond official history lessons and history textbooks, contribute to these boys' understanding of history. As Conway (2001, p.10) stated, "It can be easy to forget just how persuasive the preconceptions pupils bring into the classroom can be, and how subtly those which are misconceptions can shape their thinking, and sometimes, limit their understanding." Unofficial history refers to the history learnt outside of the classroom from other means or sources such as the media, the family and the school as a genderising institution. In this category the focus

is on what sources beyond history lessons and history textbooks, contribute to these boys' understanding of history and the shaping of their masculinity.

#### **4.7.1 Family and History**

Interest in history and the beginnings of historical literacy or historical imagination began early on in the family unit even before some of these history boys started formal schooling. For many of the boys participating in this study their introduction to history was in the form of stories rooted in history told to them by older family members or family visits to places of historical interest or significance. The fact that his family was related to General Louis Botha was a source of pride for Allan. Not knowing anything about him, Allan knew that Botha must have been great as "he had the old airport named after him." At the same time Louis Botha had been Allan's "first exposure to history." In addition a family member's link to history immediately becomes something significant and by implication, relevant for these boys.

In Jaryd's story he referred right at the beginning to the fact that he had documents pertaining to his birth. In so doing he placed himself and his family within a history context. He identified with the role of the historian. He thus undertook the process of acquiring historical literacy quite early. Topics of mystery, suspense and intrigue featured prominently in the unofficial history of many of the boys. Jaryd had an interest in magic from a young age and started investigating the history of magic. Ryan was intrigued by spies and bought many books and replicas of weapons when he was young. The process of finding out more for themselves marked the beginnings of historical literacy and took place outside of the history classroom.

In many of the boys' narratives grandfathers featured in the telling of stories and sparking an interest in history. Jaryd's grandfather "loves WWII" and had told him stories about his own experiences. Ryan explained that his interest in war had been sparked by the fact that one of his grandfathers had received a military cross on D Day. Ryan's grandfather's influence was such that he had suggested to Ryan that he study

history from grade 10: “And he always said it was a great subject, very interesting subject, and that it’s very important, you know how we see society today and how it functions is from where it came.”

Jaryd’s great-grandfather, who was alive at the time of his birth, was someone who had witnessed history and “someone I’ve been interested in finding out more about.” This process of “finding out” signifies the start of historical literacy and born out of an intimate relationship with his great-grandfather. The personal and the historical are therefore closely entwined.

Fathers also played a role in the boys’ interest in history. They had also told stories which were readily remembered by the boys. By associating their fathers with history, the boys elevated their fathers to more heroic status. Ian told of his father’s experiences of being “drafted” into the South African Defence Force as a “rattle [ratel] tank mechanic.” However, Ian admitted that his father only played the role of a bystander: “Luckily he wasn’t in the firing line like the infantry would be.” Jaryd’s childhood had been characterized by his father telling him stories of his own secondary school days. Jaryd admitted that these stories had “intrigued” him. Thus Jaryd knew that he would be following in his father’s footsteps by attending the same school later which had strengthened his relationship with his father as they shared a similar experience. History thus binds sons to their fathers. Jaryd’s father had also bought him books on pirates and took him to various museums around Johannesburg thus supporting his son’s interest in history.

Fathers also play a role in the boys’ choice to study history from grade 10. Brad admitted that his father had told him not to choose history telling him “that it’ll waste too much of your time.” However, Brad described how he had stood up to his father and had challenged this stance of his by telling him “no, history has changed a lot from what he described it to now.” Ryan suggested that his father had originally been sceptical but after attending the grade 9 history expo “he was sold on history” and “he pushed me to do it because he saw it as an important subject because of the skills it develops.”



Jaryd's father supported his decision to choose history in grade 10: "My dad kind of gave me the choice, he said do what you enjoy because if you enjoy it, you'll do good in it."

Ian's South African nationalistic view of history was forged by his father's stories of the South African Border War and this was how he came to view history as being relevant or significant: "History has played a huge part in my life due [due] to all the stories mostly about apartheid and the South African arm [army] back in they [the] day when my father was drafted and ended up becoming a 'rattle' tank mechanic." The South African nationalistic view was all the more evident with the words "the intriguing history of the past of our very beautiful country South Africa." This South African nationalist viewpoint was created within Ian's family.

Both of Jeffery's parents passed down their respect for history to him. He therefore came to realize at an early age that history was important or significant: "Both my parents have always said to me, that history is important how else would we know what has been done before and if it worked or failed terribly, history is how we learn, they would say." Jeffrey got introduced to English history having lived with his mother in the U.K for two years. He developed a fascination for Winston Churchill. Together he and his mother had visited museums and places of historical interest and it was his mother who had encouraged him to study history after grade 9. It was Allan's mother who had told him that he was related to Louis Botha: "My mom then told me that I had a great great grandfather who used to be the prime minister and had the old airport named after him." For Sipho the fact that his mother had taken on a new job meant that he could attend Balcomb Academy. Sipho's mother played an influential role in his life. He made no mention of any father.

Mothers and sisters also played influential roles when it came to the boys' decision to choose history in grade 10. Ian's sister suggested that he should not take history: "My sister took history in matric and said no I mustn't take it because all the essays and that type of stuff, but I ended up taking it anyway, it's not as bad as she said it is." Ryan's

mother had also suggested that history be avoided as a viable subject choice: “My mother said that I shouldn’t take it, well she said it’s all about dates and times and all that: facts that you have to like parrot learn and stuff like that, and it’s not very interesting.” However, when his father attended the grade 9 history expo and indicated that he supported Ryan’s choice, his mother’s words were quickly forgotten. Ian also seemed to have ignored his sister’s advice easily.

Jeffrey’s mother, however, suggested that he consider history. Sipho’s sister and mother had influenced him positively to choose history: “well firstly my sister did good in history, but she, she did good in theory subjects, not in like mathematical subjects, so she did good, and my mom encouraged me to do the same.”

Siblings were also associated with these history boys’ introduction to history. Thabo had chosen to write a detailed narrative of a single experience for his story. It involved a racist incident that had affected him when he was 5 years old. The word “racist” had not been a familiar term to him and had been used by his older siblings and domestic worker to describe the incident that he had suffered at the hands of a white Afrikaner neighbour. His older siblings had put down the occurrence of this incident to Apartheid which, having been government policy before his birth, was associated with history. And yet this piece of history came to have a direct effect on him in his everyday life. Not having had an understanding of this historical period propelled him to want to find out about it. Thus this period of history became significant for Thabo.

#### **4.7.2. Media and History**

History does not always need to have a history classroom with a history teacher in order to be learnt. For many young history boys they are first introduced to history either through a family member but more often than not through the powerful medium of television.

Ryan had lost interest in history at primary school. However, he had sought refuge in

watching the History Channel – “finding everything interesting.” Michael’s experience was in stark contrast, the opposite in fact: “I’ve always been intrigued by history, especially when I was younger, learning ancient history and mythology was more entertaining than watching TV.” He had an enriching experience of primary school history and therefore had no need to get his knowledge or excitement from watching the History Channel. In Jaryd’s story he told of his first topic of historical interest – pirates. He had sought to satisfy his obsession with pirates by watching movies and buying books about them. Ryan recalled buying books and weapons on the topic of spies.

Television, books and childhood toys all in turn serve to develop historical imagination – an ability to imagine or empathize with the lives and thoughts of historical characters. Historical imagination can be instilled in boys before they even enter the history classroom. However, boys are more likely to develop historical imagination with historical characters that they deem to be significant. In Jaryd’s case he developed a significant level of historical imagination through his fascination with pirates: adventurous, daring, rebellious and mysterious men.

#### **4.7.3 Historical Places**

Jaryd’s first memories of history were of his parents taking him to museums around Johannesburg. He associated history with old buildings and one of his earliest memories was of taking art lessons in an old Cape Dutch house where he had enjoyed exploring the vast rooms. In fact his association of history with buildings resulted in his decision to study architecture after secondary school. His love of museums was taken further when he volunteered to assist with displays in his secondary school’s museum. When he had the opportunity to travel internationally in grade 10 Jaryd “visited many museums, old chapels, art galleries and castles.” He remembered being introduced to Leonardo da Vinci in an art exhibition at the University of Pretoria. In the focus group interview Jeffrey also made reference to the visiting of museums in the U.K: “like when I was there, I like saw a lot of like museums and stuff, and the U.K has a lot of rich history and I like particularly found it interesting.”

Buildings and museums therefore form another unofficial source of history as they provide an opportunity for boys to explore on their own in order to find historical knowledge. Exploration and self-discovery are vital components of both historical imagination and historical literacy.

The personal too can be historical. Historical literacy or historical imagination does not need a history classroom to grow. It can happen in the exploration of buildings or reading books and watching the History Channel. However, by far the most impactful and greatest lessons of history are learnt through personal relationships which forms part of the unofficial curriculum. For many of these boys, the acquisition of historical knowledge was intricately woven into each of these boys' personal narratives – in many cases through the relationships of male family figures: specifically fathers and grandfathers. Boys construct their masculinity through their association with other men in their development from boys into men. The association of grandfathers and fathers with the telling of history in turn serves to associate masculinity and history. To experience history and to know history means being a better man and sometimes more of a man as these family members took on almost historical hero status in the eyes of the boys. The knowledge of history therefore becomes intricately linked with power. Knowing history therefore distinguished the boy from the man. History and masculinity are therefore intimately intertwined.

Sometimes alternative histories develop within the margins or below the surface of the official school curriculum. This alternate or unofficial history curriculum is more often than not disseminated through family, cultural and religious associations. At other times they are created through cultural means such as museums, magazines, film and television. At the same time tensions can start to arise because of the possibility of the conflict between official school history curricula and unofficial histories. The boys at times found it difficult to reconcile their own perspectives on historical significance with those presented in the official school curriculum. They choose instead to draw on what they have learnt through unofficial history rather than the lessons learnt in the history

classroom. Unofficial history has greater influence than official school history in shaping the idea of a historical education and what it means to be a man.

#### **4.8 Conclusion – Boys Will Be Boys**

At the beginning of the chapter the boys articulated their notion of masculinity as being men's need to dominate. Their study of history both sensitized the boys to hegemonic masculine identity and its accompanying power relations but also reinforced the boys' belief in the hegemonic notion of what it means to be a real man that they had learnt through unofficial history sources such as their family relationships, associations with friends and the school as a masculinity regulating institution. This chapter highlighted the dual forces of official history and unofficial history that exist in shaping the boys of this study's understanding of both history as well as masculinity.

In conclusion what do boys understand about history and masculinity and how does masculinity influence boys' understanding of history? This chapter has served to answer the first two research questions in the following ways:

##### **4.8.1. What do boys understand about history and masculinity?**

Official primary school history seemed to imitate the warrior games played out by young boys in the playground and reflected a one dimensional – or hegemonic – version of masculinity. The focus was on conflict. The warrior with the greatest strength won. The physically stronger man dominated those weaker than himself. The boys did not question the history that they were studying just as they did not question their masculinity or that of the boys with whom they played. Masculinity, like the official school history, was taken at face value. However, by secondary school most of these history boys had come to be aware of their own masculinity in relation to those around them. This awareness was transferred to their understanding of the official school history which had also changed from what they had understood of history at primary school.

When asked for other attributes associated with masculinity courage was mentioned – the courage to stand up when there is injustice. This was what Martin Luther King, Gandhi and Mandela did. Masculinity therefore featured strongly in the official history curriculum – men dominate and more specifically white men dominate mostly black men. This in turn informed the history boys' opinions of masculinity. However, the opposite interpretation is probably truer – that these boys' notion of masculinity acquired through unofficial history actually informed their understanding of official history.

Still carrying their own notions of what it means to be a man acquired through unofficial history some of these history boys came to an understanding that to survive in the 20th and 21st centuries men cannot just be a caveman with a stick. However, some of the history boys continued to legitimize the form of masculinity involving the need for men to dominate despite, or because of, their studying of official history. Going back to the history boys' original commonly held belief that men dominate women and other men, this view was evident in their upholding historically powerful men who did just that: Hitler, De Klerk and Gorbachev. Once again, according to the history boys, men are powerful because they are physically stronger. White men in particular possessed individual skills and ability that enabled them to change history. Women, like black men, were unable to do anything significant on their own – they needed the support of a lot of people to achieve their aims. These beliefs were formed from the official school history yet fed into the history boys' preconceived notions of what it meant to be a man – to be able to dominate others- constructed by unofficial history. This domination is achieved through physical strength or by possessing superior knowledge. For these history boys the official history curriculum served to validate this belief and reinforced the hegemonic masculine identity that they subscribed to.

#### **4.8.2. How does masculinity influence boys' understanding of history?**

The personal too can be historical. Historical literacy or historical imagination does not need a history classroom to grow. It can happen in the exploration of buildings or

reading books and watching the History Channel. However, by far the most impactful and greatest lessons of history are learnt through personal relationships. The same is true for masculinity. For many of these boys, the acquisition of historical knowledge was intricately woven into each of these boys' personal narratives – in many cases through the relationships of male family figures: specifically fathers and grandfathers. These influential figures taught the boys not only history lessons but also lessons of how to be a man. Put another way: these history boys ultimately interpreted the official history through the lens of masculinity acquired at home and regulated at school. Unofficial history overshadows the lessons learnt in the history classroom. The boys' understanding of what it means to be man is therefore ambiguous – on the one hand official school history has taught that physical strength alone doesn't last. On the other hand unofficial history learnt through their interactions with family members, the school and their friends has taught these boys that to be considered a real man you have to dominate other men.

These history boys, through their knowledge gained of both history and masculinity through official school history and unofficial history then began to construct their own form of hegemonic masculinity. Going back to Lacan's (1949) work there are three images that are reflected by the mirror into which the history boys look: there is the image of themselves as emerging men; there is the image of men constructed by the study of history and finally there is the history boy: the emerging man who through his acquisition of historically significant knowledge and skills is empowered to dominate other boys who do not have such knowledge or skills. The profile of what it is to be a history boy will be explored in depth in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

POSNER I'm a Jew, I'm small; I'm homosexual, and I live in Sheffield. *[pause]* I'm fucked

(Bennett, 2004, p.42).

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to answer the third research question: why does masculinity influence boys' understanding of history the way it does? I will be returning to Lacan's (1949) Mirror Stage model in order to answer the final research question and in so doing compiling a profile of the independent school history boy drawn from the analysis of the data as analysed in the previous chapter. This chapter identifies the common characteristics of the independent school history boy that are thrown up by the boys' shared studying of official history and through their common understanding of unofficial history and masculinity.

Masculinity is fluid. Men and boys can in any one lifetime subscribe to a number of different and varying masculinities. This is often where the confusion comes into play between the real me, the perceived me and the ideal me. At the beginning of this study it was clear that the history boys, who were the focus of this study, shared a common view of masculinity which was the hegemonic view. This refers to the masculinity that is formed by the legitimacy of patriarchy. Because of the configuration of various masculine practices and values, this is the group that has traditionally been exalted as the dominant form of masculinity and in existing it serves to subordinate the other gender as well as other forms of masculinity. Such examples would include body strength over emotional strength; action over thought and also man over woman (Connell, 1996). However, almost all of these history boys did not see themselves in this



reflection. Why was this? The explanations are varied and complex.

One possible explanation is provided by Lacan (1949) who claimed that every child passes through a stage in which an external image of the body – a mirror image - gives rise to the mental representation of an “I.” However, because the image of the unified body does not match with the child’s physical vulnerability and weakness, this mirror image is established as an “ideal me” toward which the child will forever strive to achieve throughout his life. At the same time the mirror may also serve as a haunting image or warning of an undesirable or outdated masculinity. In keeping with the focus of this study this image in the mirror against which these history boys perceived themselves was formed by the boys’ shared study of official school history and may explain why, knowingly or unknowingly, most of these history boys then began to turn their backs on the hegemonic notion of masculinity when defining the types of men that they perceived themselves to be. The image in the mirror was therefore ambiguous – sometimes clear but often times blurred. The image was formed in part by the boys’ experiences of learning through unofficial history sources. At other times the image was both challenged and legitimized by the boys’ experiences of the official school history curriculum. The mirror image against which the boys of this study saw themselves was therefore formed by their understanding of both official and unofficial history.

Through their study of official school history these boys seem to come to realize that the hegemonic notion of masculinity almost invariably leads to conflict and much of the injustice that has dominated the contents of the official South African school history curriculum to which they were subjected. However, for these history boys the official history curriculum in some part served to validate the hegemonic masculine identity that they subscribed to when originally asked to define their understanding of what it means to be a man - their understanding of masculinity. The opposite interpretation is probably truer, that these boys’ notion of masculinity, acquired through unofficial history, actually informed their understanding of official school history. Put another way: these history boys ultimately interpreted the official school history through unofficial history and in particular the lens of masculinity acquired at home and regulated at school. The boys’

understanding of what it means to be man is therefore ambiguous – on the one hand history has taught that physical strength alone doesn't last, yet physical strength does ensure that one man can dominate other. This supports what Salisbury and Jackson (1996, p.103) affirmed that boys are not “passive victims of gender socialization” into categories that are fixed. This is also Connell's (1996) contention. Boys' masculinity are more often than not “complex and contradictory; full of cracks and fissures, as they shift across history and different cultures” (Jackson & Salisbury, 1996, p.103). Additionally, the findings of this study support Salisbury & Jackson's view that boys are not regularly and easily “brainwashed by macho values” (1996, p.13). This study also supports Salisbury and Jackson's (1996) claim that boys are aware of the pluralities and complexities of masculinity.

Going back to Lacan's (1949) mirror as a metaphor, the boys of this study's ambiguous understanding of masculinity leads to the formation of a third image – the image of the independent school history boy. Formed by the fusion of the understanding of both masculinity and history acquired through the lessons of unofficial and official history, the image of the independent school history boy begins to gain clarity out of the haze of the boys' perceptions and growing understanding of both history as well as what it means to be a man. This is somewhat like Ebels-Hoving's *Homo Historia* (2011). In Ebels-Hoving's work she draws a picture of a successful student of history. One of her characteristics is an innate aptitude for the subject. So what characterizes the image of the history boys of this study? What notion of what it means to be man do these boys share having studied official history and through their experiences of unofficial history? What are the common characteristics of an independent school history boy?

## **5.2. Thinking Historically**

Wineburg's (1991) concept of historical thinking has been used as it involves the boys' ability to think and question all the history that they have been taught. Historical thinking means going beyond simple memorization and recall of historical facts, instead it involves “retelling the past essentially as it happened based on what can be constructed

from residue, traces, artefacts and texts dealing with that past” (Vansledright, 1998, p.3). But there is more to it than just comprehending information from a variety of sources. The boys are also expected to engage critically with the sources of historical information which means drawing on the cognitive skills of analysis and evaluation; to place events into an appropriate chronology and to construct and maintain a coherent argument of what they believed happened in the past. It involves seeing such historical sources in context. However, historical thinking relies on an understanding that there are different and valid versions of the past and an understanding of how these claims can be supported. This, according to Lee (2005), Vansledright (1998) and Wineburg (2001) is virtually impossible for many learners (including boys) to grasp. The boys in this study showed a definite understanding that history is more than just the memorization or recall of pre-existing knowledge and reveals that Vansledright (1998) and Wineburg (2001) were incorrect, at least in terms of this case study, in their claim that historical thinking is difficult to grasp. In their descriptions of the studying of history, these history boys used active words such as “finding” and “investigating.” The boys were also quick to identify the association of history and critical thinking which further confirms the notion that the studying of history was more than just about the dates. Critical thinking, according to these boys, was a requirement for the successful studying of history. The skill of critical thinking is part of the process of historical understanding. One of the ways in which critical thinking is demonstrated is by discerning fact from opinion. The ability to study something from multiple perspectives is also a requirement of critical thinking and was a skill that the boys claimed that they had acquired through the learning of history. For example, Jaryd was able to demonstrate the skills of critical thinking through the construction of an argument.

In the pursuit of acquiring historical knowledge and an understanding of masculinity, these history boys first came to a historical understanding of what they were studying. Historical understanding is a higher-order skill involving both historical thinking and historical knowledge based on a varying nature of evidence from primary and secondary sources. However, previously acquired historical knowledge from unofficial history also plays a part in historical understanding. Added to this are the boys’ attitude and

perceptions of masculinity. The knowledge of both history and masculinity that the boys acquired through their interaction with family members, the media, museum visits and other boys is brought to the table and blended with the interrogation of other primary and secondary sources to reach the goal of historical understanding. This further supports what Vansledright (1998) refers to as positionality - who the learner is brings great bearing onto his historical thinking. In keeping with the focus of this study this means that the boys' masculinity also influenced a prior set of historical knowledge that he brings to the history classroom before even accessing the task of understanding history. This is supported by Salisbury and Jackson. According to them boys "learn best when they can start from their own personal histories, feelings, curiosities and actions" (1996, p.13).

Therefore, although these boys seemed to have grasped the concept of historical thinking (Wineburg, 2001) and demonstrated an acute understanding of the nature of history education, the role played by unofficial history in their understanding of history cannot be ignored. In fact more often than not, unofficial history clouded the knowledge that they acquired within the history classroom. What these boys deemed to have been historically significant furthermore served to blur the official image of history that was the intention of the N.C.S-History and the third image of what it means to be an independent school history boy becomes all the more clear.

### **5.3. Having Significant Historical Knowledge**

Historical knowledge is also relevant knowledge – it could be applied and had significance for these history boys – knowing what had come before them gave these boys greater insight into the world in which they found themselves. Significance for the boys in this study was determined by whether they could relate to the official school history that they were studying at school; whether it had a personal meaning to them and ultimately whether it mattered to them. This determined whether it had had an impact on them and their emerging masculinity. All of the boys in this study acknowledged that the study of history had interested them and had played some part

in their understanding of themselves. This made the study of history relevant to these boys. Put another way this made the studying of history significant. Using Cercadillo's conceptualization: what is important = significant in history (2001, p.6) we can also add interest + relevance + importance = significant.

From an interrogation of the data it seems that Seixas's (1994) concept of historical significance best fits the boys' understanding of significance: "a historical phenomenon becomes significant if and only if members of a contemporary community can draw relationships between it and other historical phenomena and ultimately to themselves" (p. 285). This means how the event or person's actions shed light on emerging issues in history as well as contemporary life. The boys of this study were able to see the connection of past events to contemporary life. In particular they focused a lot on contemporary South African history as they saw that it had had an impact on their understanding of South African society today. For most of the boys the greatest lessons learnt in official school history involved mistakes committed and the need to avoid them. For these boys in grade 12 wars are mistakes that should be avoided hence the true significance of history. By coming to an understanding of how these conflicts occurred and how they can be avoided is the greatest lesson of history. The boys were able to take the lesson learnt in the historical context and apply it to their own lives. One can therefore conclude that these boys hold those themes that have personal relevance to be significant. They in turn find it easier to do well in history when the history they are studying is significant to them. Interesting history is significant history as it is used by these boys to hold up a mirror against which they formulate their masculinity. At times the image formed by the official history curriculum is clear as it reflects the boys' understanding of what it means to be a man and their understanding of contemporary society as informed by unofficial history – their families, other boys and institution. However, at other times this image is not clear. It is ambiguous. It leads to confusion. This was what Stearns, Seixas and Wineburg (2000) found. Students - and in the context of this study, boys - at times find it difficult to reconcile their own perspectives on historical significance with those presented in the official school curriculum. As a result they can begin to resist what they encounter at school, choosing instead to draw on

what they have learnt through unofficial history from visits to historical sites and through their interactions with family members (Stearns, Seixas & Wineburg, 2000, p.286).

#### **5.4. Knowing More than Other Men**

Both historical thinking and historical significance ultimately provided these boys with more than just historical knowledge – they, through the process of doing history, came to acquire a particular form of masculine hegemony. The acquisition of historical knowledge through historical understanding furthermore empowered these history boys to dominate other boys who did not study the subject intellectually. Although the official history curriculum has brought the boys to an understanding that physical domination is wrong and a thing of the past, at the same time the image of the independent school history boy comes into focus with a particular form of hegemonic masculinity.

Part of this third image (as opposed to the image of the boy shaped by unofficial history and the image of history shaped by the official school history curriculum) remains a desire to still dominate and this is somewhat achieved by dominating other boys intellectually. Having historical knowledge gives these boys agency and power over other boys who do not possess their historical knowledge. For these history boys the gaining of historical knowledge, furthermore, added to a broader understanding of the world today. It is knowledge not just for knowledge's sake but knowledge that can be applied in an everyday setting. The possession of historical knowledge therefore places these boys within the masculine hegemony as it means that they can dominate other boys who do not have this power. This knowing more than those who have not studied history is a form of dominance that the boys had earlier characterized as a core component of hegemonic masculinity, not the physical dominance but an alternate form of masculinity: intellectual dominance. This is played out not in the formal classroom setting but in informal settings such as dormitory discussions. Brad alluded to this: "it [history] helps with like your talking. We were having a conversation the other day [John] doesn't do history and he didn't know what we were talking about, we were talking about Communism and all of that, Capitalism and stuff, and he didn't even know what we were saying." Thus knowing history enables a boy to intellectually dominate

other boys who do not have this kind of knowledge. Having historical knowledge therefore was empowering for these history boys. It allowed them to dominate intellectually and therefore serves to construct a hegemonic masculine identity for these independent school history boys.

Moreover, history, above all other subjects constantly forced the boys to stare masculinity in the face. Masculinity is always present. Their study of history therefore both legitimized as well as deconstructed the boys' notions of what it means to be a man which sets them apart from other boys who seemingly did not have this understanding of both history and masculinity. This alternate form of masculine dominance is what Frank, Kehler, Lovell and Davison refer to as "counter-hegemonic masculine performances" that sometimes play out in schools and that are accepted as "alternative possibilities of masculine practice" (2003, p.119). This can disrupt the "conventional heteronormative masculinity" (Frank, Kehler, Lovell and Davison, 2003, p.124). However, it must also be remembered that boys are aware of the dynamics of masculine identity formation (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996).

To have a historical understanding and the ability to think historically means being a better man and sometimes more of a man. Historical knowledge becomes intricately linked with power. Knowing history therefore distinguished the boy from the man. Historical knowledge is a significant component of the hegemonic masculine gender construction. The history boys, in studying history, were also a step above those who did not have this historical knowledge. This further empowered these history boys – they knew more about how the world has come to be the way it is as well as having acquired relevant skills such as critical thinking and the ability to debate. This adds a further dimension to the pluralities and complexities of masculinity.

However, despite boasting of their historical knowledge and lauding it over other boys who do not have this historical knowledge, this is not translated into boys' performance in the I.E.B N.S.C history examination written at the end of their grade 12 year. Despite equal number of boys and girls entering to write the history examination, for every one

boy who achieved a distinction there were two girls who achieved a distinction (I.E.B, 2012). Boys in general are therefore not achieving at the top level in the I.E.B history examinations despite boasting of having significant historical knowledge and using it to dominate other boys. It can therefore be concluded that in terms of the historical knowledge expected of the I.E.B N.S.C examination, the boys' historical knowledge is not in effect significant. The official history curriculum requires a different purpose for this historical knowledge - an understanding of gender power relations and a respect for gender equity. It is apparent from the boys' understanding of history acquired through the official history curriculum – yet strongly influenced by unofficial history – has not achieved its aim of gender equity (DoE, 2003). One of the reasons why these history boys have been incapable of achieving this aim is because the lessons learnt through unofficial history overshadow those learnt through the official school curriculum. In short, the boys' understanding of masculinity, which is largely determined by the genderised institution in which they find themselves, as well as the lessons derived through their friends and family relationships, inhibits the acquisition of the aims of the official school history curriculum. This in turn adversely affects the boys' performance in the N.S.C examinations. Their historical knowledge, as far as the I.E.B N.S.C examinations go, is not as significant as it should be.

## **5.5. Defenders of Justice**

The history boys of this study saw the studying of history as having further relevance or significance as it positively affected their post-secondary school studies and career path. Law dominated as the majority of the boys' chosen career path although architecture was also mentioned. This confirms Whitehead's conclusion that boys are more likely to choose subjects that are rational or vocational – career-orientated (Whitehead, 1996). This is despite the perceptions in Whitehead's study that history – because it is about people - puts it into the feminine domain of the genderised curriculum (1996). Boys are conscious of their masculinity and this affects their subject choices. One aspect of the construction of masculinity is the avoidance of the feminine. Boys, therefore, avoid choosing subjects that are viewed as feminine. This is because



“boys showed much more bias in their subject choices and those choosing exclusively masculine subjects were much more likely to support traditional sex roles and to conform to traditional notions of masculinity” (Whitehead, 1996, p.147). So what is it about history and its positive association with masculinity that drew the subjects of this study to see it as a legitimate masculine pursuit?

One possible reason, other than having historical knowledge and skills to dominate other boys intellectually, is the desire to be defenders of justice. One component that these boys had earlier associated with being a man was standing up for what is right. This defence of justice - which was seen as synonymous with a positive masculine identity – made the studying of law seem as a positive masculine career choice. This confirms Whitehead’s (1996) conclusion. History, with its association with the studying of law, was therefore seen to be a relevant or significant subject. It provided the historical knowledge that could be used to dominate others intellectually and also prepared these history boys for a career in law – a credible masculine profession in which a man is seen to be standing up for what is right and using his superior powers of argument and reason to win a case. History therefore played a part in these independent school boys’ understanding and negotiating of their own masculinity. This made the studying of history at school – the embodiment of official history - both significant and empowering. It ensured that for these boys they found their place within the hegemonic masculinity.

This is somewhat like Unterhalter’s description of what she terms heroic masculinity (2000). She associated history with politics which legitimized the heroic component of what it means to be a man. This political work involved the noble fight to end oppression but also the aim to build a better society for all. This is the quest for social justice. Despite the attempts to break their political resolves by those in authority as well as the oppressive South African society at large further legitimizes the heroic masculinity (Unterhalter, 2000). It is this quest for social justice that is heroic. The study of official school history is closely linked with the study of South Africa’s transition to democracy and the boys of this study identified with the image of heroic defenders of justice

created by the official school history curriculum. For Brad his favourite section in his grade 12 curriculum was “South Africa’s Emergence as a Democracy” as he found this section “interesting and relevant.” He saw relevance as being synonymous with interest. A number of the boys in the focus group interviews agreed with Brad’s sentiments, finding contemporary South African history interesting. At the same time that these boys were learning about this period in South Africa’s history a mirror was being held up to their own masculine identities and a connection was being made. This connection resulted in what was determined to be historically significant. This further legitimized the studying of history as a credible masculine pursuit.

## **5.6. Warriors**

The regulation and shaping of masculinity involves power and is shaped by both the official school history curriculum as well as unofficial history. In order to ascertain historical significance, the boys in the focus group setting were asked what their immediate association was with the word history. These responses were both similar and yet different and was based on their understanding of history derived by both the official and unofficial versions.

Official school history was the history studied at both primary and secondary school. Most of the boys’ initial responses revealed an association of history with some sort of conflict – more specifically, war, spies and weapons – which was based on their impression of official primary school history. Historical figures when they were mentioned specifically were in the main white military male figures – Churchill, Louis Botha and Hitler. Otherwise they were strong individuals who seemingly singlehandedly changed the course of history like Mandela, De Klerk and Gorbachev. These boys ascribed the values of the warrior to these historical figures. Why did they do this? According to Salisbury and Jackson (1996) history taught in classrooms is heavy with the exploits of warriors. The warrior is “the most extreme example of virile manhood – the ultimate in power and ruthlessness” (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.250). He is a man without feelings – strong, powerful, and decisive with the power to determine who

lives and who dies. In other words he is the man in power. The image of the warrior featured in both the official and unofficial history to which these boys were exposed. When asked to reflect on the official history that they had studied in primary school half of the boys mentioned war. Warfare involves the military which encourages conformity, discipline, control and camaraderie. Giving substance to the notion that, “the warrior pattern is at the heart of patriarchy” (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.250). It has been played out generation after generation – the deployment of war as a justifiable means for the greater good, “with world wars and mass conscription, the tighter the net of aggressive masculinity draws” (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.250). Warfare involves the military which encourages conformity, discipline, control and camaraderie. The historical narratives of such warriors have served to “guard the sense of masculine heroic toughness, softer, gentler feelings and emotional complexities are cut off and signed to women and lesser men” (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.253). Masculinity and the glorification of war are inextricably intertwined in the narratives of primary school history.

The absence of direct confrontation or violence sticks out in most boys’ memories when they described the history learnt in their last year of secondary school. Confrontation when it did occur was on an ideological level and the clash of opposite values. Particular reference was made to the clash in ideologies involved in the Cold War and the role of protest in bringing about a peace at a time of great conflict. This is not surprising as human rights, diversity and good citizenship dominate the N.C.S - History as it requires learners to have “an understanding of our diverse past and a mutual grasp of how that informs our present reality” and “enables people to examine with greater insight and understanding the prejudices involving race, class, gender, ethnicity and xenophobia still existing in society and which must be challenged and addressed” (DoE, 2003, p.9). All this serves to support the fundamental knowledge focus of the curriculum which is “to build a new identity in South Africa” (DoE, 2003, p.4). However, it seems that when recalling what was studied at primary school the history learnt there seems to be about war and violence without resolution or context but not so in secondary school. Although not necessarily advocating the use of violence, prominent historical figures in the official secondary school history curriculum were still seen by these boys as being

warriors as they were thought to be courageous, resolute and strong individuals who changed the course of history. This historical understanding is achieved at the same time that the boys in this study are forging their masculinity. It can be surmised that as these boys come to an understanding that there are multiple layers involved in interrogating historical events from many perspectives they also came to the understanding that there are many ways to be a man. In the official secondary school curriculum change was perceived to have been achieved not just with the use of violence. Despite this perception, the boys of this study elevated the male historical figures who might not have readily been associated with war to that of the image of the warrior thereby placing them within the realm of the hegemonic masculinity. Why did they do this? One reason may be that, knowingly or unknowingly, the boys themselves revere the position of hegemonic masculinity and by giving male historical characters such as Mandela and De Klerk hegemonic status is a form of glorification. Using Lacan's (1949) mirror to explain this helps - the mirror image is established as an "ideal me" toward which the child will forever strive to achieve throughout his life. This imago creates a permanent sense of being imperfect but looking forward to perfection. Therefore, by assigning warrior status to such male historical figures these boys are in a sense hero worshipping them by giving them hegemonic status. As masculinity is defined in contrast to femininity, those masculinities that are more closely aligned to feminist attributes (soft, emotional, sensitive) will be positioned at the bottom of the masculine hierarchy and those associated with traditional characteristics of hegemonic masculinity (toughness, strong and courageous) will be placed at the top (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998) thus giving men such as Mandela and De Klerk hero status.

The image of the warrior also featured in the boys' lessons learnt through unofficial history. Influential male family figures were readily associated with war such as grandfathers fighting in the Second World War and another of the boy's reference to his father's involvement in the Border War having served as a "rattle [ratel] tank mechanic." Other boys made reference to male military figures that had featured in their family's history such as General Louis Botha. When it came to unofficial history most of the boys within this study mentioned the association of historical events or personalities with

male family figures such as fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers. History is associated with positive male role models and is therefore a legitimate masculine pursuit. Furthermore, in their retelling of the impact made by male family figures in these history boys' acquisition of historical knowledge the fathers and grandfathers too are given hero status and become to some extent warriors. There was an association with some grandfathers and fathers with war which further entrenched the warrior image.

The history boys themselves have clear warrior associations. In their quest for historical truth, and to some extent social justice, they saw themselves as battling against adversity. This adversity was either in the form of those who were historically ignorant or those who subscribed to the traditional hegemonic form of masculinity. The historical thinking that only those who studied history acquired was described in a positive light as being almost tantamount to a superhero's unique power. Therefore the skills, attitude and knowledge that these boys acquired through the studying of history give the boys themselves warrior-like abilities.

## **5.7. Evolved Cavemen**

The study of official history as embodied in the school curriculum did highlight how for many of the boys the traditional masculine roles have changed and that there is perhaps alternate versions of masculinity other than the traditional hegemonic. But for some of the boys, despite their study of history (or perhaps even because of it), they still clung to the hegemonic or traditional view of what it means to be a man. For example Jaryd articulated: "I think history has taught us that physical dominance is never really a good idea alone, and that you need emotional and mental, you can't just be a cave man with a big stick." The implication of such a statement is that it is okay to have a stick but you can't just be a cave man. You have to be more evolved – an evolved cave man. Alternatively, you can still be a cave man but you will need more than just a big stick. For some of these boys, their understanding of what it means to be a man gained through unofficial sources and the lessons intended through the official school history curriculum are in conflict.

The further the boys went back in time, the more traditional or hegemonic they saw the role of men in official history: strong, aggressive, the hunter; the fighter and the dominator. Man dominated way back in history through his use of force and violence alone. However, over time, and according to the understanding the independent school history boys achieved through studying official history, man came to realize that violence and force alone would not achieve his need to dominate others. This was articulated by Ryan: "I think it changes in time, like in different periods of history. I think like, in sort of, ancient history it's more of a physical sense than anything else, and slowly it's moved, like as we progressed, and it's become, and technology has developed, it's become more of an intellectual thing as well, I think, than just physical." At the same time it must be remembered that the lessons that these boys gained through unofficial history such as their relationships with fathers and grandfathers also readily threw up the association of men and war.

Although their study of official school history sensitized the boys to power relations at play as well as the dominance of hegemonic masculinity over women, at the same time through their study of official and unofficial history, these boys came to learn that with physical strength and violence a man can still dominate other men. Why is this? One possible explanation lies in the fact that men and boys can in any one lifetime subscribe to a number of different and varying masculinities. This is often where the confusion comes into play between the real me, the perceived me and the ideal me as suggested by Lacan's (1949) Mirror Stage model. This confusion is heightened by the pecking order or hierarchy of masculinities that a boy will face as he becomes a man who in turn navigates his way in the world of gender relations. Schools become the site for the "production, negotiation and policing of particular forms of masculinity" (Martino, 2000, p.106). Masculine hierarchies, therefore, are constructed by families, institutions, teachers, subjects such as history and boys themselves.

For many of the history boys, their understanding of history legitimized their thinking that men have a need to dominate not only women but also other men including the

domination of white men of black men. This continues to affirm the hegemonic form of masculinity. Dominance is, however, not achieved through violence (the big stick) alone but also intellectually and sometimes using both. As Jeffrey stated: "Like all the Apartheid figures and stuff, like Afrikaner okes, like in my mind, all the Afrikaans like leaders, and people who pioneered Apartheid, like in my mind, they were like run by masculinity, and thinking that men were better. And not only better, and their race was better, and that links to masculinity." This is evidence of Jeffrey using his understanding of masculinity to influence his understanding of this period in South Africa's history. Apartheid law enforcement relied on an out-dated or traditional hegemonic form of masculinity – the big stick – but dominance cannot be achieved through the use of force alone. Apartheid ended because it was based on an out-dated notion of masculinity. The Apartheid government failed to evolve and therefore had to fall. This was echoed by Jaryd: "Well our study of Apartheid and South African history is obviously an example. You can only rule through oppression and the big stick for so long, until people say "you can't treat us like that", and "that we are people too and that your time has come, and that's shown us that you can't be a cave man."

Besides, an evolved man is someone who is able to assess a situation and makes a courageous decision to change direction. The traditional hegemonic form of masculinity would have involved the use of violence or force alone to maintain the status quo. Official school history taught these boys that force can only maintain an ideology for so long. It takes an evolved man to abandon force and seek a new way. This new way, however, does not negate men's need to dominate. Men just need to find new ways of dominating – more often than not this means abandoning violence in favour of intellectual dominance – knowing more than other men and using this knowledge to dominate other men. Men do not always need to use violence to achieve domination. Thus the history boys' understanding of official school history taught some of these boys that you do not have to use violence to achieve your aims. But you do have to be confrontational. You do have to face your adversaries. Confrontation therefore is a form of aggression. Official history once again reaffirmed their traditional notion of what it means to be a man as learnt through unofficial sources. Official school history therefore

formed a mirror image of an “ideal me” toward which the boys in this study strive to achieve. The image of the evolved caveman is an image that creates a permanent sense of being imperfect but looking forward to perfection (Lacan, 1949).

### **5.8. Institutionalized Cavemen**

So where do the boys derive this understanding that man today cannot be a caveman with a big stick? Undeniably, the official school history school curriculum has informed this understanding and the lessons from unofficial history have also played a part. One source of unofficial history is that of institutionalized masculinity. Many all-boys’ schools construct their own particular kind of masculinity that is unique to the school. Boys’ schools may celebrate “toughness and endurance, relentlessly promoting competitiveness and fear of losing and connecting a sense of maleness with a taste of violence and confrontation” (Kessler, 1985, p.40). Such institutions through practices involving the exaltation of sport over academic pursuits and marginalizing cultural or artistic activities thus promote a certain type of institutionalized masculinity or “gender regime” (Kessler, 1985, p.40). The dominant form of masculinity does not seek to obliterate the marginalized but by giving more honour and admiration to the activities commonly associated with the desired masculinity, the institutionalized hegemonic masculinity is established. Boys’ schools therefore provide a setting in which one kind or another masculinity becomes hegemonic (Kessler, 1985). This is played out in the boys’ understanding of history as illustrated by official and unofficial sources. At the top of the masculine gender hierarchy sits the evolved caveman, the warrior and the defender of justice. However, although official history, unofficial history, as well as the boys themselves, exalt these masculinities it is institutionalized masculinity that entrenches and validates their position.

As discussed in chapter one, Balcomb Academy is “home to young men who come to learn skills, forge lifelong friendships, acquire wisdom and are guided to become citizens who make a positive impact in our world. When a boy joins [Balcomb Academy] as either a boarder or a day scholar, he inherits the time honoured traditions and



principles that have made [Balcomb] the remarkable school it is today” (Balcomb Academy prospectus). Furthermore, the school hints at what it upholds to be the most desirable characteristics in the development of boys into men: “It is here that new boys arrive tossed on an ocean of shock and change, soon to be transformed into young gentlemen and later into passionate, loyal Old Boys taking their place in the world economy” (Balcomb Academy prospectus). It is therefore clear what characteristics of masculinity are placed at the top of the masculinity hierarchy by this school: endurance - boys who are able to survive and be “transformed” by some “shock”; “gentlemen” – a rather old-fashioned notion of what it means to be a man (this notion differs fundamentally from “gentle man”); boys who will ultimately be able to fit into a group (as opposed to standing alone) are loyal to their school for evermore and finally boys who have skills that will allow them to find a place and compete in a “world economy.” The importance of being able to compete and competitiveness is articulated a number of times in the school’s promotional material: “The academic ethos at the College is as competitive as the one enjoyed in sport and cultural arenas. Boys are encouraged to fulfil their potential and a programme of goal-setting is active throughout the College with a host of academic prizes awarded each year” (Balcomb Academy prospectus).

The superior masculinity therefore involves dominance. The school espouses to produce emerging men who dominate over others academically, through sport as well as cultural pursuits. This superior notion of masculinity is an attractive one to many of the families that choose to send their sons to Balcomb Academy and this in turn mirrors the value system of these boys’ families. No longer is it acceptable for men to dominate using their physical strength alone, there are many ways in which men can prove and show their dominance. In addition, like a pack of cavemen, the school espouses to produce men who stick together. Furthermore, like a caveman who, despite the developments of history, has survived, the school emphasizes resilience and endurance as core masculine values. This goes some way to explain why these history boys come to the understanding that men today have evolved from being just a caveman with a big stick. This understanding is forged in part through official school history but by and large it is entrenched and regulated by the lessons from unofficial history derived by the

school's attempts to promote its own institutionalized masculinity. Unofficial history ultimately overshadows the attempts of the official school history to establish a just and equal society.

The official history curriculum is a transformative one that seeks to achieve an appreciation of gender equity and a sensitization to power dynamics at play in a constantly evolving South African society. However, the institution in which the boys find themselves is not evolving, it is a traditional one that essentially aims to maintain old-fashioned or "time honoured" values. These independent school history boys therefore learn many lessons on what it means to be a man from the independent boys' only boarding school in which they all find themselves as well as through official history. The institution has taught them contradictory lessons: being independent but learning how to be accepted as part of the group; accepting your punishment like a man but confronting those who have caused you an injustice. Official history has taught them that you cannot be a caveman with a big stick yet they glorify the association of positive role models like fathers and grandfathers with war. These contradictory lessons all lead to the conflicting and ambiguous notions of what it means to be a man. As Lacan (1949) pointed out the mirror image created by all these influences is an artificial projection of the self - modelled on the visual images of others that the individual confronts in the world. The image in the mirror is, however, always changing as it contrasts "with the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him" (Sheridan, 1977, p.2). Moreover, the families to which these boys belong are essentially conservative, white middle class and in many respects can be viewed as privileged. Like the school, the values that the boys are taught are essentially solidarity and loyalty to one's own kind over social justice. Hence there is a conflict that exists in the lessons that the official school history curriculum seeks to impart and those learnt through unofficial history sources such as the family and the independent boys' boarding school as a genderising institution. This goes some way to explain the boys' relatively poor performance in the I.E.B N.S.C history examination (I.E.B, 2012). They have what they believe to be significant historical knowledge but this is not the historical knowledge required by the I.E.B N.S.C examination as an assessment tool. What is required is what is stated in the

official grade 12 history curriculum: “In understanding our world today and the legacies that shaped our present, the broad themes of power alignments, human rights, issues of civil society and globalization” (DoE, 2003, p.30). In addition what is expected is an acute understanding of how issues of race, gender and class impacted and continue to impact on South African society (DoE, 2003). How can these boys have this understanding when their institution has remained relatively unaffected by these issues and their traditional notions of masculinity reflect traditionally hegemonic ideals in conflict with the intention of N.C.S (DoE, 2003)? The boys’ relative under performance is not the boys’ fault but lies in the transformative gender intentions of official history curricula and that clashes with those of unofficial history as well as the institution as a masculine regulating force. The image in the mirror created by these conflicting forces is a blurred one for these boys.

## **5.9 Limited Sense of Gender Justice**

It could be thought that because they are sensitized to masculine gender formation and possible discrimination these history boys might be sensitive to all gender discrimination. However, this was not apparent in this study. The official history curriculum therefore seeks to support the aims of transforming society characterized by a lack of conflict and gender equality (DoE, 2003). The subjects of this study were all born in 1991 or 1992 - at the time of this country’s political and educational transformation as described previously. These history boys have grown up male in this democratic South Africa characterized by, amongst other things, gender equality. However, the boys’ understanding of history gained through the official school history curriculum, despite its aims, does not reflect a sensitivity to gender equity. These boys’ understanding shows sensitivity towards masculine gender construction but this is as far as their understanding of gender relations goes. Therefore these boys in learning history come to some understanding of a just sense of masculine construction but not a just sense of gender relations in general.

Some of the boys seemed quite torn in their traditional views of what it meant to be a

man and what it meant to be a woman. At times this conflict was caused by what they had brought into the history classroom with their preconceived ideas obtained through unofficial history. This conflict was made all the greater when they were confronted by what they come to learn about men and women through official school history. At other times what they had learnt in the history classroom reaffirmed some of their traditional and conservative views of what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman (Unterhalter, 2000; Chipondo, 2011). Many of these boys believed that men are justified in being dominant because they are physically stronger. Men and women are not equal according to Ryan, for example, because physical strength determines dominance and society is still patriarchal. According to some of these boys men and women play separate and unequal roles in society. This belief is born out of the lessons learnt through official school history such as in prehistoric times men were the hunters and women the gatherers. However, it is more accurate to acknowledge the lessons learnt through unofficial history such as family dynamics and the school as a genderised institution for this belief. For some of these history boys men dominate women because women are the weaker sex. Men are physically stronger and therefore perform more physically strenuous tasks which justify their dominance over women. This is most certainly not communicated in the official school history curriculum so the boys would have learnt this from other sources – unofficial history lessons taught through family dynamics as well as institutionalized masculinity.

Although these history boys were able to describe various roles played by individual women in history they did not see these roles as being significant although they equally admitted that they had not studied women's roles in history in enough detail. This was due to the fact that women's roles are not nearly emphasized in the official school history curriculum to the same extent as the roles of powerful men. When pressed to mention by name the women whom they had studied in history these boys mentioned women who by and large were associated with the fight for human rights: Rosa Parks, Helen Suzman, Helen Zille, Amy Biehl and Hillary Clinton. Again most of these historical figures were white although there was a mix of international and South African figures most of whom could be found in the official school history curriculum. There was also a

mix of historical and more contemporary political figures which leads one to believe that these boys were drawing on their contemporary South African and world general knowledge rather than their historical knowledge. But closer to the truth is the fact that these boys, were not interested in the history of the roles played by women. If significant history is determined to be the history that interests them and is relevant to them, then it can be deduced that because of their gender they do not see the role played by people of the opposite gender as being significant.

For the history boys protest seemed to be associated with women alone. It was not something that men were associated with as protest on the whole does not involve physical strength or even raw courage although others might contest this. However, when men did protest they were seen to be more effective than women largely because they came across as more threatening. Women were unable to do it alone. Women therefore, according to these history boys, are powerless without men. This is not what the official history curriculum seeks to communicate. It seeks to achieve the opposite – a transformed society characterized by gender equality (DoE, 2003). It can therefore be concluded that the belief that women are powerless without men must have been communicated to the boys through unofficial history sources such as family relationships and the genderised institution in which these history boys find themselves.

Once again, according to these history boys, men are powerful because they are physically stronger. White men in particular possessed individual skills and ability that enabled them to change history. Women, like black men, were unable to do anything significant on their own – they needed the support of a lot of people to achieve their aims. These beliefs were formed to a limited extent by the official school history curriculum yet fed into the history boys' preconceived hegemonic notions of what it meant to be a man – to be able to dominate others. This is despite of, or because of, the content of the N.C.S – History which was selected in order to understand our world today. By the end of grade 12 it is hoped that a learner will be able to “critically investigate how issues such as gender, race and class impacted and continue to impact on sources used in history” (DoE, 2003, p.45). For these history boys the aim of

identifying gender discrimination in order to abolish it from contemporary society has not been achieved.

#### **5.10 Conclusion - Why does masculinity influence boys' understanding of history the way it does?**

One explanation lies in the fact that the lessons learnt from unofficial history - preconceived notions acquired before the first classroom-based history lesson - are stronger than those intended by the official school curriculum. This confirms what Partington (1980) and Phillips (1998) contended that unofficial history has greater influence than official school history in shaping the idea of a historical education. Unofficial history is associated with positive male role models and history is therefore a legitimate masculine pursuit. Besides, in their retelling of the impact made by male family figures in these history boys' acquisition of historical knowledge the fathers and grandfathers too were given hero status and became to some extent warriors. There was an association with some grandfathers and fathers with war which further entrenched the warrior image and downgraded the roles of marginalized masculinities and women. In addition when recalling the role played by history teachers all the boys referred to male history teachers. Not one mentioned a female history teacher. History, as reflected by the unofficial sources of history, is dominated by men. However, the official school history curriculum seeks to address the inequalities of the past by emphasizing the significant roles played by women so it cannot be contended that women remain hidden in the official school curriculum (DoE, 2003). Nevertheless, these history boys do not deem the roles played by women to be significant. The decision as to why women's history is not significant history is strongly informed by unofficial history. In particular it is informed by an awareness of masculinity and the genderised institution in which the boys find themselves. These unofficial sources of history therefore exert a more powerful force on these boys than the official school history curriculum.

However, it must also be remembered that boys are a lot more self-questioning and aware of the dynamics involved in the construction of masculinity than what researchers in the past have credited them with. Salisbury and Jackson have warned that we need

to stop viewing boys as men as “exercising a monolithic, unchanging system of patriarchal power” (1996, p.14). Therefore, these history boys’ understanding of masculinities as shaped through the official school history curriculum and unofficial sources is ambiguous. At times the official history curriculum and unofficial history are at odds leading to a blurred image in the mirror into which these boys peer to see their masculine identity. There are times when the boys identify with the image that history reflects but at other times these boys misconceive the image before them. The masculinities that are reflected are multiple and often times unclear. The ideal I – “the statue in which man projects himself” (Lacan, 1949, in Sheridan 1977 p. 2) or ideal ego – that is appealing and unattainable – is always present. The perfect other also creates envy, confusion and tension between the two opposite images formed by unofficial and official school history. So for these boys masculinity is more often than not ambiguous.

The official history curriculum is a transformative one that seeks to achieve an appreciation of gender equity and a sensitization to power dynamics at play in a constantly evolving South African society. However, the institution in which the boys find themselves is not evolving, it is a traditional one that essentially aims to maintain old-fashioned or “time honoured” values. These independent school history boys therefore learn many lessons on what it means to be a man from the independent boys’ only boarding school in which they all find themselves as well as through official history. The institution has taught them contradictory lessons: being independent but learning how to be accepted as part of the group; accepting your punishment like a man but confronting those who have caused you an injustice. Official history has taught them that you cannot be a caveman with a big stick yet they glorify the association of positive role models like fathers and grandfathers with war. These contradictory lessons all lead to the conflicting and ambiguous notions of what it means to be a man. Moreover, the families to which these boys belong are essentially conservative, white middle class and in many respects can be viewed as privileged. Like the school, the values that the boys are taught are essentially solidarity and loyalty to one’s own kind over social justice. Hence there is a conflict that exists in the lessons that the official school history curriculum seeks to impart and those learnt through unofficial history sources such as

the family and the independent boys' boarding school as a genderising institution. What is expected in the official school history curriculum is an acute understanding of how issues of race, gender and class impacted and continue to impact on South African society (DoE, 2003) but how can these boys have this understanding when their institution and families have remained relatively unaffected by these issues and their traditional notions of masculinity reflect traditionally hegemonic ideals in conflict with the intention of N.C.S (DoE, 2003)? The boys' relative under performance in the I.E.B N.S.C examinations is not entirely the boys' fault as some explanation can also be found within the clash of the transformative gender intentions of official history curricula and the lessons of unofficial history formed in part by the school institution as a masculine regulating force.



## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

RUDGE        I did all the other stuff like Stalin was a sweetie and Wilfred Owen was a wuss. They said I was plainly someone who thought for himself and just what the college rugger team needed

(Bennett, 2004, p.98).

#### **6.1    Introduction**

This study sought to highlight and understand the impact that masculine gender construction plays in boys' understanding of history particularly within the context of an independent boys' secondary school in South Africa. Conversely – and yet at the same time – this study also sought to highlight how the understanding of history within the context of a South African independent boys' secondary school plays a role in boys' construction of masculinity. In so doing I have attempted to close some of the gaps in the literature that was reviewed in chapter 2.

Boys do not learn history in isolation. They learn history in genderised and genderising institutions. Schools, more than any other instructors, shape boys' construction of masculine identities as they provide a set of meanings through the reinforcement and regulation of gender norm behaviours and performances (Swain, 2003). Many all-boys' schools construct their own particular kind of masculinity that is unique to the school. This may be the result of the needs of the particular clientele or may have been constructed over time or in the case of long-established schools it may even be a by-product of a by-gone era. Thus the construction of masculinity is strategic.

This study has shown that at the same time that they are coming to an understanding of history, boys are also constructing their own masculine identities and finding their place in the masculine gender hierarchy. The regulation and shaping of masculinity involves

power and happens both in the official academic curriculum as well as the unofficial curriculum. The school curriculum too is gendered and hegemonised. Like masculinity, the curriculum is subject to genderising regimes and is constructed in a hierarchy with the very elite or what is perceived to be most difficult subjects placed at the top and the so-called easier subjects at the bottom (Roulston & Mills, 2000).

However, one cannot negate the influence of the lessons learnt through the unofficial curriculum and which the boys have acquired before even entering the history classroom. This study has shown that although official school history has an impact on these history boys' understanding of masculinity, the converse is stronger: masculinity (as a component of unofficial history) has a greater impact on these history boys' understanding of history. Not only do institutions serve to legitimise or downplay forms of masculinity other than the hegemonic but boys themselves are also active in constructing hierarchies of masculinity. Therefore boys' schools - with the lessons learnt through the official school history curriculum but more so through the unofficial curriculum - are battlegrounds on which boys negotiate or even fight to establish their masculinities.

This chapter draws the findings of this study together, reflects on the research process and makes recommendations as drawn from the research conclusions. In this, the final chapter of this thesis, I will firstly propose an answer to the three research questions that guided this study. I will also be reflecting on the personal and professional importance of this study for me.

## **6.2 Review of the Study**

Balcomb Academy, where this study took place, is described in its promotional material as being "home to young men who come to learn skills, forge lifelong friendships, acquire wisdom and are guided to become citizens who make a positive impact in our world. When a boy joins [Balcomb Academy] as either a boarder or a day scholar, he inherits the time honoured traditions and principles that have made [Balcomb] the

remarkable school it is today.” Furthermore, the school hints at what it upholds to be the most desirable characteristics in the development of boys into men: “It is here that new boys arrive tossed on an ocean of shock and change, soon to be transformed into young gentlemen and later into passionate, loyal Old Boys taking their place in the world economy.” It is therefore clear what characteristics of masculinity are placed at the top of the masculinity hierarchy by this school: endurance - boys who are able to survive and be “transformed” by some “shock”; “gentlemen” – a rather old fashioned notion of what it means to be a man (this notion differs fundamentally from “gentle man”); boys who will ultimately be able to fit into a group (as opposed to standing alone) that are loyal to their school for evermore and finally boys who have skills that will allow them to find a place and compete in a “world economy.”

However, the official school history curriculum is a transformative one that seeks to achieve an appreciation of gender equity and a sensitization to power dynamics at play in a constantly evolving South African society. But Balcomb Academy, as an institution for the education of boys, is not evolving. This independent boys’ school is a traditional one that essentially aims to maintain old-fashioned or “time honoured” values. Moreover, the families to which these boys belong are essentially conservative, white middle class and in many respects can be viewed as privileged. Like the school, the values that the boys are taught are essentially solidarity and loyalty to one’s own kind over social justice. Hence there is a conflict that exists in the lessons that the official school history curriculum seeks to impart and those learnt through unofficial history sources such as the family and the independent boys’ boarding school as a genderising institution.

Caught in the middle of this clash are the history boys of this study. These independent school history boys learn many lessons on what it means to be a man from the independent boys’ only boarding school in which they all find themselves, the families from which they come, the boys with whom they socialise in their dormitories after school and only to a limited extent through official school history.

### **Research Question 1:** What do boys understand about history and masculinity?

Schools with their academic subjects are places where gender identities are turned into gender regimes. These regimes seek to create gender hierarchies. In the case of masculinity the most acceptable and exalted forms of masculinity are positioned at the top and the lesser forms at the bottom. Normally in such a setting one form of masculinity – the hegemonic – dominates the other (Connell, 1996). However, not only do institutions serve to legitimise or downplay forms of masculinity other than the hegemonic but boys themselves are also active in constructing hierarchies of masculinity.

Connell's theory of masculinity (1996) describes four categories or groups that emerge in the analysis of different forms of masculinity: hegemonic masculinity; subordinate masculinity; complicit masculinity and the marginalized form of masculinity. However, the findings of this study showed that unlike Connell's categories that are seemingly fixed, masculinity was found to be fluid. Men and boys can in any one lifetime subscribe to a number of different and varying masculinities. Using Connell's theory of masculinity (1996) these history boys were acutely aware of the existence of the hegemonic masculine regime that existed within their school and wider South African society. They recognised that real men dominate other men and use their physical strength to assert their dominance. However, these history boys described themselves in different terms such as "peaceful" and wanting to avoid conflict. Thus at first glance these history boys seemed to subscribe to the characteristics of Connell's (1996) complicit form of masculinity. This group constructs its masculinity by "gaining the patriarchal dividend without the tension or risks of being the frontline troops or patriarchy" (Connell, 1996, p.21). Hegemonic masculinity dominates because of the complicit masculinity's silence. This category exists because most men do not in fact attain the normative practices of hegemony. Not all men embody the ideals or practices of the hegemonic man. Yet in order for the hegemonic form of masculinity to dominate, various complicit intermediaries – lesser masculinities that serve to highlight the subordinates – are required in order to exalt the hegemonic. The history boys, with their ideas of what it

means to be a man, therefore seemingly form a particular complicit form of masculinity.

However, this is also where the confusion comes into play between the real me, the perceived me and the ideal me. This confusion is heightened by the pecking order or hierarchy of masculinities that a boy will face in the genderising institution of the school with its genderising subjects such as history. The dual forces of official school history and unofficial history, and the subsequent clash that comes into being, shaped the boys of this study's understanding of both history as well as masculinity. Sources beyond history lessons and history textbooks also contribute to students' understanding of history. However, tensions can start to arise because of the possibility of the conflict between official school history curricula and unofficial histories learnt outside the classroom.

The content of the official South African N.C.S–History was selected in order to understand our world today: “In understanding our world today and the legacies that shaped our present, the broad themes of power alignments, human rights, issues of civil society and globalization were used in suggesting areas of content” (DoE, 2003, p.30). The choice of what is worth studying or even remembering is considered to be significant. Decisions as to what is deemed historically significant involve both power and historical literacy. Cox's (2010) conceptualisation of significance was used in this study whereby significance refers to how boys “discover purpose in their lives” (Cox, 2010, p.3). Significance is the “meaning and value beyond the immediacy of the moment; experiences that shape boys' minds through the power of insight, inspiration, and meaningful changes in their subjective perspectives of themselves and the world” (Cox, 2010, p.3).

So what official history did these boys consider to be significant? Official primary school history seemed to imitate the warrior games played out by young boys in the playground and reflected a one dimensional – or hegemonic – version of masculinity. The focus was on conflict. The warrior with the greatest strength won. The physically stronger man dominated those weaker than himself. The boys did not question the history that they

were studying just as they did not question their masculinity or that of the boys with whom they played. Masculinity, like the official school history, was taken at face value. However, by secondary school most of these history boys had come to be aware of their own masculinity in relation to those around them. This awareness was transferred to their understanding of the official school history which had also changed from what they had understood of history at primary school.

When asked for other attributes associated with masculinity, courage was mentioned – the courage to stand up when there is injustice. This was what Martin Luther King, Gandhi and Mandela did. Masculinity therefore featured strongly in the official history curriculum – men dominate and more specifically white men dominate mostly black men. Men also dominate women for, according to these history boys, women – like black men – alone cannot change history or play a significant role in history. These ideas in turn informed the history boys' opinions of masculinity. However, the opposite interpretation is probably truer – that these boys' notion of masculinity, moulded through unofficial history, actually informed their understanding of official history.

Still carrying their own notions of what it means to be a man acquired through unofficial history, some of these history boys came to an understanding that to survive in the 20th and 21st centuries men cannot just be a caveman with a stick. However, some of the history boys continued to legitimize the form of masculinity involving the need for men to dominate despite, or because of, their studying of official history. Going back to the history boys' original commonly held belief that men dominate women and other men, this view was evident in their upholding historically powerful men who did just that: Hitler, De Klerk and Gorbachev. Once again, according to the history boys, men are powerful because they are physically stronger. White men in particular possessed individual skills and ability that enabled them to change history. Women, like black men, were unable to do anything significant on their own – they needed the support of a lot of people to achieve their aims. These beliefs were formed from the official school history yet fed into the history boys' preconceived notions of what it meant to be a man - to be able to dominate others - constructed to a great extent by unofficial history. This

domination is achieved through physical strength or by possessing superior knowledge. For these history boys the official history curriculum as taught and assessed served to validate this belief and reinforced the hegemonic masculine identity that they subscribed to.

Being a man also meant acknowledging when wrong has been done and learning from mistakes. For some boys history has taught them what mistakes not to make but also that it is okay to make mistakes. The power, however, is in the knowing – knowing what mistakes not to repeat. Knowing more than others feeds into these history boys' contention that to be a man you must be able to dominate intellectually. History therefore plays a role in these boys' understanding of what it means to be a man and legitimises their understanding of masculinity.

So in returning to Connell's (1996) theory of masculinity it soon became apparent that these history boys were, through their common undertaking of studying history in this independent boys' boarding school, in turn forming their own form of hegemonic masculinity that was being positioned, both in these history boys and other boys' eyes, near the top of the masculine hierarchy. The hegemonic group can claim its authoritative status through the institutionalized power that exists in boys' schools. More often than not such examples would include the celebration of athleticism over the arts; the emphasis of physical activity over academic pursuits; body strength over emotional strength; action over thought and also man over woman. However, as Connell (1996) points out, new forms of masculinity are always challenging the hegemonic. This is where the new hegemonic history boy masculinity enters the hierarchy. According to these history boys real men dominate other men but in a modern context the domination of other men by men using physical force is out-dated. Men, however, can dominate other men and women in other ways – most notably intellectually. This is termed intellectual dominance. Historical understanding ultimately provided these boys with more than just historical knowledge – they, through the process of doing history, came to understand historical knowledge. The history boys, in studying history, were also a step above those who did not have this historical knowledge. This further empowered

these history boys – they knew more. Historical knowledge therefore gave these boys agency. Furthermore, an ability to apply an understanding of concepts learnt in the study of history to everyday life ensures greater significance as it reinforces the history boy's masculinity by empowering him to dominate other boys intellectually thereby finding his place within the masculine hegemony.

**Research Question 2:** How does masculinity influence boys' understanding of history?

The image of the mirror against which the history boys perceived themselves was used to analyse how the study of history impacts on the boys' understanding of masculinity. In keeping with Lacan's (1949) Mirror Stage model the history boys of this study identified with some of the lessons and images of what it means to be a man as constructed by the official history curriculum and validated by the families from which they came as well as the masculinity hierarchy within the school. That what was deemed to be significant enough, furthermore, served to form the image of the history boy in the mirror. What was not deemed to be significant did not appear in the mirror. Identifying with this image created by the official history curriculum further validated the boys' perceptions of the self and formed part of the boys' understanding of their own masculine identity.

However, as Lacan (1949) pointed out, the mirror image created by all these influences is an artificial projection of the self - modelled on the visual images of others that the individual confronts in the world. The image in the mirror is, however, always changing. There are times when the boys cannot see themselves in the image created by the official school curriculum.

Decisions as to what is deemed historically significant involve both power and historical literacy. This is evident in the emphasis of certain historical figures or events over others. It was clear that within the official history curriculum that there were those who were deemed to be powerful and those who were seen to be powerless. Men were on the whole depicted to be powerful. More importantly white historical men were seen to



be more powerful than black historical men. Black historical men did not have as much power and needed the mass support of the people to change history: the likes of Martin Luther King and Mandela. At the same time white male historical characters had the ability to be both good and bad (Hitler, Stalin and Jack the Ripper) such was their power. Black historical characters on the other hand are one dimensional – mostly good and supported by the people in almost martyr like fashion.

Official school history must share some of the blame for these boys' perceptions. However, on the other hand, these perceptions are also borne out of what the history boys believed to be the characteristics of masculinity learnt through the unofficial curriculum. It is clear that the mirror that the boys had previously created of what it means to be a man is used to reflect their understanding of history.

Historical literacy or historical imagination does not need a history classroom to grow. It can happen in the exploration of buildings or reading books and watching the History Channel. However, many a time by far the most impactful and greatest lessons of history are learnt through personal relationships. The same is true for masculinity. For many of these boys, the acquisition of historical knowledge was intricately woven into each of these boys' personal narratives – in many cases through the relationships of male family figures: specifically fathers and grandfathers. These influential figures taught the boys not only history lessons but also lessons of how to be a man. Put another way: these history boys ultimately interpreted the official history through the lens of masculinity acquired at home and regulated at school. Unofficial history therefore overshadowed the lessons learnt in the history classroom. The boys' understanding of what it means to be man is therefore ambiguous – on the one hand official school history has taught that physical strength alone doesn't last. On the other hand unofficial history learnt through their interactions with family members, the school and their friends has taught these boys that to be considered a real man you have to dominate other men. These history boys were therefore unable to identify with the image of an almost genderless being that sees all men (both black and white) and women as being equal. The image in the mirror - created by these conflicting forces of

official school history and unofficial history - is a blurred one for these boys. It both validates their notions of what it means to be a man but also problematizes it.

However, there is another image that has greater clarity. These history boys, with their knowledge gained of both history and masculinity through official school history and unofficial history have constructed their own form of hegemonic masculinity. Going back to Lacan's (1949) work there are three images that are reflected by the mirror into which the history boys look: there is the image of themselves as emerging men; there is the image of men constructed by the study of history and finally there is the history boy - the emerging man who through his acquisition of historically significant knowledge and skills is empowered to dominate other boys who do not have such knowledge or skills. This legitimizes the placing of the history boy near to the top of the masculine gender hierarchy.

**Research Question 3:** Why does masculinity influence boys' understanding of history the way it does?

One explanation to this question lies in the fact that the lessons learnt from unofficial history - preconceived notions acquired before the first classroom-based history lesson - are stronger than those intended by the official school curriculum. This confirms what Phillips (1998) contended that unofficial history has greater influence than official school history in shaping the idea of a historical education. Unofficial history is associated with positive male role models and history is therefore to the boys a legitimate masculine pursuit. Besides, in their retelling of the impact made by male family figures in these history boys' acquisition of historical knowledge the fathers and grandfathers too were given hero status and became to some extent warriors. There was an association with some grandfathers and fathers with war which further entrenched the warrior image and downgraded the roles of marginalized masculinities and women. In addition when recalling the role played by history teachers all the boys referred to male history teachers. Not one mentioned a female history teacher. History, as reflected by the unofficial sources of history, is also dominated by men. However, it was clear that male

family members played a much greater role in the boys' understanding of history compared to the roles played by male history teachers. In so doing an alternate masculine history hierarchy is constructed by the boys with male primary school teachers at the bottom followed by male secondary school history teachers then friends followed by fathers and grandfathers at the top.

However, the official school history curriculum seeks to address the inequalities of the past by emphasizing the significant roles played by women so it cannot be contended that women remain hidden in the official school curriculum (DoE, 2003). Nevertheless, these history boys do not deem the roles played by women to be significant. The decision as to why women's history is not significant is strongly informed by unofficial history. In particular it is informed by an awareness of masculinity and the genderised institution in which the boys find themselves. These unofficial sources of history therefore exert a more powerful force on these boys than the official school history curriculum.

At the same time it must also be remembered that boys are a lot more self-questioning and aware of the dynamics involved in the construction of masculinity than what researchers in the past have credited them with. Salisbury and Jackson have warned that we need to stop viewing boys as "exercising a monolithic, unchanging system of patriarchal power" (1996, p.14). Therefore, these history boys' understanding of masculinity as shaped through the official school history curriculum and unofficial sources is ambiguous. At times the official history curriculum and unofficial history are at odds leading to a blurred image in the mirror into which these boys peer to see their masculine identity. At other times the image reflected by the mirror of official school history is a familiar one. There are times when the boys identify with the image that history reflects. There is also the third, blurred image of the history boy that is created by the clash between the lessons of unofficial history and official school history. The masculinities that are reflected are multiple and often times unclear. The ideal I – "the statue in which man projects himself" (Lacan, 1949, in Sheridan 1977 p. 2) or ideal ego – that is appealing and unattainable – is always present. The perfect other also creates

envy, confusion and tension between the two opposite images formed by unofficial and official school history. Thus for these history boys masculinity is more often than not ambiguous.

Furthermore, the official history curriculum is a transformative one that seeks to achieve an appreciation of gender equity and a sensitization to power dynamics at play in a constantly evolving South African society. However, the institution in which the boys found themselves is not evolving, it is a traditional one that essentially aims to maintain old-fashioned or “time honoured” values. The clash between the lessons of masculinity taught by the school as a genderising institution and those lessons taught through the official school history curriculum are contradictory. These contradictory lessons are for example being independent but learning how to be accepted as part of the group and accepting your punishment like a man but confronting those who have caused you an injustice. Official history taught them that you cannot be a caveman with a big stick yet they glorified the association of positive role models like fathers and grandfathers with war. These contradictory lessons all led to the conflicting and ambiguous notions of what it means to be a man. Moreover, the families to which these boys belong are essentially conservative, white upper middle class and in many respects can be viewed as privileged. Like the school, the values that the boys are taught are essentially solidarity and loyalty to one’s own kind over social justice. Hence there is a conflict that exists in the lessons that the official school history curriculum seeks to impart and those learnt through unofficial history sources such as the family and the independent boys’ boarding school as a genderising institution. What is expected in the official school history curriculum is an acute understanding of how issues of race, gender and class impacted and continue to impact on South African society (DoE, 2003) but how can these boys have this understanding when their institution and families have remained relatively unaffected by these issues and their traditional notions of masculinity reflect hegemonic ideals in conflict with the intention of N.C.S – History (DoE, 2003)? The boys’ relative under-performance in the I.E.B N.S.C examinations as explained earlier in the thesis is not the boys’ fault but lies in the transformative gender intentions of official history curricula that clash with the lessons of unofficial history formed in part by the

school institution and their homes as masculine regulating forces. These are some of the reasons why masculinity influences boys' understanding of history the way that it does.

To conclude, the dual forces of official school history and unofficial history and the subsequent clash that comes into being shaped the boys of this study's understanding of both history as well as masculinity. Still carrying their own notions of what it means to be a man acquired through unofficial history some of these history boys came to an understanding that to survive in the 20th and 21st centuries men cannot just be a caveman with a stick. However, some of the history boys continued to legitimize the form of masculinity involving the need for men to dominate despite, or because of, their studying of official history. It can be concluded that the lessons learnt from unofficial history - preconceived notions acquired before or outside the classroom-based history lesson and formed by the boys' relationships with their friends, family and school - are stronger than those intended by the official school curriculum. Furthermore, the official history curriculum is a transformative one that seeks to achieve an appreciation of gender equity and a sensitization to power dynamics at play in a constantly evolving South African society. However, the school in which the boys found themselves is not evolving, it is a traditional one that essentially aims to maintain old-fashioned or "time honoured" values. The clash between the lessons of masculinity taught by the school as a genderising institution and those lessons taught through the official school history curriculum are contradictory. Returning to Connell's (1996) theory of masculinity it soon became apparent that these history boys were as a result, through their common undertaking of studying history in this independent boys' school, in turn forming their own form of hegemonic masculinity that was being positioned, both in these history boys' and other boys' eyes, near the top of the masculine hierarchy. The studying of history therefore, despite its attempt to bring about a gender-just society in South Africa, in the case of this study in an independent boys' school, further legitimised the construction of hegemonic masculine hierarchies that seek to dominate women and other men within schools.

### 6.3 Methodological Reflections

In immersing myself in boy-centred research so as to answer the research questions (see above) I made use of a bounded case study using a purposive sample. Furthermore, I made use of qualitative methods of narrative inquiry and focus group interviews in order to answer, as fully as possible, my first two research questions. The data was coded and analysed using open coding. In addition I drew on the epistemology of the pro-feminist theorists in order to frame my research.

Masculinity formed the conceptual framework for this study. In addition to looking through the lens of masculinity I took a pro-feminist (progressive male) approach to my study. Grounded firmly in sociology pro-feminism occupies the middle ground between the defensiveness of mytho-poetical theorists; anti-feminist masculinity politics and anti-patriarchal radical feminist politics (Imms, 2000). Pro-feminism offers a pluralistic view of masculinity. It is aligned to feminism in its concentration on power and patriarchy and uses feminist theories of the marginalization of not only women but also men on the basis of race, class and sexuality in turn to form theories of masculinity. In keeping with pro-feminism I have endeavoured to give voice to a multiplicity of masculinities.

The image of the mirror forms a central theme in this thesis. I chose to use the script of the play of *The History Boys* as one of the mirrors against which I held up the findings of my study. Some of the more controversial and enticing quotations were used to introduce the chapters of this thesis as I viewed my thesis to be a play within a play. Furthermore, I made use of Lacan's (1949) Mirror Stage model to make sense of the data generated by my research. This further accentuated the central theme of reflections that characterised the findings of this study.

Using the methodologies of a bounded case study, narrative inquiry and focus group interviews, *The History Boys* and Lacan's (1949) Mirror Stage model served as a play within a play and a mirror against which I held up the findings of my study.

The main reason why I chose to make use of Lacan's (1949) Mirror Stage model was that it goes some way in reflecting the concept of masculinity. As stated previously in this final chapter masculinity is fluid. Men and boys can in any one lifetime subscribe to a number of different and varying masculinities. History education serves as a mirror into which the boys of this study peered. Ultimately this case study sought to give voice to boys' experiences in order to investigate the impact of masculinity in their understanding of history.

However, the research process did not at any stage unfold as neatly as I have explained in the preceding paragraphs. Answering the research questions proved much more demanding and troublesome and constant adjustments had to be made. In starting out I battled to narrow my reading down to masculinity and history education. Each of these two concepts came with a large body of knowledge which I found a daunting task in wading through them. As a history teacher of more than 15 years experience I found the latter concept more familiar. Despite having spent most of those 15 years teaching boys, I had not versed myself in the theories and knowledge of masculinity. Despite being a man and having attended a boys' boarding school and having taught in two boys' schools, I felt that I did not have the academic knowledge to undertake a formal study in masculinity. However, as I described in the review of my literature, the reading process was like climbing a tree. I had to climb onto the trunk of existing knowledge and then found my way along the branches in order to reach the tips that takes one closer in both time and specificity to research aligned to one's own study. I had to climb from the branches of masculinity to the branches of history education in order to try and connect masculinity to history. It was no easy climb.

I also battled to decide on a particular research methodology. I knew I wanted to hear the voices of boys but was undecided on how best I could achieve this. I was attracted to narratives as I thought that this best encapsulated my two focus areas – boys and history but would I be undertaking the use of narrative inquiry or life histories? What is the difference between these two methodologies? I wanted the boys to tell their stories but should this be in an oral or written form? What would be less inhibiting for these

boys? I then had doubts whether this methodology alone would yield the thick data that I needed. I therefore decided to also make use of focus group interviews. However, the year was ticking on and soon the subjects of my study would be leaving school. It was difficult to assemble all 9 of the boys who had agreed to participate in this study together in a single sitting after school hours. However, a date was finally agreed on and thankfully all 9 boys arrived.

Once I had recorded the focus group interviews onto DVD I knew that it would take me a lifetime to transcribe these interviews so I commissioned a transcriber/ typist to put the data from oral form into written form. This then allowed me the opportunity to try and interpret this data. However, this too was a daunting task as I had decided to make use of open-coding to analyse both the boys' written narratives as well as the focus group interviews. I did not know where to begin as no one boy's story was the same. I had to try and decide on broad categories which I could use to find commonalities. Slowly these categories emerged and I was able to deconstruct the data and place the information yielded under various category headings. This too was time-consuming.

In addition I knew from the outset of embarking on this study that I wanted to make use of the play *The History Boys* but I did not know how. I was worried by incorporating both the voices of the boys of the play with the voices of the boys of my study that some confusion would be created – not knowing who was speaking. However, I wanted to make reference to the themes that emerged from the play within my study. Furthermore the powerful quotes that I extracted from the play I decided to use as lead-in statements at the start of each chapter. I explained my intention in the first chapter of my thesis and I have felt confident that the quotes have worked to successfully introduce the various components that make up this thesis.

Once I had immersed myself in the readings and had undertaken the data collection and analysing process I did start to gain in confidence. At the same time the previously foreign language of academia started to become strangely familiar. My greatest challenge, however, was time. This thesis took over 4 years to complete and was



largely undertaken during school holidays and on weekends when not doing school-related activities such as marking and extramural activities. I was given no time off from my teaching to undertake the research or writing of this thesis and was given no dispensation or relief from my teaching or administrative responsibilities. Snatches of time had to be found to sit down to write this thesis. Hence this thesis was a long time in the writing. I embarked on my studies in the year of my daughter's birth and she is now 5 years old. In trying to grapple to find the time to complete this thesis I was constantly plagued by feelings of guilt as my family had to do without my attention. However, an overwhelming sense of relief and achievement has come over me of late as I work towards finalising this thesis.

#### **6.4 Personal-Professional Reflections on the Study**

I remain resolute in my belief that there are many ways to be a man. As a history teacher of boys only, I am acutely aware that boys are not all the same and should not be expected to be the same. However, until I embarked on this study into the construction of masculinity and its role in boys' understanding of history I had never formalised this understanding of masculinity and also had little concrete understanding of my teaching practice – whether conscious or not – that are both complicit and confrontational in the formation of gender patterns. Through the undertaking of this study I have immersed myself in the theories of masculinities and history education which has resulted in a much deeper understanding of my teaching practice and the context in which my teaching takes place on a daily basis.

Prior to the undertaking of the research involved in this study I had not considered myself to have been equipped with the skills or know-how required of a researcher. However, by researching various discourses and methodologies; choosing my methodologies and gathering my data I soon found myself in the role of researcher. This has served to ground me firmly within the social sciences and expand my skills base. I undertook this extremely challenging task because I wanted to test myself intellectually. I did not realise that in so doing I would also test myself emotionally. As I began to peel

away at the layers that framed my study I soon became aware that I was peeling away the layers of my various masculine identities too: man; father; son; husband; male history teacher and the gender dynamics that I am faced with as I undertake these various roles daily. This study has therefore afforded me the opportunity to not only look outside of myself to the professional self but also inwardly too.

The undertaking of this study has furthermore broadened my outlook on schools as genderising institutions and the power plays that exist therein. I undertook this thesis to better myself and to widen my professional outlook. I have achieved my aims and I have a much greater macro view of my history teaching; the boys whom I teach; the context of the school in which I teach and myself as a male history teacher. Having undertaken this study I have become aware that at the same time that boys are trying to understand history, they are also negotiating their masculinities within a school hierarchy that exists to exalt certain masculinities over others. However, for there to be a respect for democracy, there needs to be “a wholesale transformation of school environments such that tolerance, respect and democratic decision-making become the norm” (Morrell, 1998, p.221). One way that this transformation can take place is if an environment is created whereby all boys’ voices can be heard. A multiple masculinity approach to the teaching of history can go some way to creating an environment which encourages the articulation of different perspectives - both hegemonic and subversive masculinities - thereby aiding positive identity formulation and a respect for human rights. As a result of this study I will seek on a daily basis to give equal opportunity to all masculinities with which I will come into contact within my history classroom and the boys’ school in which I teach. Furthermore, I aim in my history classroom and staffroom to continue to bring awareness to the discriminatory practices involved in hegemonic masculine practices. After all, this is what was intended in the writing of the N.C.S – History which is “infused with the principles and practices of social justice and human rights as defined by the Constitution of South Africa” (DoE, 2003, p.4). One of these principles is gender equality. Not just between the genders but across the genders too. The findings of this study has implications therefore not just for history teachers but all teachers of boys and all teachers within South Africa who wish to achieve an appreciation of human rights

and respect for social justice.

In addition this study will hopefully also add to the development of the growing scholarship of masculinity studies. To date there has not been any study into the impact of masculinity on history education and this study has hopefully served to close this gap in some way.

## **6.5 Limitations of Study**

The limitations of this study were discussed in detail in chapter 3 and largely focused on my role as an insider researcher. However, it must also be pointed out that whereas there is undoubtedly a gap in the literature on masculinity and the understanding of history which this study sought to fill, this study is at the same time limited in a number of ways. As I made use of a bounded case study using a purposive sample it is difficult to draw generalized conclusions that can in turn be applied to the general world population of boys at large or even to South African boys or to that matter even other boys' schools. The context of this study therefore immediately limits the conclusions drawn. This study was located in a well-resourced, independent boys' school and not a co-educational or state school. It must also be borne in mind that the boys participating in this study were predominantly wealthy, white, English-speaking, Christian boys who attended a particular independent boys' boarding school – Balcomb Academy - for 5 years. Compared to the wider population group of boys of secondary school-going age both within South Africa or even the world, they are not diverse or even representative.

In addition I am reluctant to make any firm recommendations following the identification of the findings of this study. This is in keeping with the qualitative nature of this study which was to understand the phenomenon that came under the lens.

## 6.6 Conclusion

The movie *Fight Club* offers a portrait of men who feel their lives are without meaning. Before a fight, Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) describes the state of manhood to the other men:

We're the middle children of history, man – no purpose or place. We have no Great War ... no Great Depression. Our Great War's a spiritual war. Our Great Depression is our lives. [We've] been raised on television to believe that one day we'd all be millionaires and movie gods and rock stars ... But we won't (Wood, 2009, p.105).

Schools become the site for the “production, negotiation and policing of particular forms of masculinity” (Martino, 2000, p.106). But through an intertwining vine of unofficial history made up of influential role players such as family members and friends, and official school history over both primary and secondary schools, the boys of this study sometimes found themselves to be lacking because they did not measure up to the ideals of the hegemonic masculinity. At other times, through their study of history, these boys were empowered to be able to dominate other boys because of their possession of historical knowledge thus formulating their own hegemonic masculinity as embodied in the history boy. Masculine hierarchies are therefore constructed by institutions, teachers, subjects like history and boys themselves.

The official South African history curriculum is a transformative one that seeks to achieve an appreciation of gender equity and a sensitization to power dynamics at play in a constantly evolving South African society. However, the institution in which the boys found themselves is not evolving. It is a traditional one that essentially aims to maintain old-fashioned or “time honoured” values. These independent school history boys learnt many lessons on what it means to be a man from the independent boys' only boarding school in which they all found themselves as well as through official school history. The institution has taught them contradictory lessons: being independent but learning how to be accepted as part of the group; accepting your punishment like a man but confronting

those who have caused you an injustice. Official history has taught them that you cannot be a caveman with a big stick yet they glorify the association of positive role models like fathers and grandfathers with war. These contradictory lessons all led to the conflicting and ambiguous notions of what it means to be a man and the formulation of the image of the history boy. The ambiguity is further clouded by the clash that exists between the ideal me versus the real me and which is heightened by the pecking order or hierarchy of masculinities that a boy faces within schools as he becomes a man. This in turn led to the creation of the hegemonic masculine form of the history boy that is established towards the top end of the masculinity hierarchy within this South African independent boys' school.

However, for many boys as emerging men, the attainment of a hegemonic form of masculinity is an ideal that they seldom reach. They are sold stories of bravery and of heroes by both influential role models and by the history that they study within their 12 years of formal schooling but their own lives will seldom mirror these heroic stories. By far their greatest journey will be their quiet, private, introspective one in which they develop from boys into men and in so doing make sense of the conflicting images which bombard them of what it means to be a real man. In time they may find, as I have, that masculinity is both ambiguous and fluid.

In conclusion, masculinity influences a boy's understanding of history but, at the same time, a boy's understanding of history influences his understanding of his own masculinity. Each boy's masculinity, like his own unique stories, is his own - shaped by his own experiences - one of which is the studying of history. Moreover, history, above all other subjects constantly forced the boys to stare masculinity in the face. Masculinity is always present. Their study of history therefore both legitimized as well as deconstructed these history boys' notions of what it means to be an emerging man in a South African independent boys' school.

## APPENDIX



3 May 2013

Mr Adam Rogers 922407212  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Protocol reference number: HSS/0225/013M  
Project title: "HIStory: masculinity and history in an independent boys' school."

Dear Mr Rogers

### Expedited approval

I wish to inform you that your application has been granted Full Approval through an expedited review process.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

  
.....  
Professor Steven Collings (Chair)

/px






cc Supervisor Professor Johan Wassermann  
cc Academic leader research Dr MN Davids  
cc School Administrator Ms B Bhengu

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