

**BOYS' NARRATIVES OF VIOLENCE IN A
TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL IN
CHATSWORTH, DURBAN**

BY

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Good teachers are a gift to the world.

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Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of the way a small number of grade 12 boys understand violence and how they describe and locate it in the narratives of their own masculinity. Semi-structured interviews with grade 12 boys attending a Technical School in Chatsworth were conducted and analysed in order to establish how these boys relate to violence in their lives and respond to their experiences of violence at home and in school. The school learner population consists of African, Coloured and Indian learners. The current racial composition of the learner population is as follows: 18 % - African, 8% - Coloured and 74% Indian. The entire staff is Indian and the majority are male.

This study focuses particularly on physical violence at home and in school. The research also examines what the boys say about violence against the girls at the school. The major findings from the boys' narratives of violence at home are that the perpetrators of physical violence at home were the men. The physical violence experienced by the boys at school among peers has racial overtones. The Indian boys are the main perpetrators of violence and use violence to intimidate, threaten and dominate other boys in school. The African and Coloured boys although capable of violence seem to construct their masculinity in non-violent ways. Teachers are complicit in the enactment of physical violence in school. Physical violence against girls in school is non-existent, however girls are verbally harassed and abused.

This study finds that race and ethnicity influences the manner in which masculine identities are constructed in school and that violence is intertwined into the construction of the boys' masculinities. This study will hopefully raise awareness of the importance of including a focus on masculinities in violence intervention strategies.

Declaration of originality

I, Vijay Hamlall declare that this thesis is my own work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Education at the University of Natal. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university. Where use has been made of the works of others, it has been acknowledged and referenced.

Date : 2003-12-01

Signed: 

Chapter One

Introduction

Studies of masculinity in schools are just beginning in South Africa and those that exist identify violence as a major issue. Morrell (1998c) points out that schooling in South Africa is threatened by intolerance and violence. Morrell (1998c) poses the question, "why does violence remain endemic in schools?" (p104). He argues that one of the reasons and possibly the major reason is that constructions of masculinity validate these forms of anti-social and anti-democratic behaviour. Harber (1997) states a key and recurring issue both in gender and race relations is the issue of violence. Research findings by Griggs (1997) on ten schools in Durban indicate that violence is destroying the basic environmental conditions required to provide adequate education.

This mini-dissertation examines violence and masculinity in a Durban school where the author is currently a teacher. Very few school-based studies of masculinity have been done in South Africa and none have been done amongst 'black' youth in a Technical school. The Gender Equity Task Team (GETT) that was established in 1997 by the Education Ministry to study the gender state of education in South Africa also drew attention to the very limited research into gender and schooling in South Africa (GETT, 1997). This modest research project examines the relationship of masculinity to violence in the setting of a single school and in this way begins to fill the existing research lacunae.

The research site of this study is a Technical school in the Indian suburb of Chatsworth. In this thesis I will use the pseudonym *Moorlands Technical for the actual name of the school and will indicate this by inserting an * against the school's name. The school reflects educational change resulting from national political processes initiated in the early 1990s. Education legislation passed since 1994 has created the policy framework for a full racial integration of public schools. This has resulted in African and Coloured learners being admitted to this school. The current racial composition of the learner population is as follows: 18 % - African, 8% - Coloured and 74% Indian. The history of apartheid has resulted in social distance between race groups and although policy aims to redress past imbalances, assimilation between race groups at *Moorlands has not been automatic among the learners.

Motivation for the research

When I enrolled to study for a M.Ed degree at the University of Natal in 2002, I had a vague understanding of gender and no knowledge of masculinities. When I began interacting with the gender literature and theories of masculinities, I acquired a better understanding of the issues surrounding masculinity and violence and was intrigued at how relevant the literature was to my school and schooling in general. I began to take an interest in theories of masculinity and violence (Connell, 1995; Fitzclarence, 1995; Gilbert, 1998; Lingard and Douglas, 1999; Kenway, 1995; Morrell, 1998). With greater knowledge about the connections between gender violence and masculinities, I became more alert to the fact that masculinities play an integral part in the explanation of violence.

I have become very conscious of learners' behaviour, especially that of the boys at my school, and in this thesis have tried to understand this behaviour by referring to the literature on masculinities.

There is growing local perception that violence is escalating in Chatsworth schools as depicted in the following newspaper report:

Schools Battle Thugs : It's a war Zone, Says Principals

There are pupils bent on hijacking the school operation and because of the lack of capacity to deal with such occurrences they are getting away with it said Nundlall Rabibal, principal of Chatsworth Secondary School.

Since the beginning of the year there were 25 requests for pupils' expulsions, the ultimate penalty. Many were at the former Indian administered schools – mainly in Chatsworth (The Daily News, July 25, 2003).

The aim of this study in the first instance is to investigate how boys at a Technical school understand violence and locate it within their own narratives. This exercise will hopefully raise awareness of the importance of including a focus on masculinities in intervention strategies.

This thesis is an analysis of the way a small number of grade 12 boys understand violence and how they describe and locate it in the narratives of their own masculinity. Semi-structured interviews with grade 12 boys attending a Technical School in Chatsworth were conducted and analyzed in order to establish how these boys relate to violence in their lives and respond to their experiences of violence at home and in school.

Men's involvement in violence is an issue of masculinity (Connell, 1995). This research focuses on understanding how the enactment of violence relates to different versions of masculinity and how boys experience themselves in violent settings. I will examine the boys' reaction to violence and the strategies they use in order to survive. This study will examine the constructs of masculinity based on what boys see, say and think in their experiences of violence in the school and at home.

The study examines the views of five boys: two African, two Indian and one Coloured who are in grade 12. Their ages range between 17 to 20. The methodology is qualitative and semi-structured interviews were used. The boys were chosen randomly, all of whom, are in grade 12 at *Moorlands Technical in the year 2003.

Violence in schools is regarded as a major problem and its gender component is recognized (GETT, 1997). In this report violence, sexual harassment and aggressive forms of masculinity were highlighted as being significant areas of concern. The causes of violence, the experiences of violence and narratives of violence, are all aspects of school violence which are being debated and researched. In this study, I focus among other things on the sites of violence. Here two are important – home and school. The literature on violence at school and at home will be reviewed in the next chapter, suffice to say that race and class are key variables in the production of violent

behaviour. Race and class are significant in determining socio-economic conditions in South Africa (Morrell, 1998b). Morrell (2001) further illustrates that some men are more at risk of being involved in violence as perpetrators and victims than others. The role of race, class and socio-economic factors and their relation to violence will be investigated here as well.

This study examines how boys interpret violence in their own lives. The intention of this study is to get beyond the dichotomy of victim and perpetrator (Morrell, 2001). Everybody has violence within them, everybody has capacity for violence and has probably been violent to other people at some time in their lives. This study allows an examination of how boys themselves understand and explain violent behaviour. The literature in the USA, Australia and UK (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Skelton, 2001; Sewell, 1997; Martino, 2000; Frosh et.al, 2002; Reay, 2002) which focuses on boy-specific research that examines the intricacies of the methods boys use to construct gender identities has been helpful in providing insight that is relevant to this study.

Although the main focus of this study revolves around boys' experiences of violence, towards the end of this thesis, I will examine what the boys that were interviewed say about violence against the girls at school.

In the next section I introduce the school as a research site. I discuss the social context of the school and explore political, socio-economic and demographic factors that inform relationships within the school.

The Social Context in Chatsworth

Chatsworth lies 26 km to the south of Durban and covers 2000 hectares. Chatsworth came into being as a result of the Group Areas Act No. 41 which was passed in 1950 in order to implement the policy of racial segregation. This act replaced a large number of Indian and Coloured, neighbourhoods with a smaller number of larger townships. Chatsworth was established along these lines, to accommodate for the forced removal of masses of Indian people in the lower and middle-income groups living in Durban. Tens of thousands of Indians were forced to give up their lives in the areas they had called home and were packed off to the outer reaches of Durban (Desai, 2000). Up to 1980, 22000 houses had been built in Chatsworth, designed to accommodate 160 000 people (Durban South Central Council Report A, 1999). According to the 1996 Census, Chatsworth had a population of 177 165 people. However Deasia(2000) argues that Chatsworth currently houses about three hundred thousand people. Before, they were all Indian, now less so. With the abolishment of The Group Areas Act in 1991, an increasing number of African and Coloured people have moved into Chatsworth. Most of these people are concentrated in informal settlements that have mushroomed in vacant and unused spaces in Chatsworth. There has been a mass influx of people into Chatsworth in recent years and this has resulted in Chatsworth having an ethnically diverse population. However, this has also resulted in severe overcrowding in the area.

Chatsworth started off as a low- income area and although people in some areas have become more economically affluent, it remains a working class society with working class ethics. Many of the homeowners have built granny flats on their already small

properties and sub-let them to supplement income. This not only reduces living space, but also adds to the overcrowding and social ills in Chatsworth.

Chatsworth is plagued by social distress. The unemployment rate in Chatsworth is over 50%. Historically a large number of men and women in Chatsworth found work in clothing and textiles industries. As these industries started to shed labour, it was the men who went first. Many men became reliant on their wives' wages (Desai, 2000). Desai (2000) shows that many families are suffering severe marital discord. Many women have opted to be single mothers, often ostracized by the family and the community, rather than put up with the abuse and exploitation of their male partners. According to Desai (2000) many women in Chatsworth, suffer sexual violence quite regularly, either from fathers, elder siblings, lovers or rivals. Feeding into this destitution is the reduction of Child Support Grants, which adds to the hardships of unemployed single mothers. Single parent families are common in Chatsworth. The crime rate has also grown to alarming proportions. The economic and social distress of the youth, draws them into gangsterism. According to Huff (1992) needy youth, are at greatest risk of gang involvement. It is difficult to convince the youth that there are options beyond unemployment. As a result alcohol and drug abuse has escalated to alarming proportions. Shebeens have subsequently become lucrative sources of income and are frequented by boys and men where violent masculinities are often enacted. Violence in this community has become normalized as many of the people are desensitized to violence and often use violence to settle disputes.

Bhana's (2002) study of gender in early schooling, has found that social and economic dislocation, encourages violent patterns of behaviour in schools. Bhana (2002) drew on four schools in the Durban Metropolitan Region in KwaZulu-Natal to conduct her research. The choice of schools reflected the race and class dimensions of schooling. Bhana (2002) reveals that a shift to violence occurs against the backdrop of major structural inequalities and the legacy of apartheid that fuels violent gender relations.

The type of curriculum offered at *Moorlands attracts a particular type of boy to this school. The general perception in this community is that boys who cannot fit into other schools, boys who have academic and behavioural problems, should attend *Moorlands. Boys who fit this description are generally from the lower income groups and from the African population of Chatsworth who reside in the informal settlements.

School Context - *Moorlands

I have chosen *Moorlands Technical, which is situated in Chatsworth, as a research site because I have been teaching at this school for the past 11 years as a level one educator. I teach Mathematics and Computer Science to learners in grades 10, 11 and 12. This school was established in 1969 and offered a purely academic curriculum. With the political transition in 1994, there was an increased emphasis on technical and vocational training to be offered to all learners of all races. Skills training was regarded as important to prepare learners for the world of work and self-employment. Since Chatsworth did not have a technical school, *Moorlands was chosen in 1995 to be transformed to a technical school. The learner population consists of Indians,

Coloureds and Blacks. There are no White learners or educators at this school since all the learners enroll from in and around Chatsworth, which includes Kwa-Mashu, Lamontville, Weldbedacht and Marianridge. There are 1001 boys and 237 girls of whom 218 are Black (152 boys;66 girls) 97 Coloured (65 boys;32 girls) and 923 Indians (784 boys;139 girls). Most of the educators are also male. The staff consists of 52 educators, all Indian, of which 38 are male including the principal. While women dominate the teaching fraternity in KwaZulu Natal men dominate the teaching of technical subjects at *Moorlands. The anomaly exists because the nature of the curriculum offered at *Moorlands involves design and technology. Research conducted by Paechter and Head (1993) on design and technology in five secondary schools in London reveals that these subjects have an association with physical skills and the body and are still under the influence of deeply gendered histories as being masculine subjects (Paechter, 1998).

Paechter and Head (1996) further illustrate that technical subjects have become increasingly masculine in orientation, and attract a large number of boys. This view can be used to explain the high proportion of male learners at this school, since all the courses involve a specific technical subject. Science and Technology has traditionally been an area of boys' strength (Head, 1999). "It has long been established that certain subjects are regarded as girl's subjects and other subjects as boy's subjects" (Younger and Warrington, 1996, 309) which is indicated at *Moorlands by the large number of boys aligning to the trade subjects. The trade subjects range from Electronics, Welding, Fitting and Turning, Motor Body Repairs, Motor Mechanics and Refrigeration. Hair Care and Hotel Keeping, are constructed as girls' careers and no boys do these courses. According to the admissions register of 2003 there are 22 girls taking the trade courses of which 20 girls are doing Technika Electronics and one girl is doing Electronics.

Current Measures to Deal with Violence at *Moorlands

Violence and crime is one of the most serious problems that have plagued this school in recent years. An enormous amount of time and energy is spent on addressing issues of violence at *Moorlands.

In this school present efforts to tackle violence depend heavily on policing and the sanctions imposed on perpetrators. Learners are compelled to carry ID and demerit cards. Learners are often searched without notice or warning. Learners who do not comply with school times and leave regulations are locked out. The school is fully walled, since fences that were erected were constantly destroyed by vandals and by learners looking for alternate routes in and out of the school during school hours. There are security gates and a very heavy presence of security guards. According to Fitzclarence (1995, 26) in many obvious and subtle ways, schools model, permit and shape violent attitudes and behaviours.

Benedek (in Fitzclarence, 1995) explains the approach of some schools to violence by noting that learners are seen as defiant. The problem child is seen as the wild creature in need of taming in order to produce a functional citizen rather than searching for a better understanding of the general social factors involved in violent behaviour. This

approach sees social violence as a lack of adequate social control and discipline and gears policy development to micro level control measures.

*Moorlands Technical adopts a similar approach to offenders. Defiant, disruptive or violent behaviour is dealt with by suspending the learner, normally for one week. There are no structures in school for guidance, counselling or pastoral care. Many educators in this school have surrendered to believing that the situation is hopeless.

The Education Department has policies in place to protect learners and educators like the South African Schools Act No.27 of 1996 which states that every governing body must adopt a code of conduct for learners and outlines procedures for suspension and expulsion (Department of Education, 1996). *Moorlands has a very well constructed code of conduct that is followed strictly to maintain order at the school.

However, policies alone cannot solve the problem of violence in schools. Without understanding masculinities, little headway can be made in this area. The current measures to deal with violence lack focus on masculinities and those that do, see boys as potential criminals. Violent behaviour is handled by imposing heavy sanctions on the perpetrators ignoring the role of emotions in the lives of adolescents. Therefore these policies fail to combat violence in schools and in fact become complicit in producing violence.

I have endeavoured in this introductory chapter, to explain the focus of this study. I have also attempted to describe the setting in which this research is conducted and clarify the purpose and motivation of this study.

Chapter 2 is the literature review. This chapter reviews the global and local literature on masculinity and violence, which will include constructions of masculinity, gender power and how race, class and socio-economic conditions relate to violent behaviour of boys and men.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology that I have used to conduct the research. My investigation of violence and masculinities is qualitative. This chapter will describe how the research was operationalized by giving an account of the fieldwork.

In Chapter 4 the findings reached during the research process are discussed and the results emanating from the responses to the interviews are analysed. This chapter looks at the way in which boys' narrate violence, their's and others. It will examine how race, class and location impact on the way in which boys understand this violence but will also give an insight into how boys avoid or engage with violent school cultures.

Chapter 5 is the conclusion that revisits and synthesises the key issues of this study.

Chapter Two ✓

Literature Review

This chapter reviews a well-developed international literature on gender, masculinity, violence and schooling. Particular attention will be given to boy centred research and to work that specifically has analysed narratives. Particular attention will also be paid to the literature that looks at the construction of boys as active subjects in the production of their masculine identities. In this chapter, the theoretical framework through which masculinities can be explored is highlighted. I will attempt to develop a framework, which will allow a distinction between different expressions of masculinity and the relationship of violence to the constructions of gender identities. I will review the literature in the following way :

- A general overview of masculinity and violence.
- The construction of narratives of masculinity among school boys.
- Key factors of narratives of masculinity.
- How do boys develop narratives of masculinity that are alternative to those that stress violence, power and control?
- Boys' relationship with fathers.
- School circumstances that give rise to violent masculinities.
- The relevance of class and race/ethnicity in the construction of masculinities.

Masculinity and Violence

As a variety of authors have shown, we can make sense of masculinity in school by distinguishing different categories or configurations of masculinity. These masculinities are all positioned in relation to one another as well as in relation to other actors in the school (eg. teachers and female learners). Different masculinities express power relations and these power relations can in turn refer to a willingness to use violence to assert the self. While the evidential basis of this study does not permit any categorical statement about different masculinities in the school, the work by gender theorists outlined below, will allow me to be sensitive to the existence of different ways of talking about masculinity which schoolboys use.

Connell (1995) offers four categories of masculinities (dominant or hegemonic, complicit, submissive or subordinate and oppositional or protest). The concept hegemonic masculinity is now widely used in discussions of masculinity and refers to those dominant and dominating forms of masculinity which claim the highest status and exercise the greatest influence and authority. Hegemonic masculinity makes its claims and asserts its authority through many cultural and institutional practices – particularly the global image media and the state, and although it does not necessarily

involve physical violence, it is often underwritten by the threat of such violence (Kenway and Fitzclarence, 1997). Hegemonic masculinity is associated with heterosexuality, toughness, power and competitiveness and the subordination of gay men (Connell, 1995). The interviews conducted by Frosh et.al. (2002) with 11-14 year old boys in a London school, on features that boys identify as making for popularity reveal striking similarity to those identified by Connell(1995) and other researchers as features of hegemonic masculinity.

Subordinate masculinity stands in direct opposition to hegemonic masculinity and is both repressed and oppressed by it. As Connell (1995) says, it is 'expelled from the circle' of masculine legitimacy. Gay masculinities feature in this category. Any major attachment to 'the feminine' is likely to propel its owner into this category and to subject him to various forms of violence. Epstein (1997) found in interviews with gay men about their experiences and identities at school that, homophobia was expressed towards non-macho boys and that these boys were termed, 'woosie' and 'girl'. Willis's (1977) study of white working class boys (the 'lads') also found that the boys placed strong emphasis on heterosexual sex and behaviour that challenged this orientation was seen as 'sissy' behaviour.

Hegemonic masculinity is the standard bearer of what it means to be a 'real' man or boy and many males draw inspiration from its cultural library of resources. Nonetheless, few men can live up to its rigorous standards. Many may try and many may not, but either way, according to Connell (1995) they benefit from the patriarchal dividend. "The advantaged men in general gain from the overall subordination of women and ... without the tensions of being the front line troops of patriarchy" (p79). In this sense Connell says that, in the politics of gender they are complicit with hegemonic forms of masculinity even if they fail to live up to and do not draw moral inspiration from its imperatives.

There is a growing literature on 'black masculinity' in the United States and Britain. What this literature has in common is the way it locates this form of masculinity as oppositional. This masculinity was forged as part of the process of adolescent psychosexual development in a context of survivalist peer group culture. It is an inversion of the dominant white adult masculinities (Morrell, 1998b). I will discuss masculinities in respect of race and class, in more detail, later on in this review.

In order to analyse the boys' experience of violence in this study it is important to consider possible definitions and explanations of violence. It is more important to appreciate the changing definitions of violence through time and place. Violence can mean many different things to different people. According to Hearn (1998) the term 'violence' can be used precisely or vaguely. It can refer to or involve many different kinds of social relations. Violence is sometimes used to include or exclude, 'abuse'. Violence can be taken to mean 'physical violence' or only certain forms of 'physical violence'.

The definition of violence is contested (Hearn, 1998). What is meant by violence and whether there is a notion of violence at all, is historically, socially and culturally constructed. While there is no concrete definition of violence, Newman (in Fitzclarence,1995) notes that violence is behaviour which leads to physical injury or damage. The New Zealand Special Education Service (1994) defines violence as "a

set of behaviours that attempt to control the behaviour of others by fear, force, intimidation and manipulation. It always involves the abuse of power in unequal relationships” (Galbraith, 1998, 6). According to Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997) violence occurs along a continuum and involves physical, sexual, verbal and emotional abuse of power at individual, group and social structural levels. School violence can occur in a number of forms: student against student, teacher against student, student against teacher and against oneself (Curio and First, 1993). Sexual violence includes, verbal degradation, fondling, subject to aggressive sexual advances, sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape (Gender-Aids,2001). These explanations of violence are important as they will help to make sense of how the boys themselves understand violence and how they place these understandings into their narratives of violence. I will compare and contrast these definitions and understandings of violence against those advanced by the boys that I have interviewed.

In my interviews, I approached the concept of violence with an open mind. My prime concern is to see in what ways the boys’ understanding of violence in the specific context of this school reflect the contested nature of the definition of violence. The understandings of violence are very context-specific and even though there are attempts to produce universal definitions of violence, these often do not translate easily into specific contexts. In the context of this study, violence was mostly understood to be physical. It is, however, important to listen to those involved in these situations rather than imposing outsider views of violence.

Narratives of masculinity among school boys How are they constructed?

Recent studies have stressed both collective and individual constructions of narratives of masculinities. In Mac an Ghaill’s (1994) study of the ‘macho lads’ we see a collective construction of the boys’ narratives. The ‘macho lads’ are counter-posed to a number of other groups: the academic achievers; groups of girls who have a characteristically critical take on masculine identities; a gay group with striking insights into the sexual dynamics of the school; middle class grouping of ‘real Englishmen’. The narratives are not seen in isolation but always in relation to each other, where the boys’ accounts are collectively constructed. The collective narratives being constructed here resonates with Epstein and Johnson’s (1998) research on sexualities in school where the stories of individuals are used to acquire a collective significance.

Reay’s (2002) work, uses an individual approach to the construction of narratives of masculinity. It tells the story of a hard working, well-behaved, poor, white, working class boy trying to maintain his standing within the male peer group culture. The research focuses on one boy’s narratives of masculinity and compares this to dominant white working class masculinities. Connell’s (2000) case study of a champion sportsman and his exploration of departures from hegemonic masculinity through episodes in the lives of two men in Australia, also focus on individual narratives in the construction of masculinities. These studies have helped shape the methodology and analysis of this study.

Frosh et. al. (2002) point out that research on boys as active subjects involves making masculinities plural and understanding and addressing them as relational identities which boys construct and inhabit. While such research aims to be interpretive and empathic in order to understand what it is like to be a young man from the point of view of boys themselves, it is critical of the ways particular masculinities come to be constructed as if they were pre-given identities with essential attributes inhering in them. The narratives of masculinities constructed by Frosh et. al. (2002) draws on accounts of 11-14 year old boys. Their research project investigates the ways these boys conceptualise and articulate their experiences of themselves, their peers and the adult world. It represents boys thinking on their own emergent masculine identities. According to Skelton (1998) post-structuralism allows for a more complex understanding of how identities are constructed by taking the notion of difference as a starting point. One of the concepts associated with post-structuralism is that of 'discourse' and how people are positioned and position others 'discursively'. The idea here is that patterns of language (discourse) allow a variety of ways of placing (positioning) a person. Post-structuralist arguments demonstrate that gender identity is not fixed but changes across sites, time, culture and so forth. Where post-structuralism is useful then, is that the notion of discursive positioning allows for an explanation of the differences between groups and individuals in specific situations. It also permits considerations of variables such as ethnicity and social class identity.

Frosh et. al. (2002) further argue that carrying out boy centred research, therefore does not imply uncritical acceptance of boys' versions of themselves, rather it builds on the idea of masculinities as something achieved – a practice or practices, a set of 'performative acts', or an activity of doing gender. Masculinities have become contextualised as specific plural identities which intersect with class, ethnicity and sexuality and which are taken up and performed in particular ways in locations such as school or on the streets. Boys' accounts and ethnographic descriptions of these activities give access to this performance, but still require interpretation. Thus while the research carried out by Frosh et. al. (2002) addresses masculinities as everyday practices in which boys are engaged, it recognises also that their actions are constrained by the discursive position available to them. This distinction can helpfully be applied to the narratives produced by the boys in my own study.

Key Factors in the Narratives of Masculinity

Misogynism

Frosh et. al. (2002) examine how 11-14 year old boys in London schools speak about girls and how this reflects on the different kinds of masculinities they produce. The boys took up traditional positions in talking about girls in relation to sport, looks, humour and academic achievement. They forged versions of themselves as knowing and mature, in relation to physically uncoordinated, hysterical and childish girls. They went on to contrast girls as being obsessed with their looks in a way which made them fragile and pathetic. Girls were constructed as lacking a sense of humour in ways which made them weak and easily buffeted by boys' humour. Humour is central in the lives of boys, and they perform gender by being funny. In their study Frosh et. al., (2002) found that the boys often ridiculed girls and related it to "just joking". They often said, "Girls aren't funny". Messing around and having a laugh were frequently mentioned when boys were asked to say what they or boys in general like

doing and humour was often presented as a capacity lacking in girls. Girls were seen as being more committed to schoolwork. Girls were denigrated for being overly committed to the school's work ethic. Not being supposed to fight girls was clearly significant in the way the boys positioned themselves in relation to girls. In the interviews the boys spoke about boys who hit girls as "wimpish". Interviews conducted by Mills (2001) on secondary school boys in Australia reveal similar findings. Boys seldom regard the use of physical violence by boys against girls as a legitimate act. Mills (2001) states, "Numerous boys I have interviewed argue that it is wrong to hit girls." (p39). This is an important revelation as it serves to inform my study of the boys' narratives of violent behaviour towards the girls.

The above studies are developed in a well-resourced context. In South Africa with a different history, divergent cultures and varying levels of society, the same may not hold. A report from the Human Rights Watch (2000) states that for many South African girls, violence and abuse are an inevitable part of the school environment. South African girls continue to be raped, sexually abused, harassed, and assaulted at school by male classmates and teachers. My study will indicate that the school under study is not a gender sensitive school. Misogynism exists to a large extent although there is no explicit violence against girls.

Violence

A lot of research has focussed on masculinity and violence in schools. I will focus on a few cases that highlight physical violence as a key element in the construction of masculinity in local and international contexts. Mills (2001) found in interviews with grade 12 boys in Mountainview High in Australia that violence among boys was seen as normal behaviour. The views of the boys on violence in their lives could be summed up in this response from one respondent, "I mean boys will be boys, that sort of thing. But its just something they do. I mean it happens and its that tradition thing again" (p.43). Mills (2001) maintains that violence is often employed to maintain the existing gender order. In another school, Mills found that the boys were very clear about which boys are most at risk of violence from their peers. It is those that do not meet the bodily expectations of masculinity and those that transgress its dictates. A boy who is not prepared to engage in acts of physical violence in order to stand up for himself is a popular target for abuse and violence in the school.

Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997) looked at self-narratives of boys in Australian schools to investigate the extent of violence in schools and its relation to masculinity. Of particular interest is the following narrative from one of the research schools: "I have been harassed at eleven schools now. At every school I have been to I have been a ten-pound weakling. I get harassed guaranteed almost every morning. They just feel like throwing rocks at me, pushing me around, shoving me, throwing me into walls" (p130). Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997) point out that this narrative makes clear that stories of violence demonstrate the way that power relations are manifested in the construction of masculine identities. Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997) further state that the story lines represented in many of the boys' self-narrations contain similar perceptions. 'Big is best' and 'take control by force and fear' are themes that apply throughout the study.

Bhana (2002) in her ethnographic study of gender in early schooling in four schools in the Durban Metropolitan Region in KwaZulu-Natal uses stories as one of the methods to investigate how masculinities are constructed. She found that many of the boys resorted to defining and asserting their masculinity through practices of misogyny, heterosexuality and performing and demonstrating their strength through collision with each other. Bodily strength and physical force was salient in the boys' narratives. Violence was not only used as a means to maintain control but also the mere threat of violence was sometimes sufficient to ensure compliance. These findings are salient to my research project in that violence is used by most of the boys to affirm certain constructions of masculinity.

There is a danger that research of masculinities becomes so pre-occupied with the way boys aggressively and competitively assert themselves that it fails to acknowledge the possibilities of less polarised and more 'transgressive' masculine identities. In the next section I explore some of the ways that boys develop alternative masculinities that are not necessarily subordinate.

How do boys develop narratives that are alternative to those that stress violence, power and control?

While it is important that research draws attention to the oppressive ways masculinities are constructed, it also needs to be attentive to the ways, contexts and times in which boys inhabit alternative (not necessary subordinate) masculinities. For example research such as that by Walker and Kushner (1997) suggests that boys who inhabit softer masculinities are less misogynistic and more likely to express anxieties connected with health, work and relationships. Walker and Kushner (in Frosh 2002) argue that the effect of having a girlfriend was to undermine boys' investments in competitive masculinities.

Frosh et. al. (2002) found that one strategy used by boys to resist the notion of hegemonic masculinities was to claim to be above it. Boys did this in a number of ways: they asserted their authenticity (in contradistinction from acting) claimed a particular skill, made claims to maturity or to being egalitarian or enforcing justice. One boy in particular gave accounts of identifying with girls and constructed himself as different from and better than boys in general. Sewell's (1997) study of black boys in London refer to strategies used by boys who disparage others' obsessive interest in sport and similar signifiers of hegemonic masculinity because they believe it is a fool's option leading nowhere. These findings resonate with the research of Edley and Wetherell (1997). They report how non-rugby playing boys, challenge the domination of rugby players at a private single-sex school by portraying them as "unthinking conformists, incapable, or even scared perhaps of doing their own thing"(p211).

These studies are helpful in analysing how violence-avoiding boys in my own study makes sense of violence and construct their masculine identities.

Boys' relationship with their fathers

In my study, the main perpetrators of violence in the home are the fathers. This violence occurred mainly in the form of physical punishment of the boys. I am aware that contextual factors influence the relationship that boys have with their fathers, however the literature reviewed below is helpful in providing insight into boys' thinking on their own relationships with their fathers in my study.

Tolson (in Heward, 1996) argues that a boy's identification with his father is the basis of his future experience. Father's legislate and 'punish' yet their masculine presence is realized in their absence from home while at work. For a son, masculinity is a promise of the world of work and power. The ambivalence and relation which characterise father-son relations are rooted in the vast range of complexities of power, emotion and sexuality nexus with families.

According to Bly (in Frosh, 2002) the literature on boys' experiences with their parents, lays particular emphasis on the significance on the link (or lack of it) with fathers. The father offers clear structures of role and identity as boys move into adulthood. The boys that were interviewed by Frosh et. al. (2002) reveal the following findings: Many boys see the relationship with their fathers as fun – rude jokes, play-fighting, mucking about, silly noises. Other boys said that it made no difference whether the father was there or not. Some boys describe the father as a bully, controlling and belligerent. However, only a few boys saw the father's role as punisher. One boy said, " He's a big man and he recons you're never gonna hurt him" (p251).

Heward (1996) states, while fathers are the first role model for their sons' masculinities and take an active part in shaping their sons' construction of masculinities, outcomes are problematic, negotiated and contested. However, mothers are still peripheral to the process of constructing masculinities in families. In my study, whether relationships with fathers matter more than those with mothers is not clearly evident, however I found that fathers play a significant role in shaping masculine identities, especially in the manner in which they administer punishment.

School circumstances that give rise to violent masculinities

If schools avoid and discourage empathetic, compassionate, nurturant and affiliate behaviours and emotional responsibility and instead favour heavy handed discipline and control then they are complicit in the production of violence. To ignore the emotional world of schooling and of students is to contribute to the repressions which recycle and legitimate violence (Kenway and Fitzclarence, 1997).

Devine (1996) suggests that the separation of responsibility by teachers to discipline learners creates and fosters a culture of violence in the school. This distancing of teachers from the student means teachers are denied the opportunity of communicating firmly but consistently what is not acceptable in terms of behaviour and challenging adolescent beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. In South Africa teachers have been excluded to a large extent from the discipline arena, which is now the preserve of policy like the code of conduct, governing bodies, hearings and tribunals. Where there is no personal relationship between teachers and learners issues of

discipline are likely to be handled insensitively or mechanistically. Teachers are compliant to policy and procedure in handling violent situations and the opportunity for holistic approach to combating violence in school is lost. There is evidence in the literature to suggest that aggressive forms of discipline in schools are related to the development of particular 'tough' forms of masculinity (Connell, 1989; Mac an Ghaill, 1984).

In my study the research site is a technical school. The perception of the general community is that this school focuses on skills training and not academic excellence. As a result, most of the boys that attend this school do not place emphasis on achieving high educational standards.

Frosh et.al. (2002) interviewed boys from working class and middle class who attended both state and private schools. Boys in their study who attended schools with high educational standards (mostly from private schools) expressed more concern about their schoolwork load. They tended to stereotype state schools and particularly boys who attended them as rough, violent and tough. This does not mean that they saw themselves as soft and not properly 'masculine' but they considered themselves to be less violent and more intelligent. These findings can helpfully be applied to the study of masculinities at *Moorlands Technical.

In contemporary society, the construction of gender identities involves a narrowing of choices which takes place in the context of other overlapping layers of identity construction, most notably and obviously those of class and, especially race (Frosh, 2002). Race and class are central to the process of generating masculinities. In the next section I review literature that examines how gender intersects with class and race in the formation of masculinities.

The relevance of race/ethnicity and class in the construction of masculinity

There are clear relations between race and social class and the construction of masculine identities (Connell, 1995; Skelton, 2001; Pattman, Frosh and Phoenix, 1998). In this review I will explore the role of race and class in inscribing masculine ideals and attitudes. According to Morrell (1998a) race in the metropolis is not the same as race in South Africa. Morrell further argues that while there are obvious similarities between the experiences of black people and the development of racism in say, the USA and countries like South Africa where rule has been exercised by white settlers, there are equally significant differences. The most obvious is that indigenous social institutions continue to exert a residual influence (Morrell, 1998b).

Recent British school-based ethnographies on boys, for example those of Mac an Ghaill (1994) and Sewell (1997) have examined how gender intersects with class, race and sexuality in the formation of masculinities. Both illustrate how these masculinities are structured as relations of power and how they are mediated by sexualised constructions of masculinity. The literature, however, is based on research in the UK and does not readily fit into the South African setting but does serve to inform our understanding of how class and race are implicated in the construction of masculine identities.

We cannot generalise findings from research in other countries and assume that it will be relevant to the South African context as cautioned by Morrell (1998a) above, however the research reviewed below does serve to inform my own study since there are parallels between the construction of masculinity by the black boys in Sewell's (1997) study and the African boys in my study.

Addressing black masculinities as a collective response to a racist culture
Sewell(1997) explored how black boys in London survive modern schooling. He found that many of these boys located themselves in a 'phallogocentric framework', positioning themselves as superior to white and Asian students in terms of their sexual attractiveness, style, creativity and hardness. They referred to white boys as 'pussies' (female) and 'batty men' (homosexuals) and, in illustrating this, spoke of White boys' fears about doing 'daring' or 'up front' scams. The black boys developed a type of hyper-masculinity with emphasis on appearance, style and gesture.

Connolly (1998) in a study of white working class adolescents boys in London, found that whereas white and black boys fought and had cussing matches in public places, they would 'swoop' on Asian boys, hitting them and calling them names. The style of such confrontations prevented the Asian boys from effectively defending themselves and therefore "proving" themselves as competent fighters (p126). The violent behaviour of the white boys towards the Asian boys in this study is similar to the violent behaviour of the Indian boys towards the African boys in my own study. This will help me to analyse some of the violent incidents that the boys in my study have narrated as they include incidents of boys swooping violently on other boys without allowing them to defend themselves.

A lot of research has been done on the working class men in UK and America to identify links between violence and masculinity. Canaan (1996) found in her research of working class men in UK that drinking and then fighting were centrally important to the construction of masculinity. She found that alcohol played a central role in the manner in which these men constructed their identities. Alcohol and violence was used as a means to assert hardness. Vahed (forthcoming) reveals similar behaviour in his study of indentured Indian males in colonial Natal.

The study of Indian masculinities has been very limited both internationally and in South Africa. While Morrell (1998b) refers to the indigenous masculinity of African men in South Africa as African masculinity, Vahed (2004 forthcoming) refers to the masculinity of Indian migrants as indentured masculinity. Denied entry into the settler society, Indian immigrants developed a form of indentured masculinity, which reflect the conditions under which they lived and worked. Hard physical labour, constant threat of physical beatings, isolation, inadequate housing, abuse and extortion had major implications for the ways in which 'being a man' was understood and legitimated. Vahed maintains that palliatives like alcohol, Indian hemp (dagga) and gambling were key features of indentured masculinity. Drunkenness often resulted in violence. Violence was a feature of indenture in the workplace and in leisure time pursuits. For many the family was another arena of violence, with gross exploitation of women by men.

Contact between African and Indian men created tension and distrust in the early decades of the twentieth century. The colonial state employed Africans for example to

track down Indian deserters, while individual white employers often used Africans to carry out beatings on Indians. The structure of domination on plantations was racialized as it pitted Africans against Indians, creating undercurrent racial tensions which manifested on several occasions during the twentieth century (Vahed, 2004 forthcoming). How much of the ideas developed from historically and culturally mediated codes are carried into contemporary emerging masculinities is impossible to predict but race and ethnicity is embroiled and invested in ways in which masculinities are experienced.

According to Frosh et. al. (2002) ethnicity and racialized difference are powerfully intertwined with emerging masculinities, not because of pre-existing and immutable differences between cultures but because constructions of cultural diversity are crucial elements in social contexts out of which masculinities emerge.

The divided history of South Africa has left the region with a highly complex mix of gender regimes and identities. Race, class, geographical location and many other factors are constitutive of gender identities and affect the gender regimes which exist in the institution and milieu of this country. These have to be central in any gender analysis and are helpful in showing how misleading masculine essentialism is.

The literature reviewed in this chapter provides background against which the findings of this research will be analysed. It has helped in our understanding that there might be varying types of masculinities and alternative ways of 'doing boy'. The role of teachers and fathers in shaping masculinity and how violence is intertwined into the construction of the boys' masculinities was reviewed. This review describes the ways in which race and ethnicity pervade the constructions of masculinity. The theoretical frame in much of this chapter is cast in boy centred research and particularly in constructions of narratives. These are useful in the analysing and making sense of the boys' narratives. In the next chapter I will discuss the methodology used to gather the data and analyse the findings.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

This chapter will describe the approach that I used to gather and analyse the data that I present in the next chapter.

A case study of boys and masculinity in a technical secondary school

This thesis is a small-scale case study that investigates how boys describe and locate violence in their own narratives of masculinity within the context of a technical school located in Chatsworth. My reason for choosing this particular school is that I have been teaching at this school for several years and I am aware that there are high levels of violence at this school. The majority of the learner population are boys who are the main perpetrators of defiant, disruptive and violent behaviour. The school deals with this type of behaviour by policing and imposing sanctions on perpetrators. However this approach has failed to combat violence and many educators have surrendered to believing that the situation is hopeless.

This research is qualitative, using semi-structured interviews, to get the boys to disclose information about their lives at home and social relationships in school with specific reference to their experiences of violence. According to Creswell (1994) qualitative researchers are interested in meaning – how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world. Creswell (1994) further illustrates that qualitative research is descriptive in that the researcher is interested in process, meaning and understanding gained through words. The nature of my study fits a qualitative research approach.

Gaining Access

As an educator for the past 13 years, 11 years of which I have spent at *Moorlands Technical, I have gained vast experience in handling learners and my interest in learner behaviour increased over the years.

I have been the Teacher Liaison Officer at *Moorlands for the past five years. The duty of a Teacher Liaison Officer is to liaise with learners and obtain their views on school related issues. I am also a Master Teacher Liaison Officer, responsible for learner development in the Chatsworth circuit. Working closely with learners as a TLO and educator I have become increasingly concerned about the deterioration of learners' behaviour and how violent behaviour has become a normalized form of behaviour among learners in Chatsworth. The boys mentioned that my work with the learners as a teacher liaison officer was of primary significance in their decision to participate in this study.

Permission to interview the boys was immediately granted by the principal of the school. I received the backing of the parents at a governing body meeting as they welcome any intervention that would be beneficial to education and the school. The

learners are familiar with me working amongst them, therefore the interviews went on smoothly and the boys felt comfortable talking about their experiences of violence.

Sampling

I chose grade 12 boys because they would have spent more years in the school and would be able to relate more comprehensive accounts of their experiences of violence. I chose boys from different ethnic backgrounds (Indian, Coloured, African) that make up the population of *Moorlands Technical in order to get a varying perspective of violence and the explanation of violent behaviour, that the boys experience from the various race groups.

The original intent was to interview the boys that displayed the most amount of violence in the school. The boys were chosen from records of tribunals that were conducted during the course of the year 2003. This effort failed because these boys were not accessible. The boys always found excuses not to turn up for the interviews. Two of the boys had been suspended for a stabbing during a fight in school. I therefore chose to interview a random sample of boys from grade 12 to obtain their experiences and views of violence at home and in school. I chose five boys because of the time constraints in which I had to work and I wanted to limit the disruption of classes. I did not want to interview fewer boys because should participants not offer detailed and rich narratives, I would be lacking data to conduct an effective and successful study.

The Interview

In this study, I have adopted a qualitative approach to using semi-structured interviews. An open approach to learning from an interview is well expressed in this introduction from Spradley (in Kvale 1994):

I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. (p125)

According to Kvale (1994) interviews allows the interviewer an empathic access to the world of the interviewee; the interviewee's lived meanings may be immediately accessible in the situation, communicated not only by words, but by tone and voice, expressions and gestures in the natural flow of a conversation.

I decided not to use group interviews as other studies (Reay, 2002) had indicated that group interviews, particularly on sensitive subjects, would not have been productive.

The participants were interviewed once, and I used an interview schedule, in order to give the interview structure and direction. This schedule included instructions to the interviewer, the key research questions to be asked and possible probes to follow key questions. I found this to be effective although in many instances I could not stick strictly to this schedule.

'Race' was introduced by the interviewees and featured more prominently in the interviews with the African boys than the Indian boys and the Coloured boy. In talking about experiences of violence at home race was not a primary issue but race was given a particularly high profile in most of the narratives of violence in school. The African boys, especially, when talking about violence in school introduced race early on. They often spoke specifically about Indian boys and their own experiences as African boys in the school.

The African and Coloured boys were comfortable with the interviewer being Indian and spoke at ease about their experiences of violence with the Indian boys. Mac an Ghiall's (1998) work, a white man studying black students, resonates with my experiences as a researcher in this study.

I set times on different days to conduct the interviews and negotiated with educators to release these boys from classes. At the beginning of the interview, the interviewees were thanked for agreeing to participate and I stressed that I wanted to learn from them about their experiences of violence and that there were no right or wrong answers, that everything they said would be kept in confidence and that they would be given pseudonyms to protect their identities. The two African boys showed some concern that the information they supplied would be revealed, but after I reassured them that whatever they said would be treated in the strictest of confidence and in no way would their identity be revealed, they became willing participants.

The interviews were conducted in the computer room, which is situated away from the classrooms. The room has blinds, air-conditioning and is normally very quiet. This created an atmosphere in which the boys felt safe enough to talk freely about their experiences and from the first interview my examination took off with the boys becoming involved with their own stories and those of their peers in animated, often highly entertaining and sometimes deeply moving ways.

I asked the boys to provide narratives of violent incidents that took place in their homes and in school. The same questions were asked of all the boys. I examined: Who were the perpetrators of the violence? How the boys felt about the violence and the perpetrators? I questioned the boys on the emotions that they felt during the course of the violent incidents. Some boys spoke about their emotions and feelings about the incidents they were narrating, without me specifically asking. With the permission of each subject I used a tape recorder to tape each interview. Kvale (1994) states that taping an interview gives the interviewer the opportunity to concentrate on the topic and the dynamics of the interview. Further the words and their tone, pauses, and the like are recorded in a permanent form that can be returned to again and again for re-listening.

In addition, it is possible to focus more attention on establishing rapport and taking non-verbal clues. Taping also allows us to leave open the possibility of transcribing the interview for later close inspection. This inspection, known as discourse analysis, can be an additional way of uncovering layers of meaning in what the informants say.

After each interview I set aside about ten minutes to recall and reflect what each subject has said. I wrote down points that I felt might be important for my analysis.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) refer to these notes as reflective notes where the researcher records personal thoughts, feelings, ideas and impressions. I also made note of contextual factors like body language, facial expressions and emotions that I would not get from the recordings later.

I initially allocated 30 minutes for each interview but in most cases the interviews exceeded the allotted time, because the boys had so much to say, especially with regard to their experiences of violence at school. Further I did not interrupt the boys when they spoke of other things not directly related to the study for fear of breaking the flow of their narratives. The boys were not ashamed or afraid to speak of violent experiences at home and at school. It seemed that they wanted to tell someone about their experiences and felt happier after the interviews.

My initial approach to the discussion of the data gathered was to separate the findings and analysis into two sections. However when I began to work with the data I found it difficult to discuss the findings and the analysis of the data separately. In the next chapter, therefore, I present the findings of my research and at the same time, offer an analysis of the data.

In conclusion the rich and emotionally engaged accounts of the boys provided me with sufficient data needed for this study. My choice to conduct individual interviews was rewarded as I found that the boys were serious, critical and willing to talk about things which might be described as wimpish or soft with other boys present. I also received vivid accounts of how race impacts on the violence experienced by the boys and the construction of masculine identities, that I may not have got in a group interview. In the next chapter, I will discuss and analyse the boys' narratives.

Chapter Four

Findings and Analysis

Boys' Experiences of Violence

I adopted a narrow definition of violence in my study because the broader definitions are unmanageable. Swearing, shouting, looking – examples of verbal and sexual harassment according to some definitions are common, daily happenings at my school. I therefore decided to focus on physical violence – hitting, punching, biting and so on. The major findings from the boys' narratives of violence at home are that the perpetrators of physical violence at home were the men. The physical violence experienced by the boys at school among peers has racial overtones. The findings reveal that teachers are complicit in the enactment of physical violence in school. Physical violence against girls is non-existent, however girls are verbally harassed and abused.

In this study, I focus among other things on the sites of violence. From my experience as an educator, I found that the two most important ones are the home and school.

The findings will be structured as follows:

- The boys' experiences of violence at home.
- The boys' experiences of violence at school with teachers and peers.
- The boys' narratives of violence against girls at school.

I will narrate some of the boys' own stories of violence in the above contexts and attempt to relate these stories to constructs of masculinity.

In discussing the findings of my study I did not use the boys actual names in order to protect their identity. I insert an * against the boys' name to indicate that these are pseudonyms.

Home and Family Background of the Participants

I selected participants from the three race groups that represent the learner population of *Moorlands Technical, (Indian, African, Coloured). In some cases race is an important signifier in the construction of violence and at other times it will be less so. This study finds commonalities and differences across racial barriers in the boys' narrations of violence at home and at school.

The two African boys that I interviewed were Zulu home language speakers. Both of the boys' families were living in an informal settlement in Chatsworth.

*Bright was the first boy that I interviewed. He was 19 years old. He lives with both parents. His father works for Durban Solid Waste as a truck driver and his mother

works as a shop assistant at a local supermarket. *Bright's father has a first wife who does not live with them. He has two children from his first wife. *Bright has a brother and two sisters who are younger than him. *Bright's father went to live with his first wife for a while and when he became sick, he returned to the family.

*Sipho was the second boy interviewed. He was 20 years old. He lives with his mother. He has a brother who is 2 years old. His mother is a domestic worker. His father is working in Richards Bay and has not come home for years. *Sipho's mother has another male friend who lives with them. *Sipho is not sure about, "the type of work that this man does".

The two Indian boys that I interviewed were *Navin and *Jabir. *Navin who is 17 years old, lives with both parents and both parents are employed. *Navin's father is a sales representative for a shoe company and his mother works in a clothing factory. The family lives in a semi-detached home that is freehold. *Navin has a sister who also schools at *Moorlands.

*Jabir who is 17 years old, also lives with both parents. He has a brother who is younger than him. There are no other siblings. *Jabir's family is renting in a granny flat, which was nearby to the school. His father worked on an 'on and off' basis. At the time of the interview *Jabir's father was working casually for a retail outlet. His mother used to work, but ever-since she took ill she has stayed at home.

The Coloured boy that I interviewed was *Collin. *Collin is 18 years old and lives in a flat with his mother. There are no other siblings. His father passed away when he was two years old. *Collin lives in Marianridge and commutes to school by taxi.

Experiences of Violence at Home

Hitting Fathers

Physical violence at home was common in the lives of *Bright, *Sipho *Jabir and *Collin.

The violence that *Bright and *Sipho experienced was in the form of beatings. They mentioned that they often received beatings as a form of discipline. Sometimes the beatings were severe and left scars on their bodies. All of the violence that the boys experienced was inflicted by a male. In *Bright's case it was his father and in *Sipho's case it was his mother's friend. *Sipho said, "he sometimes hits me with a pipe. I stand and take it, I don't run."

*Bright said that his mother never beat him even when she was upset. His father however readily showed aggression by slapping or punching him whenever he was "naughty". I asked *Bright how his mother reacted to his punishment and he said that she often approved and even when she disapproved, she said nothing. In *Sipho's case his mother was hardly at home as she worked late hours and she was oblivious to the violence. *Sipho said, "if she knows, I don't think she would do anything. We boys must not complain."

Both boys felt it was normal to be punished and although they were frightened at the time when punishment was meted out, it was “good for them to become strong men.” The boys approve of male aggression and it seems as if the females in the family approve as well since there is no intervention by the females. Violent behaviour by the men in these households seems to be accepted as normal. *Sipho said, “I don’t like to be hit, but at least he’s a man.”

It is important to mention the relationship of violence to the manner in which these boys are brought to manhood.

My findings from my interaction with these two African boys legitimate some of the arguments made by Morrell(1998b) on African masculinities. Violence is often enacted at home by the males in the family. The boys identify with the concepts of male domination at home and approve of violent modes of behaviour by the adult males in disciplining them. However I must caution that one cannot generalise because violence occurs in complex but context specific ways. Pollack (1998) argues that both parental and societal assumptions and attitudes about how to raise boys creates the psychology of male violence. Shame is often used in the toughening up process by which it is assumed boys need to be raised. Both adult males in *Bright and *Sipho’s homes assert their authority by using violence. Their female counterparts are also working, so the cultural view of male supremacy could be challenged.

When asked about his experiences of violence at home *Jabir initially said, “there is not much violence at home.” As the interview progressed he related quite a few incidents of violence. All the violence was perpetrated by his father and only when he was drunk. Most cases of violence were against his mother. *Jabir and his brother often got caught up in the scuffles and they received “a few blows as well.” *Jabir does not bear malice towards his father but blames the violence on money since most of the fighting was related to finance.

*Collin has a harmonious relationship with his mother and relates minor incidents of violence at home. Sometimes when he defaults he is referred to his uncle who scolds him but does not beat him. He does, however, recall incidents where his uncle occasionally slaps him for being naughty. I regard this as physical violence. *Collin regards his uncle as a father figure and says, “it is okay for him to slap me when I am wrong.”

*Navin did not relate any instances of physical violence at home but recounted the odd scolding and reprimanding by his father.

All the boys in this study indicated in their narratives that it was acceptable to be punished by their fathers or a dominant male figure in their lives. None of the boys bear malice to the man who punishes them and accepts the physical violence as normal behaviour. These findings resonate to a large extent with Tolson’s (in Heward, 1996) view that fathers legislate and punish and their presence in the home is realised in this context. We must also keep in mind that many people in Chatsworth use violence to settle disputes and are desensitised to violence to a large extent. The boys in this study view the use of violence as a means of punishment as normal and acceptable.

I have spoken to the boys only once in this study and their view of the family is only part of the story but the only part that I have access to. From their accounts of violence at home which is only one aspect of the men's relationship with their families I gather that male supremacy and dominance exist, to a certain extent, in all of the boys' families as is evident in the males making the decisions and being responsible for punishment when the boys default. Even in the cases where their biological fathers are not present the matter is referred to another male.

The data shows that African boys are harshly punished whereas Indian and Coloured boys are not. African boys who are beaten are not necessarily aggressive in social or school contexts as we shall see, but are willing to defend themselves especially in racially charged situations. On the other hand, the absence of home punishment does not seem to make the other boys more peaceful. There may be some correlation between violence at home, but as I have pointed out violence has many causes and we should avoid making mono-casual attributions that corporal punishment at home produces violent boys.

Poverty, Alcohol and Violence

*Jabir said that most of the time the "problem arose" because of finances. He recalls that all the violent incidences at home occurred when his father was not working. The most serious case of violence related by *Jabir in his home, occurred about six months ago. His father had come home late and was drunk. At the time he was unemployed. *Jabir said, "he must have went to Dryers". Dryers is the local shebeen that is frequented by many men and boys. They had not paid the rent for that month and his mother questioned his father about having money for alcohol. This brewed into a scuffle and *Jabir said "he hit her(his mother) with a lamp. I wanted to stop him so I caught his hand. He punched me and pushed me away. My younger brother started crying and ran to the landlord. They chased my father away for the night." The landlord has subsequently asked the family to "look for another place".

Capitalist relations of employment and unemployment might affect the gendered expectations and experiences of men and women, so that when men formerly defined as 'breadwinners', become unemployed and identified as redundant they may reassert their lives through violence. I am arguing that unemployment, feelings of inadequacy etc. do not of themselves necessarily cause violence; it is the gendered nature of those relations that makes possible connections to violence, structurally and individually in structures and consciousness. In *Jabir's case it seems that the father's unemployment, causes financial difficulties, which lead to frustration by the father, abuse of alcohol and this results in violent behaviour. As *Jabir says, "he (his father) only fights when he is not working and when he is drunk."

*Sipho said that when his mother's friend was drunk he resorted to hitting more readily and the punishment was more severe and lasted longer. However, although, he did receive beatings when the man was not drunk, the beatings were worse when he was drunk.

*Jabir's narrative of violence at home indicates that alcohol plays an important role in the violent behaviour of his father. *Sipho also stated the violence inflicted on him was heightened when his aggressor was drunk. Canaan (1996) found in her study of working class men in the Wolverhampton area that men who felt pessimistic about their futures often resorted to alcohol and the violence as a means of asserting 'hardness'. She found that hardness focussed on demonstrating control and this form of masculinity kept clear of direct contact with emotions. The accounts narrated by *Jabir and *Sipho about violence at home resonates, to an extent, with the research of Canaan (1996).

Poverty is an important variable in understanding violence because it creates the material conditions for violence to erupt. There is evidence from this study that socio-economic factors are implicated in violent behaviour. The boys in this study that experience violence at home come from low socio-economic backgrounds. Social and financial status contributes to a large extent to violence, especially in the cases of *Sipho and *Jabir. In *Sipho's case the mother is not at home because of work obligations and is oblivious to the violence and in *Jabir's case, financial and social factors relate directly to the violence at home.

It is impossible, in a limited sample of five boys, to establish whether the men in these households resort to violence as an expression of frustration – a reflection of not having power or whether the men use violence to maintain their hegemony. It seems, however, that in these households the ideas of male supremacy and recourse to violence still exist.

Experiences of Violence in School

Non-Violent Teachers

All the boys that were interviewed said that they had no experience of violence with the educators at *Moorlands. However, some of the boys said that the educators raised their voices and often scolded them, but the educators did not hit them.

We must keep in mind that teachers' interaction with learners are now controlled by the code of conduct. This limits personal relationships with learners and forces teachers into using forms of discipline, like tribunals, suspension etc.

The banning of corporal punishment (Schools Act of 1996) seems to have eradicated physical punishment by the educators at this school. The boys said that it was good that they were not physically punished at school and felt happier to be in the classroom. This is slightly anomalous given the stoical acceptance of violence in the home, however although the boys accept the punishment at home they do not like it. From my experience as an educator in this community for many years I found that being punished by the father or a father figure at home is culturally acceptable, but parents and learners do not approve of corporal punishment in school by teachers.

Research findings on corporal punishment in South Africa have found that policy and law have not eradicated corporal punishment in school (Morrell, 2001; IPT, 1999). This school is one of the few that has done away with corporal punishment, but as we

shall see, this has not ended other forms of violence in school and it remains questionable whether the removal of corporal punishment from the school has promoted non-violence in the school.

I asked the boys how they felt about the role of the educators in protecting them against violence.

All the boys said that the educators were powerless in helping them, “when they are in trouble.” *Sipho said that when the boys in the school were after him, his ‘form mam’ was very worried. She knew that he was going to be attacked after school. “She could’-n’t do nothing. She gave me leave to go early.” *Jabir said, “it is not their business”. When the teachers and security guards witness a fight they intervene to stop it, but it is difficult to catch perpetrators. Sipho said that even the male teachers, “can’t stop these boys”. *Bright says, “It happens too fast and they disappear”.

The boys are also reluctant to report cases of violence as they spill over, to after school hours and outside the school where the school has no control. The boys believe that it is best to “sort the problem out yourself”. *Collin said that he reported one incident of violence against him to the office. The perpetrators were suspended for a week. When they came back they, “did the same thing again.”

It seems like the code amongst the boys’ at the school is to fight your own battles. I did not discover any instances of the boys deliberately rebelling against authority but they don’t seem to respect authority. There is ambivalence towards educator interference in the ‘boys’ problems.’ The boys do not see the teachers, especially the males, as powerful and forceful because of their unwillingness or inability to help in violent situations and assert their ‘hardness’. The male teachers do not display the ‘dominant’ form of masculinity that is associated with toughness, power and authority (Connell, 1995). Although the boys do not despise the male teachers, they do not see them as role models.

Pushing, Tripping, Spitting

When I asked the boys about their experiences of violence with peers, there was an overwhelming response. Some of the boys gave so many narratives, that I had to ask them to relate only those incidents that they felt were most serious.

All the boys that I interviewed mentioned behaviour that **involved pushing, tripping, and spitting** among the boys at *Moorlands. However they do not regard this as serious and do not treat this type of behaviour as violence. They accept this as a way of life at *Moorlands. “Boys do this in our school.” They all said that as a boy, “you have to watch yourself.” The boys’ understanding of violence involves behaviour that leads to physical injury and damage, behaviour that leads to bodily harm. However physical violence does not occur in isolation. Aggressive actions such as pushing and shoving and tripping are part of a context in which physical violence often occurs with little provocation.

I did not find much difference in this type of behaviour with regard to race. The boys’ experiences of this ‘milder form of violence’, that does not involve physical injury, is

the same for all the boys that were interviewed. They all regarded this type of behaviour as, “boys’ behaviour.”

Cardboard gangs and Oak Trees

*Sipho’s encounters of violence and his narratives of masculinities particularly intrigued me. I therefore start with *Sipho’s experiences. *Sipho joined this school three years ago because he heard that “they do trade here”. *Moorlands, being a Technical school, attract boys who wish to pursue a career in the technical field. It is a common misconception in the community that *Moorlands offers ‘trade’ and many boys enrol with the understanding that they will embark on a skills training programme. *Sipho is one such boy. Frosh et. al. (2002) found, in interviews of adolescent boys in London that they stereotyped boys who placed less emphasis on academic achievement as rough, violent and tough. *Sipho is a big, strong boy and says that he is not afraid of any boy in this school. *Sipho recounted an incident that took place at the beginning of his first year at the school when he was in grade 10:

While playing with a tennis ball, the ball hit an Indian boy on the head. The boy slapped me. I got angry and pushed him down. He went away and later came back with his friends. They all came around me and started hitting me. Some of them kicked me and some of them punched me. I tried to fight but there were too many. A teacher came and stopped the fighting.

After this incident *Sipho had to leave school early every day for a week because he knew that the boys would be, “waiting for me after school.” While relating his story he mentioned often that, Indian boys had attacked him. I asked *Sipho about his thoughts of the violence perpetrated by the Indian boys at this school. He highlighted how Indian boys act and behave in specific ways. “Indian boys don’t fight alone. They like fighting in a gang. They attack in a gang. They don’t fight one on one. They are not strong. They are **cardboard gangs**.” Sipho sees the boys as weak by referring to them as “cardboard”.

*Sipho sees himself in terms of ethnic identity. He regards the Indian boys as ‘other’, and stresses the existence and significance of race in the enactments of violence. *Sipho says that the Indian boys who fight in groups are, “cowards”.

*Bright and *Collin’s narrations of violent incidents reveal similar circumstances where they were also assaulted by Indian boys. *Collin said, “They come with a big clan from all sides. They fight for simple things like a pencil or if you tease someone’s brother. Sometimes they remember incidents that happened a long time ago. They are like evil boys. They all come on you. You never know with them. We stand alone like **Oak trees**.”

The incidents of violence in the above narratives have racial overtones. The Indian boys are the aggressors and the African and Coloured boys seem to be the victims. Indian boys are in the majority at *Moorlands. *Sipho’s narratives especially highlights the way that Indian boys are dominating the other races because of sheer numbers. *Sipho rejects the violent behaviour of the Indian boys and does not see

this type of behaviour as masculine. He constructs the Indian boys as weak for fighting in groups and regards the African boys as strong for, “fighting alone.” These views are similar to Sewell’s (1997) study of how black boys survive in London schools where he found that the black boys developed a type of hyper masculinity based on creativity and ‘hardness’.

*Sipho, however does not avoid the violent boys. He says, “this Indian boy in my class, he says he’s my friend. He says he can protect me. No one can attack me if he is there. We are like friends.” In all of the interviews conducted with the boys, the analysis of this account troubled me the most. Throughout the interviews the boys (inclusive of *Sipho) spoke as if race was impermeable. Behaviour was identified primarily in terms of race. This account by *Sipho, taken on face value, indicates that there is now evidence of cross-racial alliances and friendships. This could be related to the breakdown of strong and rigid racial barriers in the school and in the Chatsworth community, presumably an effect of the end of apartheid. However *Sipho does not directly say that this Indian boy is his friend, he says, “he says he’s my friend.” Further *Sipho says, “We are like friends”, again not totally committed to the ‘friendship’. This could be a mechanism that *Sipho uses to survive in this school by pretending to befriend an Indian boy so that other Indian boys will leave him alone.

*Sipho does not totally denounce the violence at school. He speaks about *Wiseman, another Black boy in his class, who is often beaten up because, “he does not listen”. He seems to identify with the violent boys to some extent, but yet he is often a victim of violence himself. According to Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997) there is an argument which suggests that it is the group of boys who are most marginalized by society and the school who are most prone to violence and who subscribe to such values and who, paradoxically, are victims of such values. They are Connell’s (1995) ‘shock troops’. *Sipho seems to fall into this category.

We must keep in mind that this is a small study and I cannot make generalisations about the constructions of masculinities at this school from the narratives of 5 boys, however the boys’ stories indicate that violence and fighting prowess seems to be the main ingredient in the construction of masculinities in this school. As *Collin states, “if you are prepared to fight, then they respect you.”

However all the Indian boys do not identify with and participate in violent behaviour. *Navin asserts, “they like to see violence, they get excited, they get happy, I think it’s rotten.” *Navin does not include himself in ‘they’ and does not approve of the violent behaviour of the Indian boys.

The boys’ accounts indicate that most of the violence occurs outside the classroom, during the breaks and after school. The Indian boys use threats of violence to intimidate other boys and to control certain areas during these times, like the grounds and the assembly area. Masculine identities are constructed and negotiated in a culture of violence and intimidation.

My interview with *Jabir confirms some of the views of *Collin, *Navin, *Bright and *Sipho about violent Indian boys and their behaviour. I found that *Jabir is one of the

perpetrators of violence. *Jabir had a brother in this school who was notorious for violent encounters. *Jabir is proud of his brother's reputation and wants to follow in his brother's footsteps. We must keep in mind that *Jabir encounters violence at home quite often.

He says, "when there is a fight I always run to see. Sometimes my friends are involved and I can help. Sometimes different boys are fighting. When boys are fighting, they don't know who's hitting them. You can always give free boots. They don't know." I prompted *Jabir by asking him how he feels about violence in school. His response was that he was not afraid of violence. I got the impression that he likes violence at school. He said that he likes boys, "hitting it out." *Jabir says he feels alone when he is not involved in the 'action'.

*Jabir feels that violence is the best way to resolve disputes. When *Jabir talks about violence, he is referring to physical violence. He says, "they need to be put in their place. The best way is violence. They will never listen." The ('they') that *Jabir refers to, are the boys that confront or challenge him and his friends. He reported, with pride, many violent incidents in which he was involved. *Jabir does not despise the African and Coloured boys at the school but is more ready to fight with them than Indian boys. He says, "if an African boy 'bucks' us, we must go in with 'gazies'(friends). We beat the shit out of them."

This is a study that has selected a small sample of five boys from the three races that make up the learner population of the school. In the absence of ethnographic data to further our understanding of the boys' behaviour, I gather from the boys' narratives that the Indian boys are dominant over the other races. Race and ethnicity influences the manner in which masculine identities are constructed at this school. There is a close parallel between my study and that of Connolly (1998) in London. Here the style of confrontation was for white boys to swoop on Asian boys, hitting them and preventing them from actively defending themselves and therefore proving themselves as competent fighters. The boys' narratives in this study indicate that the Indian boys swoop on the African boys in numbers preventing them from defending themselves. This does not mean that the African boys are weak or soft, just that they are not given an opportunity to defend themselves.

To say that a particular form of masculinity is hegemonic means that it is culturally exalted and that its explanation stabilizes the gender order as a whole. This is a modest research, which examines the relationship of masculinity to violence in the setting of a single school, and it is not possible to establish a pattern of masculinity that we can identify as being hegemonic. However in *Jabir's narratives we get a sense of how he and his friends enact patterns of contemporary hegemonic masculinity like toughness and competitiveness and a willingness to use violence to maintain dominance.

My analysis of the boys' stories of violent incidents among their peers is that violence almost always occurs with groups of boys. It may start with individuals but develops into situations where groups of boys are involved. Morrell (1994) says that the formation of groups amongst boys is a common phenomenon. The reasons for the establishment of groups, the forms that groups take, and the functions which they perform are historically and contextually contingent. The groups that the boys form at

*Moorlands are a defensive response to anyone who threatens the power hierarchies that exist at this school. Glaser (1998) further illustrates, amongst boys and men, the quest for dominance is part of a desire for recognition. In this context the boys congregate in groups and when these become gangs, violence frequently results as dominance between groups is fought for. The Indian boys in my study form groups and use physical violence to maintain their dominance over the boys from other race groups which resonates with the findings of Glaser (1998).

Violence-avoidant boys

I asked the boys how they defended themselves against violent boys at the school. *Bright said, "I spend most of the breaks under the staircase, in the computer room or in the library. If you walk around all over you will get trouble." *Collin indicated a similar pattern of behaviour. He said that he mostly tries to avoid these boys and stay out of their way. "The grounds is were the trouble makers mostly 'hang out.'"

It seems that the African and Coloured boys have adopted an approach of avoidance in order to survive. They avoid the 'hot spots' in the school by spending their time in the sanctuary of demure places, under the stairs, computer room and library. They may be trying to construct an alternative masculinity, one that perhaps relates to academic proficiency where they are spending time in the computer room and library.

These boys are using non-violence and avoidance of violence as a form of masculinity in order to survive at this school. This does not mean that they are 'lesser' men than the violent boys. These non-violent boys see themselves as "better" and "cleverer" than the violent boys for wanting to avoid violence and focus on school work.

Messing around - 'Flukeing' the girls

According to the Human Rights Watch (2001) girls are raped, sexually abused, harassed and assaulted at school by their male classmates and even teachers. Girls' safety is under constant threat at school, because it often remains unchallenged that much of the behaviour that is violent, harassing, degrading and sexual in nature become so normalised in many schools that it is now a systemic problem. The accounts of the boys at this school show that this description does not apply to *Moorlands. Even though there are many expressions of aggression and misogyny these rarely flare into fully-fledged physical attacks on girls.

I examined how the boys talk about violence against girls at the school by asking them to relate experiences, theirs and others, of violence where girls were involved. I found that initially the boys were guarded in talking about the girls and were not as enthusiastic to speak about the girls, as they were when they spoke about the boys.

All the boys that I interviewed said that there was no violence against the girls at the school and maintained that it is "stupid" to hit girls. I prompted the boys by asking them if they had seen any incidents of boys interfering with girls. This resulted in the boys becoming more talkative about the girls. *Jabir said, "we 'fluke' the girls. I

asked *Jabir to explain what 'fluke' means. His response was, "you know whistling, calling their names loud, sometimes the boys say 'bad' things". Most of the time we joke with them". I gathered that 'bad things' means sexual remarks.

*Sipho and *Bright said that they do not interfere with any girls and that it was the Indian boys that "mess around with the girls". They are always, "calling the girls names and running after them."

While there is no overt violence against the girls (which is a good thing in a country like South Africa which has a great deal of physical violence directed at girls) it is clear that misogynistic or patriarchal notions that underpin gender inequality are rampant in this school.

An interesting finding from this study is that in every case the perpetrators of violence are male. Significantly however, the minority of victims are female. According to Morrell (1998a) it has for long been a conventional wisdom of gendered studies of education that women are major victims of violence in schools. This has been part of a feminist approach designed to draw attention to discrimination suffered by girls and women. This study, without denying that gender inequalities exist in society and education, serves to point that although the boys are the perpetrators of violence, often the victims of violence are also boys. The narratives of the boys reveal that many of the boys in this school affirm their masculinity through violence.

I find that the boys seek the approval of the dominant Indian boys in the construction of the dominant masculinity at school. There is intense male-to-male competition for dominance, and violence is interwoven into this interplay. The hierarchy of masculinities are established by a system of verbal abuse, put downs, harassment and the ever-existing threat of violence. The peer group dynamic in this school revolves around being able to assert authority in most cases by the use of violence and being able to get a laugh at the expense of boys designated as 'other' because they fail to measure up to the norm of the hegemonic masculinity. Violent boys are the gatekeepers of acceptable and desirable behaviour for the boys at this school. The majority of the boys, Indian boys, are at the top of the hierarchy and these boys determine the masculinity that is hegemonic in the school.

'Fluke' could originate from the Afrikaans word 'vloek' – meaning to swear.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

This study has looked at the narratives of violence among the boys attending a Technical school in Chatsworth. The focus was on accounts of violence at home and at school and is a confined view of how masculine identities are constructed among these grade 12 boys, in that five boys were chosen to be interviewed, two African, two Indian and one Coloured boy. Their ages range between 17 to 20. The boys were active participants in the research process, in that the core interest was in investigating what they said about themselves and their experiences of violence. This study looked at how race, class and location impacted on the way in which boys understood their experiences of violence and provides an insight into how boys avoid or engage in violent school cultures. The study also examined how the boys' narratives of violence relate to the girls at the school.

My study finds that physical violence was prevalent in the lives of boys and that this violence was sufficiently severe to result in some cases in physical injury or damage. Physical violence experienced by the boys at home was mainly in the form of punishment. The perpetrators of this violence were the adult males, either the biological fathers or a father figure in the home. An interesting finding is that none of the boys in this study bear resentment, grudge or anger towards their aggressors. The boys regard violence as a normal and acceptable way of punishment. International studies indicate that fathers legislate and 'punish' as a signifier of their masculine identity (Heward, 1996). The boys in this study seem to share this view. We must remember that in the Chatsworth community violence is often used to settle disputes and that violence in this community has become normalized as many of the people are desensitised to violence.

Alcohol and poverty are significant to the enactment of violence at home. The use of alcohol by the adult males is either a catalyst in starting the violence or serves to aggravate the violence. The boys from low socio economic conditions experience the most violence at home. Financial stress, leads to frustration, which results in violence.

Although, violence at home by the adult males was accepted, by the boys and their parents, the same cannot be said for the authority figures in school. The boys were happy that corporal punishment was banned. This has eradicated violence by teachers on learners. Teachers' behaviour in disciplining learners at school is governed by policy like the code of conduct where tribunals, suspensions etc. is used. However this has not ended other forms of violence among the peers. The boys regard teachers as powerless in curbing violence in the school and authority is seen with ambivalence.

Race is significant in the construction of masculine identities and the enactment of physical violence among the boys at this school. The Indian boys are the main perpetrators of violence and violence is often used to intimidate, threaten and maintain dominance over other boys. The African and Coloured boys in this study although capable of violence seem to construct their masculinity in non-violent ways. They develop an alternative masculinity to that of the violent ones. They do not see

themselves as being subordinated by the violent masculinity. They say that they are not afraid of the Indian boys and can defend themselves if given a chance. These boys understand violence and masculinity differently from the violent Indian boys. The Indian boys fight in gangs, are proud of this behaviour and see it as their strength. The African and Coloured boys see this behaviour as weakness and regard these boys as cowards.

A significant finding in this research is that misogyny and other patriarchal notions that underpin gender inequality are very evident in this school even though, there is no overt violence against the girls. The boys often mess around with the girls and use them to get a laugh. A report from the Human Rights Watch (2000) states that violence against girls in South African schools has reached alarming proportions. In this school the problem is less severe. This could be attributed to the fact that the boys in this study believe that it is not 'manly' to hit girls and hitting girls is not indicative of physical strength and fighting prowess.

I did not find strong evidence that the home situation influences violent behaviour in school, except for one boy (*Jabir) who experiences a lot of violence at home and believes that violence is the best way to solve problems. On the other hand one boy (*Navin) who experiences no violence at home prefers to adopt non-violent ways of surviving in school. In trying to understand school masculinities, the importance of home background has often been stressed and in this case, the value of this perspective is borne out.

The significance of the boys' stories is that they provoke fresh insights about violence in the lives of school going boys in Chatsworth. It casts light on patterns of behaviour that exist in the violent world of the boys. There is considerable body of research done on black gangs, middle and working class white boys, but the construction of masculinities in a predominantly Indian society is under researched. Where research has been conducted Asian boys are seen as victims and dominated by other stereotypes.

It is important to consider how to engage dominant boys in critical practice designed to diminish these regimes and their effects on their own and others' lives. McLean (in Skelton, 2001) for instance has argued that encouraging boys to focus on the negative experiences and consequences of dominant masculinity can create spaces that allow boys to reject the abusive effects of masculine power. Getting boys – or indeed men – to recognise the injustices they have experienced themselves can be the first step in enabling them to empathize with other people's experiences of injustice, and to recognise the ways in which they have themselves participated in perpetrating injustice.

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