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Constructions of Masculinity among young sporty boys: The case of a Kwa Zulu Natal Preparatory School's First Rugby Team.

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Table of Contents

- i Table of contents
- ii Abstract
- iii Acknowledgments
- iv Declarations

Chapter 1 - Introduction

- 1.1 Introduction..... 1
- 1.2 Motivation for the research..... 2
- 1.3 Personal Introduction 2
- 1.4 Background and context..... 3
- 1.5 Background of School..... 3
- 1.6 Rugby in Schools..... 4
- 1.7 Role of Coaches..... 5
- 1.8 Role of Schools..... 6
- 1.9 Role of Families..... 7
- 1.10 Outline of the thesis..... 8

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

- 2.1 Introduction 9
- 2.2 History of Masculinity..... 9
- 2.3 Gender Identity..... 11
- 2.4 Gender Power..... 12
- 2.5 Types of Masculinities..... 12
- 2.6 Sport..... 14
- 2.7 Sport and Bodies..... 17
- 2.8 Boys and Injuries..... 17
- 2.9 Sport, Masculinity and Power..... 18
- 2.10 Masculinity, Sport, and Schooling in South Africa..... 18
 - 2.10.1 Sport, Gender and History in South Africa..... 19
 - 2.10.2 Sport in schools from a gender perspective..... 20
 - 2.10.3 Masculinity and rugby in schools..... 21
 - 2.10.4 Rugby Heroes..... 22

2.11 School culture.....	22
2.12 Conclusion.....	23

Chapter 3 - Methodology

3.1 Introduction.....	24
3.2 Research Site.....	24
3.3 School Rugby Season.....	26
3.4 School Rugby Selection.....	26
3.5 Type of Research.....	27
3.5.1 Gaining Access.....	27
3.6 Sample size	28
3.7 Timing of Research.....	28
3.8 The Interviews.....	29
3.9 Dramatis Personae.....	31
3.10 Limitations.....	35
3.11 Ethical Issues.....	36
3.12 Conclusion.....	36

Chapter 4 - Data Presentation and Analysis

4.1 Introduction.....	37
4.2 Reasons for playing sport.....	38
4.3 Playing Rugby.....	39
4.4 “It’s just what everyone does”	40
4.5 “Rugger boys”.....	41
4.6 Physical Aggression.....	44
4.7 The boys as role models.....	45
4.7.1 By their peers	46
4.7.2 By the school	48
4.7.3 By making provincial teams	49
4.8 “So how good are you?”	50
4.9 The down side of playing 1 st team.....	51
4.10 It’s a game for all	54
4. 11 Conclusion.....	55

Chapter 5 - Discussion and Conclusion

5. 1 Overview of the study.....
5.2 Implications of the study.....
5.3 Conclusion.....

Appendix

Questions used to guide interview process.....

Literature References

Abstract

This study is an analysis of the manner in which preparatory school boys construct their masculinities through the sport of rugby. The study is based on interviews with the entire First XV rugby team of Connaught Prep School.

Sport and rugby in particular are seen as an important cog in the masculinity-making process for men but this is also true for young boys. Rugby in South Africa is regarded as a sport that real men play. Historically played primarily by white men, it remains a marker of hegemonic masculinity. In their involvement in the Connaught Prep's First XV, boys affirm the importance of the sport, act out the values associated with the sport and display the skills required to play the sport successfully.

The thesis argues that sport, and in particular, rugby, is a central feature of boys' constructions of masculinity. Due to the physical nature of rugby and the hype that surrounds and the support that is given to the sport, it has become part of the hegemonic culture of boys at Connaught Prep School. But hegemonic masculinity is not fixed; it is contested and changes. The 1st XV rugby team and its members are an important part of the process that gives content to the masculinity that is hegemonic at Connaught Preparatory. The boys try and live up to the ideals of masculinity that they see on television, hear from and see in their fathers and find in other boys. In selecting a set of sporty values, these boys perpetuate rugby as the preferred sport and a rugged school boy masculinity as the hegemonic made gender identity of the school.

While the 1st rugby team try to aspire to the ideal hegemonic masculinity at the school, they cannot meet the ideal rugby masculinity and this renders them vulnerable. They are vulnerable to physical injury and also to the humiliation of heavy losses against rival teams. Susceptible to these conditions makes their construction of masculinity a delicate and fragile situation to be in.

While the boys contribute to hegemonic masculinity they also, at times, undermine it by contributing to a counter hegemonic masculinity. These are the boys that stress playing sport for fun (rather than winning), are caring, and develop friendships through the sport.

The findings of this study, brings to light the importance of sport in the development of a young boys' masculinity and the vulnerable and fragile situation these boys find themselves in as a result.

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Declaration

I, **Barbara Anne Bowley**, declare that this work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work , or works of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1. 1 Introduction

This study explores the ways in which boys in a primary school first rugby team construct their masculinity through sport. The focus is on rugby in particular and looks at boys within a preparatory school situation. A Preparatory school is a private school based on the tradition of the United Kingdom Public schools which 'prepared boys for high school'. Preparatory schools cater for boys from the ages of ten to thirteen years and cover the grades four to six. The school being researched is an Independent school located in Durban, Kwazulu Natal. The pseudonym used for the school in this research is Connaught Preparatory School.

The research for this study was conducted using a qualitative methodology that included both individual and group interviews. Through formal interviews, discussing the reasons for them playing the game, I explored the way in which the boys understood their sporting prowess and how it influenced their thoughts about their peers and the school that provides official affirmation for sporting achievement. I discuss the methodology in more detail in Chapter 3.

The thesis is driven by the following research questions: (a) what reasons do sporty boys give for playing sport, particularly rugby? (b) how do the boys in the first rugby team see their position in relation to the rest of the school (teachers and fellow learners)? (c) do they feel that membership of the first rugby team gives them privileges in the school? (d) do they see themselves as role models for junior boys? e) what are the advantages and disadvantages of this position?

The study of masculinity in South Africa has been underway for little over ten years. Studies that have been conducted identify sport as a major site for the construction of masculinity. South Africa is a sports mad nation, particularly in the sports of soccer and rugby. In KwaZulu-Natal generally and at middle class schools such as the prep school at which I am conducting research in particular, rugby is a popular and prestigious sport. This is the reason I chose rugby as the site to observe the development of masculinities. Rugby competition amongst preparatory schools in Kwazulu-Natal is fierce and middle class, especially white boys, often classify rugby as the main sport at school.

Rugby in South Africa has not received good publicity in the press of late. Incidents of violence are frequently reported. Two Ceres players face murder charges after kicking to death a Rawsonville flyhalf in a club rugby fixture in the Western Cape (The Mercury, July 19, 2006). Injuries from hard and dangerous tackles are of serious concern to coaches and administrators alike. The toll of rugby injuries is grim. Statistics for serious injuries in school rugby, as reported to the Petro Jackson/ Chris Burger Players Fund, reflect that since 2001 there have been 10 deaths from head and neck injuries alone.(Petro Jackson/ Chris Burger Fund) If the risks are so high, then there must be very good reasons for boys to play the game. In this thesis I suggest that one of the reasons is that the sport plays a huge role in the development of boys' masculinity and for some, participation in the sport defines who they are.

1.2 Motivation for the Research

South African sport is important to many people in the country. It has played an important role in the reconciliation of the new South Africa as witnessed by Nelson Mandela's celebration when South Africa won the African Cup of Nations (soccer) in 1996 and the World Cup (rugby) in 1996. Sport can assist in the process of breaking down class and race barriers. "Our young democracy witnessed the ability of sport to act as a catalyst to bring people together, share excitement and build a nation" (South African Minister of Sport, Steve Tshwete, quoted in Nauright, 1996: 2). On the other hand, sport is also the place where political conflict is played out, most noticeably in the ongoing dispute about the racial composition of the Springbok rugby team and cricket sides.

As a result of sport being popular in South Africa, it is taken up enthusiastically by learners, particularly in well-resourced, middle class, schools. When one sees the interest and love for the game of rugby, especially, from the public, one can understand the interest and love for the game that pupils have. The passion that boys have for the game is why I chose it as the site for this study.

1.3 Personal Introduction

I am a white, female teacher who has been at Connaught Preparatory School for the past seven years. I am currently a grade six class teacher but also teach Mathematics and Natural Science in

the Grade Seven and Grade Nine years. I am fully involved in the sport extra mural programme where I coach a large number of boys in swimming, water polo and hockey.

Teaching in an all boys' school has made me want to understand better the development of boys' masculinity. I have sought better to understand boys' behaviour particularly as it varies depending on the situation. It is of interest to me as to how boys understand themselves and create, model and redefine their masculine identities. Towards this end I have utilized the gender literature to create a theoretical framework in the first instance to frame the research questions and, in the second instance, to provide concepts and analytical tools to generate some answers to the riddle of young boy masculinity. The gender literature (which I review in Chapter 2) originates broadly within a feminist paradigm and while this is sometimes understood as being hostile to men, of late it has expanded to include perspectives on men and masculinity and it is upon this literature that this study draws.

1.4 Background and Context

By studying how boys talk about their involvement in competitive sport (rugby) in a single-sex preparatory school, I investigate the ways in which they construct their masculinity, speak about their bodies, achievements and anxieties and also, how they participate in the establishment of a masculine sport norm which holds a hegemonic position within the school. A connection is made between boys' construction of masculinity and the sport they play.

By observing boys in schools and by making reference to numerous studies of the role that sport plays in reproducing hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1990, Messner, 1992, McKay et al, 2000), I show that boys depend heavily on the sport they play in order for them to construct a masculine identity within the school. In what follows I analyse the ways in which boys realize their masculinity through sport. The process is not seamless and there are difficulties and contradictions that come with constructions of masculinity in sport. By using the boys as active participants in the research process, I hope to shed light on the meanings that they give to their sport experiences.

1.5 Background of School

Connaught Preparatory was, and remains, a privately funded school. Until 1996, non government schools in South Africa were referred to as private schools. A new South African Schools Act in

1996 recognized only two types of schools: public and independent. All private schools became part of the independent school category and while today they are still often referred to as private schools, the correct term is now independent school. With few exceptions, these private schools historically only took in learners of one racial group (that is; white) though in the 1980s segregation began to break down and private (Independent) schools began to admit children of all races. Generally speaking, children at these schools were from middle class families as fees at these schools were high.

Single – sex boys’ schools, like Connaught Preparatory, were formed in the early 1920’s. In Natal single-sex boys and girls schools date from as early as the 1860s. Modeled on the British public school system, single sex boys schools were seen as ideal environments for boys to grow up. Here boys were allowed to be around other boys without the distraction of girls. The Kwazulu-Natal schools were no exception to other independent schools starting up around the country and closely resembled that of the British public schools model. Single – sex schools were popular in Britain and this model was adopted in colonial Natal. In fact, until quite recently, nearly all independent schools in South Africa were single – sex. In this environment, education could be and was geared towards boys’ alone with the intention of transforming the boys into gentlemen.

Apart from the single-sex independent schools there were also government schools that catered only for boys or only for girls. These were also middle class schools, called in the late 1980s and 1990s, model C schools and were historically administered for white children by the provincial Department of Education which was responsible, under Apartheid, for white education. It was only with the breakdown of Apartheid and its replacement in 1994 by a democratic national government that these Model C schools were opened up to all races. Today these schools are racially integrated though most remain middle class in their ethos and cost structure.

1.6 Rugby in Schools

Today, in many single sex boys’ schools rugby remains a very popular sport with significant school status. This has been borrowed from a national and provincial obsession with rugby as a major winter sport of (white, middle class) men. Introduced by the early settlers who started the public schools in South Africa, they intended to reproduce the upper class world of England. Rugby was part of this British public schools tradition and this was mirrored in South African schools. Rugby has now become an obsession at many single sex, middle class schools both at primary and

secondary level. Today many schools talk about traditional sports, that is, cricket in the summer and rugby during the winter.

While sport is important in a school's life, it is as important in the lives of its pupils. Sport, "is the central experience of the school years for many boys" (Connell, 1983:18). Boys, from an early age, are exposed to some form of sport. While some may excel in the game, there are many that fail or do not achieve. Messner argues that "there are millions of boys who at an early age are rejected by, become alienated from, or lose interest in organized sports. Yet all boys are, to a greater or lesser extent, judged according to their ability, or lack of ability in competitive sports" (Messner, 1995: 103). Sport teams, in particular, are areas for boys to bond, work together and enjoy one another's company. Physical bonding in the name of team spirit is important for boys in their development of masculine identities. Boys say that playing together in a team is one of the most important reasons for playing sport. Rugby is a game that is played in a team and can be an opportunity to build team spirit. By playing rugby in a team, boys can develop a sense of belonging. This all sounds very idealistic - boys all playing sport together and forming strong bonds, surely then there can be nothing wrong with playing team sports? Unfortunately not all teams develop a team spirit and not all boys are included. While some may experience a sense of belonging others experience rejection. This may come in the form of a boy being dropped from a particular team because he is not good enough, a team losing matches or a player being dropped through injury or illness or boys simply not being able to play the sport because they lack the talent or motivation. The spectrum of rejection and failure is a powerful theme in studies of masculinity and it frequently cropped up in the interviews that I shall analyse and discuss in Chapter 4. Because rugby plays such an important role in the life of the school and the lives of many boys, this rejection is often hard to deal with.

Success at a sport is very important for boys. In schools where a competitive spirit is inculcated, boys are highly competitive and play with a passion and aggression. So when excluded from the sport or a particular team, the rejection is enormous. As a result of this, the roles that the coaches, schools and families play in the life of the pupil playing sport are enormous.

1.7 Role of Coaches

Coaches in the preparatory phase, in particular, play a huge role in boys' sport. The boys are easily influenced and naïve at this young age. The attitude that the coach adopts both towards his team

and towards his sport is crucial towards the development of the player and boy. Players learn from a young age to adopt a philosophy for sport; be it a win at all costs or simply to enjoy the game. Some boys will participate for the enjoyment and excitement of the sport. Others learn, by being placed in lower teams, that sport will not be their place to shine or achieve, but will be a place simply to enjoy the game and the company of other team members. Often at a very young age, the lack of ability to excel at sport is a harsh reality that boys confront. The manner in which the coach is aware and sensitive to the boys in his / her team, how he deals with the boys' strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures, is vital to the boys experience with sport. William Pollack in his book, *Real Boys*, (1998: 282) defines the coach as being an emotionally important figure in a boy's life. Coaches who cheer on the boys and encourage them through team wins and losses, "transforms a boy from an isolated competitor into a bonded teammate, from someone who wants to beat the other guy to someone purely striving to do his personal best (Pollack, 1998: 282). By coaching fair play and fairness, the boys learn from an early age the importance that sport brings, not simply winning, but incorporating all the learning skills that go alongside sport. Coaches, therefore, not only have to coach sporting skills, but convey a moral sense to the boys. Coaches become mentors to the boys and this can be either hugely effective, in a positive sense, or disastrously destructive for a boy. Unfortunately for young boys today, the emphasis is high on making the "A" team for a sport. They wait beside the sports notice board for the team lists to go up after trials and there is obvious jubilation and also total disappointment for some. Rugby is easily the most popular game at Connaught Preparatory and therefore failure to make one of the top sides, can result in feelings of humiliation. How the coach of the side goes on to deal with these rejections during the season is hugely important. Boys should learn that they are all important in playing the game; regardless of the team.

1.8 Role of Schools

Schools too play an important role in the lives of the sportsmen. Unfortunately some schools have adopted a fierce element of competition in sporting matches. Merely to participate is not enough – they need to win. Anyone who has attended a rival school rugby game over a weekend would agree to the passion and aggression with which the boys play. Many parents on the sideline along with coaches have adopted a win at all cost approach to the game of rugby. Weekly team results are published in the *Sunday Times* and *Sunday Tribune*, ranking schools according to their successes over the past week. Teams and boys themselves are ranked according to their wins and how many points particular boys have scored. The *Weekend Witness* on September 23, 2006,

placed an article in the paper headed, "Schools reject rankings". Five schools in the Kwazulu Natal area have asked that schools no longer accept the policy of being ranked. Their reasons behind this move are because "the ranking systems have led to unhealthy competition and rivalry resulting in an alarming increase in injuries and are a factor in school sport losing its value as an educational tool" (*Weekend Witness*, Sept, 23, 2006: pg 4). This is the stark reality of sport in schools.

According to the article, the rivalry has become so severe that fights have broken out in the stands; referees have been assaulted and over zealous coaches have openly criticized their own players.

School boy safety seems to take a back seat and the rivalry for seeding seems to play a far greater role. Even at the Preparatory school level, schools publish their results in the local newspapers. Often only the wins are published, especially when it is a win over the local rival school. Parents are also now using the sporting success of a school as a yardstick for entry of their son into a particular school. The sport results from the previous season often sway parents towards one and away from another school.

Because sporting success has become so big in schools, boys who do well at sport become school heroes and so selection for the first team is often held to be very important by the boys themselves. With each season comes a new sport and while some boys are lucky enough to be good at all sports, others are good at only one sport and only have one season to shine.

1.9 Role of Families

Parents of young athletes play a major role in the attitude of players as well. How the parents behave on the side of the field as well as their comments and demeanor towards their children both before and after matches plays an enormous part in the way children perceive sport. Connaught Preparatory has come to the level that during the rugby season on the back of the programme of events for the weekend is a criterion for behaviour of parents while watching matches. This has come through necessity due to the poor behaviour of both home and visiting parents.

Articles in newspapers (*Weekend Witness*, September 23, 2006) and programmes on television (*Carte Blanche*, September 24, 2006) highlight the extent that parents will go to have their son win or participate in a sports match. Children are being fed prohibited substances on a regular basis to enhance performance even from a young age. Many of the substances being used are not even for

human consumption, but are medicines for animals. This is a frightening thought and a real look into the reality of what sport has become, even at the young preparatory school age.

Along with parents come families and family's history in sporting activities. Each boy interviewed was asked if his father or family relative had any influence on him playing the game of rugby. Older brothers, uncles and fathers can become role models for boys playing the sport either by boys emulating the idea of playing the sport like their father or trying to do better in the sport than their family member. Rugby skills are practiced with older brothers or fathers in the gardens at home. The fathers attitude towards the sport is, therefore, very important to many boys. It is often in the boys' relationship with his father that we find "many of the keys to the emotional salience of sports in the development of masculine identity" (Messner, 1995: 105). Dads are often the first people to teach boys how to play a game. Some boys' fathers are still active in the game or have a very prestigious background in sport. Boys identify with this. Those boys whose fathers have achieved in the sport they play often try to live up to their father's reputation.

1.10 Outline of the Thesis

The research conducted focuses on how boys construct their masculinities within the school environment. There are numerous studies on the construction of masculinities in school. For example, authors such as Connell (1995), Mac an Gaill (1996), Head (1999), Gilbert and Gilbert (1998), Martino (1995) and Mills (1997) have written extensively on the topic of masculinity. All these studies proceed from a social constructionist position and therefore examine how boys understand themselves and their environment and their relationships. Amongst young, school going boys, Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (1999) have examined the making of young masculinities and confirm what Connell (1995) and Messner (1995) have argued for over a decade, that sport is extremely important in the construction of masculinity. Some theorists argue that masculinities that strongly vest in sporting achievement can be highly competitive, violent and misogynistic but there is lack of clarity about how young boys understand sport and sporting achievement and how these understandings relate to their sense of themselves as a male. This is the area where I focus my study.

The thesis falls into five sections. The first chapter looks at the motivation behind the research and gives the basic outline of the thesis. The second chapter reviews the relevant literature discussing the concepts of masculinity and the interconnectedness of sport, masculinity and schooling in South Africa. The third chapter describes the methodology used during the research. The fourth

chapter presents and analyses the data gathered during the study. The final chapter is the conclusion.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the international and local (South African) literature on the topics of masculinity, sport and schools. Particular emphasis is given to the sport of rugby and boys of the preparatory school age (pre-teens). A theoretical framework through which masculinities is explored is defined. In order for me to do this in a structured manner, I shall look at the following concepts: (a) the concepts of masculinity, (b) the connection between sport and masculinity and (c) the interconnectedness of masculinity, sport and schooling in South Africa.

2.2 History of Masculinity

In order to understand the views of my young informants, I have elected to place them in the framework provided by theories of gender and masculinity. Masculinity does “not exist except in contrast with femininity” (Connell, 1995: 68). Historically, women have been seen as different from men; that is, not in the physical sense, but due to the fact that women were regarded inferior to men. One of the central features of feminism over the last two hundred years has been to challenge this view. Until recently, the political struggle that feminists have waged for the emancipation of women has appealed only to women. In the last quarter of a century however, men working within a feminist framework have sought to include the interests and roles of men within the scope of intellectual feminist work. As a result, the concept of masculinity has become important and has generated a tradition of pro – feminist work often called critical men’s studies. These studies serve to identify and explain the patterns of power and inequality that exist. Masculinity studies also serve to understand relationships and identities within the construction of masculinity. This study draws heavily on the latter aspect of this literature.

Masculinity, understood as a gender identity belonging to males, is not a coherent object that can be generalized into one category. Rather, it is a process that is constantly under construction. Boys are exposed to varying social forces and dynamics that mould and influence their masculinity. As one cannot identify masculinity as a fixed entity, throughout the interviews, I realized how, for each boy, masculinity and how they perceived themselves, varied. The boys constructed their masculinity in relation to each other. They compared themselves continually to others - either to

boys in the team or to boys not playing rugby at all. It is therefore interesting to see how the boys discussed the relationship between rugby and gender without themselves being conscious of making the connection. The processes of masculine development are heavily vested in sport and rugby, in particular, for the boys under research.

In order to provide a foundation for this study, I look into the history and theorization of masculinity. Theorists have observed four different strategies for understanding masculinity in past history (Connell, 1995: 68). Essentialist theories try to pick features that will inevitably define masculinity or the “core of the masculine” (Connell, 1995:68). A single feature, for example risk – taking or aggression, was used to define masculinity. As Connell argues, there is no one form or feature that defines the masculine. Each culture or society has its own definitions, so one feature cannot collectively define the masculine in general. Men do not all behave in the same manner and cannot therefore be treated as a monolithic, uniform group. For these reasons, I do not rely on essentialist theories for this study

The second theory was that of the positivist approach. The definition here was that masculinity was defined as “what men are” (Connell, 1995:69). This is difficult to understand, as what men are is dependent on the standpoint. How I, as a woman, define what men are and how men themselves view what they are, is vastly different. Resulting from the positivist approach, there was a trend to merge descriptive definitions with normative definitions which fixated on differences between males and females and regarded masculinity “as what men ought to be” (Connell, 1995: 70). This is again problematic as it assumes that there is one yardstick to which all men should aspire. Prescriptions of masculinity however vary around the world and from one situation to another. Is a man un - masculine if he does not perform as he is ‘supposed’ to perform?

The third approach is that of semiotics. Here masculinity is seen in contrast to femininity. Masculine is therefore everything that is not feminine. It is therefore seen as a discourse, one is what the other is not.

The fourth approach is the one I intend adopting in this research and is the social constructivist approach. Here masculinity is not defined as an object but as behaviour, a process through which men go in their gendered lives. It is a process and contains practices that impact on “bodily experience, personality and culture” (Connell,1995:71).

Taking all these theories into consideration, R.W. Connell (1995) argues that there cannot be one, single masculinity, but rather that there are multiple masculinities. This theory is now widely accepted by scholars writing on or about masculinity. Also, as I suggested earlier, men do not fit into one category of masculinity at all times. "... masculinity is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same" (Connell, 1995: 76). Connell's emphasis on masculinity as fluid, multiple and contingent serves as the theoretical starting point of this study.

2.3 Gender Identity

Identity, according to gender studies definitions, "is a concept which enables groups to come together around the articulation of shared experience" (Cranny – Francis, Waring, Stravropoulos & Kirkby, 2003: 36). R.W. Connell describes gender as not something that exists in bodies, but as the effects in bodies, behaviours and social relations. Thus gender identity for boys is constituted from the way in which they construct their masculinities by, for example, their participation in activities and the manner in which they behave towards others. Sport is an arena in which and an activity through which boys construct their masculine identities. "Because of the ways in which many boys construct their gendered identities, it impacts significantly on their participation and engagement with school, both in terms of their performance and in the way they behave and relate to others (Becket, 2001: 66). The ways in which boys behave can have a serious impact on the boys around them. To put it another way, the ways that boys act out their masculinity has consequences – for the boy himself, the boys around him and on the school.

Within the different types of masculinities come hierarchies. Some masculinities are founded on power over others. I will discuss gender power in more detail in a section later in this chapter. Some masculinities are more influential than others. Connell refers to these masculinities as hegemonic because they prescribe an ideal masculine behaviour for society at large. This masculinity marginalises, silences and subordinates other masculinities. In a school setting, the way in which one type of male behaviour becomes dominant (hegemonic) is complex but we know that in institutions certain types of behaviour become the norm and those who fail to conform to or to meet this ideal are or can be stigmatised. In schools, sporty masculinities are often the ones that are desired and valued and those who fail to meet the standards of sporty masculinity suffer consequence of prestige and exclusion.

Constructions of masculinity change with age. Boy's ideals and definitions change as they mature and move into different situations in their life. A boy's identity at primary school will change when he moves on to secondary school and will probably change again when he moves onto tertiary education or when he heads into the work place. Not only on this simple level does gender identity change, but it also changes with changes across different work spheres in society. For example, women are now embarking on various different careers and, boys and men are having to develop more flexible masculine identities as a result of this (Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman, 2002: 2).

Masculine identities are made up of a set of gendered practices that are forever changing and being compromised. They are multiple and are in relation to the situation the boy finds himself in. Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2002: 5) argue that identities are in fact multiple and potentially fluid; are constructed through experience and are linguistically coded. In developing their identity the person draws upon the resources available to him: from school, home or society as a whole. "Gender identity is a central component in identity construction as a whole" (Frosh, Pattman & Phoenix, 2002: 5). Constructions of gendered identities are therefore very complex issues. It is in this regard that I hope to come to understand in this thesis what the boys say about themselves and their experiences and how one can link this to their construction of gender identity.

2.4 Gender Power

All masculinities are implicated in power relations. Frosh, Pattman and Phoenix (2002:52) show that masculinities are structured as relations of power. Boys have power over other boys due to the positions they hold. For example in a school situation, the senior boys hold a position of power over the junior boys. At Connaught Preparatory, the grade seven boys hold a sense of power over the junior boys as they are the seniors in the preparatory phase of the school. While the school may give some of this power to the grade seven boys by making them prefects, giving them captaincies of teams or allowing them certain privileges, the boys themselves develop a sense of power. The boys embody some kind of ideal or masculine norm that the juniors look up to and often respect.

2.5 Types of Masculinities

Because my research involves boys and their masculinities, I will briefly touch on types of masculinities that are found. I have used the term 'type' here for convenience even though Connell cautions against reifying the term or treating it as static. Masculinities are fluid and so to try and fix them at any one point by using a term that suggests permanence is problematic. Nevertheless I will

stick to the term 'type' as a way of providing an explanatory framework for the different configurations of male gender identity which Connell himself identifies (1995). As I stated earlier, masculinities come in many forms and more than one type of masculinity can be found in a place or society. Some theories suggest that individuals occupy different subject positions themselves (i.e. that individuals can 'have' different masculinities as well, depending on the time, place or circumstance). This is a complex issue and relates to arguments about the fluidity of the concept of masculinity (on the one hand) and about the need to 'fix' analysis so we are able to say something about phenomena that are always shifting. Within this place or society, some forms of masculinity are revered as more important than others but, as I stated earlier, masculinities do not simply occur naturally. They are constructed, reconstructed and modelled and boys use the resources that are available to them in order to do this. As a result, there are many different kinds of masculinities that occur.

Connell classified masculinity into four basic groups: hegemonic (dominant form), subordinate, complicit and marginalised. Connell describes the dominant form of hegemonic masculinity to be "exemplary". This means that this form of masculinity is seen as the ultimate form. This dominant form sets standards, has popular support and damns those who fail. Occasionally real men, often celebrities or sports-stars, are considered among the exemplars, boasting the standard the dominant hegemony demands (Connell, 1995: 37, 164 - 165). The sporty boys at Connaught Preparatory in some ways represent the hegemonic norm in the school. They play a sport that is considered as the ultimate and is held in high regard by the school and the boys themselves. This dominance through sport does not apply to all sporting boys. Only certain sports in some schools hold this position. Rugby is one sport that is considered of high importance by the boys in single – sex boys' schools.

However, not all men fall within this category and boys battle to live up to these norms. It is not an easy task living up to the norms and expectations of the hegemonic position. And this reality does not change throughout boys' and men's lives. Age is important, but it is particularly significant during certain periods of the lifecycle. Adolescence is a phase in the life of a male that comes with acute anxiety. Young boys' identities are continually changing and being challenged as they construct and reconstruct their masculinities. The boys, in this thesis, are active participants as I try to understand and interpret what they say about playing sport and how they view themselves and their experiences in relation to their masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity is associated with power, and can take on forms of 'acceptable maleness' and authority. But the power is not universal but rather is applicable only in certain situations. If in a school, academic performance is revered by the school and the boys, then an example of this would be a boy that is very good at academics. Within the classroom, he may have a sense of power over other boys who do not fare as well as him. He may be confident and self-assured. On the sports field, however, he may not fare so well. He may not have the necessary skills or physique to excel and, all of a sudden, he will find himself on the backfoot, vulnerable to the power of athletic boys.

A dominant or hegemonic group may be the dominant group in terms of power, but will not necessarily constitute the majority. It does not have to be the biggest group of boys, in fact it is often only a few boys that hold this position. This group will also, as I stated earlier, change in different circumstances. These dominant groups are however, very visible in certain areas; one example being the sports field.

Connell's conception of hegemonic masculinity means that the hegemonic masculinities legitimise and naturalise the interests of the powerful – marginalising and subordinating the claims of the other groups. While I will not be dwelling on the concept of power that the first team rugby boys generate during the season, they do hold a position of dominance and influence while being in the rugby team. This emerges in their answers to questions (discussed in Chapter 4) about how they feel in comparison to boys in the other teams. Boys who do not make the first rugby team are, at least in rugby terms, subordinate to the hegemonic group. Their lack of athletic ability or willingness to take the hard knocks of rugby identify them as 'less than'. The masculinity that they embody at this moment is a subordinate masculinity.

Within society, there are always forms of dominance and subordination. The same applies for masculinity. As hegemonic masculinity is the dominant form, so in competition, there is a subordinate masculinity. Those who occupy this position stand in direct contrast to the dominant hegemonic group. They are often expelled from the dominant group and labelled by names such as "wimp, wuss, coward or geek". In the context of this thesis, the boys who do not play sport at all, form part of this group as they are ostracised from those that do play.

2.6 Sport

Sports are varied and are played for a variety of reasons. Some sports are simply played for enjoyment, recreation and fitness, while some players play as professionals. Very few men or women fall into the professional category as many people within society simply participate for enjoyment. Sports can also be divided into team and individual. While team sports provide camaraderie and team spirit, individual sports are often lonely and difficult to stay motivated for. Particular concern of this study is a team sport, namely, rugby.

Not all sports are seen in the same light as others. Certain sports are more popular and hence more influential than others. Such sports are often commercialised and become sites of media power which offer opportunities of fame and fortune for those who have exceptional sporting talents. These sports receive more media coverage, matches may be attended by large numbers of spectators and more money may be available for players and associations. In South Africa, the three most prominent (male) sports are cricket, soccer and rugby. They are the biggest unions and certainly dominate the media coverage. Weekend media coverage is dominated by Interprovincial rugby, soccer or cricket games. International games are certainly covered even when South Africa is not competing. Another example in this respect lately would be the excess salary that has been offered to the national soccer coach in the hope that South Africa can compete at a good standard at the World Cup in 2010. Rugby players here in South Africa are paid match fees with added incentives for wins. National players are mostly professionals who rely on these match fees and monthly salaries as their income. This is true however only for male sports. Women's' sports are very low key and do not receive the accolades or incentives that exist in male sports.

However, even in sports that are given lower coverage, it is interesting to note the dominance of boys or men. In a study of the starting of a chess club at a school in Australia, Ingrid Galitis (2002) tried to determine the reason for boys coming to dominate and claim the club as their own. Chess is not often seen as a 'male' dominated sport and is certainly not held in high regard by many boys. The chess club was started at a primary co – educational school in Melbourne. Both boys and girls first joined with an approximately even number of boys and girls joining at the conception. After a week the numbers fell, with about one third of the girls leaving the club. By the end of the year only three, out of the initial sixty club members, were girls. The club was highly successful, competing in competitions and acquiring trophies and titles.

Ingrid Galitis tried to determine the reasons behind this. While many boys do not consider chess highly on the sporting list, it is a game that involves precision, concentration, logical thinking and

self-discipline. The boys in this group obviously decided that this was an area for the boys to dominate, and succeeded in totally taking over the club. They dominated the numbers and positions of power within the team. Because the boys in the chess club realised that they could also dominate this area of the curriculum, they seized the opportunity. This shows just one example of the manner in which boys dominate many areas of sport.

Sport is gendered. Male sports tend to be better remunerated than female sports and within sports, male sportsmen tend to be better paid than female sportswomen. Many sports are exclusive – played either by men or women. In these cases, it is the male sports that have prominence. In South Africa, women were not permitted or recognised to play cricket or rugby until a few years back as these games were seen as exclusively ‘men’s games’. An example to the women’s extreme of this worldwide would be a sport like rhythmic gymnastics and synchronised swimming which are sports that are exclusively played by women right until this day. Women do also not compete against men in many sports and individual competitions are often even held at different venues and at different times. World cup cricket and rugby competitions are not held at the same time or even at the same venue.

Various sports also have diverse meanings for different people. As I noted in the interviews, boys, in particular, play sport for many reasons – to be with their friends; for the simple enjoyment of the game; for the level of competition that comes with the sport or as a process for the development of their masculine identity. These reasons may also all form part of why a boy plays sport. In the process of playing sport, masculinities (subordinate and hegemonic) are both reproduced and reinforced (Connell, 1987). However, the reasons for why boys play sport are not simple and may include contradictory imperatives and impulses. The reasons for playing (or not playing) sport are part of a larger process of constructing a masculine identity. Some boys may revel in the opportunity of using their eye-hand coordination and their bodies to gain prominence in the school and acceptance amongst their peers. But some boys who have these gifts may feel uncomfortable about displaying them or using them and may choose to forge an identity that does not include sporting excellence. But this is unusual. As Connell states, “sport has become the leading definer of masculinity” (1995, 54) and for this reason, the opportunity of excelling is generally taken with alacrity.

The organizational character of sport encourages competition and hierarchy among men and the exclusion or domination of women (Connell, 1995: 55). Even if boys are not consciously misogynistic or homophobic they get caught up in and have to negotiate wider gender dynamics.

2.7 Sport and Bodies

Connell (1995:56) regards the body as being “inescapable in the construction of masculinity” and that this construction is not fixed. Bodies are important and bodies matter. Bodies are continually in motion and on show when boys do sport. Playing sport means that bodies are continuously in motion and continuously on display. Because of this, boys’ bodies are continually competing against each other. Sports require the entire body to be developed, as certain skills require different muscle groups. Sportsmen who can do many sports and do them well are admired in the competitive sporting world.

The body, being exposed to skill and continuous motion in sport, competes against other bodies. By competing, the boys are continually comparing themselves to others. They will therefore rank themselves against each other. Some will match up and others will not be considered as good enough.

For the boys under research, their bodies play a huge role in defining their masculinity. At a pubescent age, when some boys are very developed at twelve and others very undeveloped, it plays an important role in their image and how they portray themselves. While a fit, strong body adds to the boys’ performance, it is also highly vulnerable.

2.8 Boys and Injuries

As a result of masculinities being produced through bodily / sporting performances, gender identity is therefore vulnerable when the sportsman can no longer perform. An example of this would be when sportsmen get injured and can no longer play the game; be it until the injury is healed or sometimes for life. Thomas Gerschink and Adam Miller performed a study on men trying to deal with disabling accidents or injuries (Connell, 1995:54). The study saw men dealing with these injuries in three different ways. The first was overcoming hegemonic masculinity by doing well in other areas. Sport, being an important part in hegemonic masculinity, can still be performed, so

men simply find other areas/sports to shine in. Others redefine hegemonic standards and exclude sport as part of the hegemonic masculinity. The third option would be for the man to reject hegemonic masculinity completely. They even criticise the stereotypes that come with hegemonic masculinity, rejecting those values that hitherto formed an important part of their lives when they were actively playing sport.

My study involved a few boys who had been injured during the season. It will be of interest to me to see later in the findings chapter, how the team I interviewed related and responded to their injuries.

2.9 Sport, Masculinity and Power

From the previous paragraphs, one can understand the importance that sport plays in the lives of boys. Sport is therefore associated with masculinity and will therefore be associated with power. Because sport plays such an important role in the lives of many boys, with it comes a form of hierarchy. If boys can play sport they are considered to be on a higher pedestal than those boys who cannot play the game. I stated earlier that boys' identities are often constructed through sport, and therefore being able to play a sport will bring with it a sense of power over other boys.

Messner and Kimmel (1995) in their research on athletes, echo Connell's observations that sport brings about a hierarchy amongst men and with it, the exclusion or domination of some men. The authors admit that sport places boys higher on the "ladder of masculinity" but they also admit that sport plays an important part in the manner in which males connect with each other. It allows boys a sense of closeness without being classified as "feminine". There is therefore a chain or set of connections between these three factors. This chain relates to the ways in which these masculinities are constructed which in turn relates to the ways in which boys talk about their own masculinities.

With power there may also be a form of aggression. Pattman and Frosh (et al, 1999) along with other authors, like Messner and Kimmel, proceed from the assumption that sports, like football, is part of a complex that creates aggressive masculinities. With the aggression comes an exclusion of boys from the dominant group. While there is undoubted validity in this approach it can sometimes operate to prevent recognition of other important features of sport. In the school arena, sport is not only an arena for boys to exclude others, but also an arena for developing friendships, breaking down class and race barriers. In this study I will keep open the possibility that sport has positive effects on constructions of masculinity and gender relations.

2.10 Masculinity, sport and schooling in South Africa

These three terms are closely intertwined. Boys develop their masculine identity through sport and sport is played, a large part of it anyway, in the school situation. Earlier I spoke of the British school situation that historically had a major impact on the development of schools, especially Independent schools, in South Africa. With the development of the school also came the influence of British sport, rugby being one of the games that was introduced.

Sport is very important in middle class, formerly white, South African schools. Interschool competitions are held for many sports and for all ages. There are even SA School competitions for sports from as early as under thirteen levels. Craven week, for both junior school and senior school level, is a highly contested inter provincial rugby tournament held each year. It is often the highlight of a boy's season to be picked to play in the provincial side and to play at these prestigious tournaments.

2.10.1 Sport, Gender and History in South Africa

Schools are seen as places where masculine values are created and developed. In this section I hope to get a broad understanding of how gender is featured in schools in South Africa. In South Africa, independent schools were based on the British public school systems. *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, published in 1857, had Squire Brown summing up the English educational aspirations of his class: "If he'll only turn out a brave, truth – telling Englishman, and a gentleman, and a Christian, that's all I want."(Randall, 1982, 2). Peter Randall in his book, *Little England on the Veld*, speaks of the English private school system that was recreated in South Africa particularly from the late nineteenth century onward. Schools not only had the influence from the British Public schooling system on which to model themselves but had British masters heading up schools and teachers teaching in the system. South African schools used to receive a constant flow of information and ideas from the British Public school system (Randall, 1982: 172). The schools also responded to the influence of white settlers (the parents of the schoolboys) who were fearful of the black working class (Morrell, 2001: 56). A way of protecting their power was to create white only boarding schools. In this way they excluded the blacks from receiving the best form of education. These independent schools thus became renowned for their elitist education.

In these forms of single – sex, boarding schools, boys were often exposed, for long periods, only to male teachers and other boys. In this environment gender values were produced and circulated.

One can therefore understand while the development of masculine identities was created in school environments. The school, the teachers and the boys themselves create gender values within the school. Characteristics of “teamwork, courage, strength, physical resilience, dependence, perseverance, honesty, loyalty and fairness were encouraged” (Connell, 2001:56). While all boys could not live up to or even accept these characteristics, they were seen as the ones that were held in high regard.

2.10.2 Sports in schools from a gender perspective

Children spend a vast amount of their time at school and as a result, “schools are seen as critical locations where gender values are created and disseminated” (Morrell, 2001, 56). This is the same for single – sex schools where boys develop their masculinity. Many schools in South Africa, in particular, place an emphasis on sport. When boys are in boy’s only schools, there is even greater emphasis placed on sport, sometimes even to the detriment of academics. Boys leave school early for sports fixtures; some boys go on tours and all of this occurs during academic term times. Schools while seen as a major site in which boys construct their masculinity, realise that sport too plays an important role in the boys construction of masculinity and therefore allow this.

Boys play sport because wider (middle class, largely white) society prescribes such activity and believes that this is ‘what boys do’. Their brothers play sport, their uncles and so too their fathers. Boys are exposed to the gendered worlds of sport at an early age. They play organised sport from as young as six years old and already the gender division line is visible. There are clubs that exclude girls and certain sports that exclude girls as well. Boys are learning therefore from a young age to exclude girls from sport participation. What appears as being a natural occurrence is in fact socially constructed. While boys and girls may play together on the sports field or during their own time, when it comes to organised sport, they are excluded. “Thus sex – segregated activities such as organised sports as structured by adults, provide the context in which gendered identities and separate gendered cultures develop and come to appear natural“(Messner, 1995: 107). When teams are chosen, the boys learn another form of exclusion. They learn to exclude those boys who are not good enough to play in their team. Team selection, therefore, plays a huge role in the identity of a boy.

Friendships are often why boys initially play an organised sport. Sports help boys establish an ‘acceptable closeness’ with other boys. While boys who do not play sport and are seen to be ‘too close’ are jeered at and often seen as gay. Boys play sport to be close to others and develop

friendships, while they desperately fear the thought of intimacy with another boy. Boys explain this by saying it is acceptable for a boy to hug another boy when a try has been scored in rugby, but totally unacceptable when they simply greet each other for the day. This is a difficult identity for a boy to try and mould and adapt to.

2.10.3 Masculinity and rugby in schools

“The entire school gathered on the stands at the far side of Trafalgar (the first team rugby field). The first team rugby gods, with their coach Mr Hall, ran through some complicated drills... So here we are back again on Trafalgar, ready for the start... the start of what will be the greatest season of rugby in the school’s history. We are no longer boys. Tomorrow we fight like men. We will only win if you are with us.” (van der Ruit, 2005: 179) This is an extract from a recent best-seller about boarding school life at an elite boys’ school in KwaZulu-Natal. It captures the place of rugby in the school’s regime as well as in the imaginations of its learners. It is written as satire but it describes the fervour that rugby evokes in independent, rugby-playing schools.

Rugby in many schools in South Africa, including Connaught Preparatory, is seen as the most powerful game for boys to play. The above quote provides an example of the intensity with which boys play rugby. Boys playing in the first tennis or swimming team do not seem to hold the same sense of power. I am not sure how this develops within the school. It is not spoken of or discussed but is something that is accepted. Even if teams, like the hockey team, could win all fixtures, boast provincial players, they would still not be held in as high regard as the rugby team.

Another example of this power would be that the main space of the playground that is used for rugby games during break. By dominating the space, the boys are emphasising the importance of the sport. Minor games, like hand tennis, are expelled to the sides of the field or restricted completely. Playing rugby during the sporting programme is not the only time that one can see the importance it plays in the lives of boys. During break times, many boys of all ages flock to the field to play the game. Clearly rugby is the game that dominates the space and membership on the field. Participation in these “disorganized teams” is as important as the game itself. These games provide arenas for the boys to prove their toughness and can enact and express their masculinities.

Playing or participating in rugby is seen as a masculine activity. During the game of rugby, boys are allowed to bond with other team members and this makes the game even more masculine.

Boys hugging after a game and celebrating seems to be accepted. It is seen as a macho activity and in the spirit of the game. When boys bond in a game situation it is accepted as something that 'real boys' do. This is seen in total contradiction to boys walking down the corridor at school and placing their arms around each other. This action, while considered very masculine in the sport situation, is seen as gay or sissy outside of the sport context.

2.10.4 Rugby Heroes

As I stated earlier, role models are extremely important for boys in their pre – teen years. Rugby is no exception. Boys at this young age often site rugby players, either provincial or national, as their role models. They actively support the local provincial team over the weekend and are ardent supporters of the springbok side. Monday mornings at school, one can hear the chatter of the weekend results of rugby games. Boys take great pride in being at the game and watching the side play. The junior sharks are a company which aims to teach boys more about the game and is supported by past provincial and national players. This is hugely supported by many of the boys at Connaught Preparatory and they take huge pride in being awarded a certificate from this company for their participation in the courses. Being selected to place the ball at the start of a provincial game or being asked to be ball boy for the game is of huge importance. Some boys are even afforded the opportunity of playing a mini match during the half time break of important provincial games. This is seen as an accolade and boys chat enthusiastically about their experiences. Some get to meet their heroes during these experiences and this is seen as a big moment for them.

2.11 School Culture

Understanding a school's culture is important when beginning to understand the learners within the environment. How boys behave in a school depends on the school culture and the boys, in turn, contribute themselves to the school's culture. School culture is often difficult to define. It seems that it is the way that things are done at a school. Stoll and Fink believe that a school's culture is the "deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously and that define in a basic 'taken – for – granted' fashion an organization's view of itself and its environment (1996: 81)" Culture is created by its participants, the learners in particular. Learners often share the same school culture that drives them to "pursue the same vision" (1996: 92). It takes time to change and yet does seem to change considerably over the years. Dominant values and philosophies on how the school is run, dictate the culture of every school. The beliefs that are shared by both the teachers and the learners play an important role in

defining the culture. The school culture of Connaught Preparatory will be taken under consideration when analysing the boys under research.

2.12. Conclusion

For many South African boys, sport plays an central role in their lives. Focusing on what masculinities are, how they are constructed and the importance that sport plays in the gender identity of boys, will bring me closer in understanding and interpreting the discussions I had with the boys concerning rugby.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The research was undertaken at Connaught Preparatory School in Durban, Kwazulu-Natal. It is a single – sex boys' independent school. The issues in this thesis revolve around the key research questions: (a) What reasons do sporty boys give for playing sport, particularly rugby? (b) How do the boys in the first rugby team see their position in relation to the rest of the school? (c) Do they feel that membership of the first rugby team gives them privileges in the school? (d) Do they see themselves as role models for junior boys? e) What are the advantages and disadvantages of this position? To try and answer these questions, I collected data by interviewing boys in the first rugby team.

Since I dealt with feelings, understandings and interpretations, my research will take a qualitative approach. The qualitative method used included unstructured interviews and observations gathered during the course of my work as a teacher in the school. The focus of the study is on how boys talk about their experiences and about themselves and how this can be related to their construction of masculinity.

3.2 Research Site

Connaught Preparatory is located in an affluent Durban suburb but draws its learners from greater Durban. The school was founded in 1924. Over the past eight decades, the school's population has grown to 430 boys. There are an additional 220 learners in the newly established secondary phase of the school. Historically, the school was exclusively for white boys and had a Christian ethos. The majority of boys are from white, middle class families; however, there are an increasing number of Indian learners within the school. The number of black learners is low although over the years the numbers have slowly increased as a result of the school's Outreach Programme. The low representation of black learners in the school is a bit of a catch twenty-two situation. We cannot get more learners here because African families do not see African learners at the school and therefore suppose that the school is a predominately White and Indian school. More African learners do not attend Connaught because it is much more expensive than other good, local suburban schools. There are exceptionally good ex – model C schools that are half the price of

Connaught Preparatory. Connaught also suffers the disadvantage that it is not located close to any African residential areas and this discourages African boys from attending. The Black learners that attend the school are often on scholarship.

Since the 1980's the school has begun to take more and more boys from race groups other than white and religious groups other than Christian. There are now almost an equal number of White and Indian learners attending and therefore a high number of both Muslim and Hindu members as well as Christians who remain numerically dominant. Because of the high number of Muslim learners, adaptations have been made in the school times to allow learners to attend prayer meetings on Friday afternoons. This all forms part of the changes in the culture and structure that Connaught Preparatory has undergone over the past few years. The ethos of the school has changed over the past few years. Although the school remains a monolingual (English – speaking), middle class environment, it now caters for a learner population of diverse religious conviction. Boys are permitted to follow their religious paths and are given time off for religious festivals that are non-Christian based.

The school's motto is "Scholarship, Leadership, Sportsmanship, and Community". Boys are "encouraged to actively pursue their interests, challenged to find and immerse themselves in their passions, guided to be responsible participants, focused to discover the pleasures of commitment, extended to enjoy the creative mix of their talents and reminded to be themselves in achieving personal excellence" (Connaught Preparation School brochure, 2005). Although these are the guidelines to which the school professes to adhere, every day life in the school is often vastly different. Conformity is still often the nature of the school and the teachers find it easier to cope with learners who conform to the norm than those who seek to find individuality and are creatively different. This is seen in the boys who do not wish to play sport. While not compulsory, teachers still try to persuade boys to participate.

The boys are encouraged to play a single sport each term. This provides little space for non – sporty boys to pursue alternative uses of school leisure time. Over the years, involvement in sport was not an issue as boys all simply played a sport of some sort. Now there are quite a few boys who opt not to play a physical game. These boys prefer to play chess or simply no sport at all. This has caused some consternation among the management at the school.

While simple participation is encouraged, boy's school sporting culture, one of winning and being leaders in their fields, often clouds the idea of simple participation. An example of this would be during the rugby season where boys are continually encouraged to play. During assemblies, masters ask the boys to play in teams to make up the numbers. Boys are asked to stand up if they do not play rugby and then are asked, in front of the whole school, as to their reasons for not playing. This is certainly not making space for non-conformity and difference even though the school motto professes to allow boys to be original and be creative in their talents.

3.3. School Rugby Season

The study was conducted during the 2006 rugby season when I interviewed all the members of the school's 1st rugby team. The season was ten weeks long with approximately eight games being played. A pre – season tour provided another four matches for the first team. The team fared fairly well, winning most of the games in the early half of the season. These were against smaller schools and seem to provide little opposition to the 1st team. The last three matches of the season were against big rival schools. The team had played one of these fixtures when I started the interviews and so their first big loss of the season was fresh in their minds. They were apprehensive about the last two games of the season. After I had concluded the interviews, I learnt that the one big rival fixture had been cancelled due to an outbreak of chicken pox at the school. This was a relief for many of the first team boys.

3.4 Sampling

I interviewed the first rugby team for the season and this amounted to twenty boys in total. This preparatory school ranges from Grade 4 through to Grade seven, with the grade seven boys being the seniors of the school. All but four boys in the team came from the grade seven classes. There is no colour quota in team selection. Nineteen of the boys interviewed were white and one was black. Although there are a large number of Indian pupils in the school, there is no representation at first team level. Many of the Indian learners opt not to play rugby and instead play chess during the rugby term. While the boys themselves see playing chess as an easy option and as a way of avoiding playing sport, the school has over the years begun to classify chess as a sport. The majority of white pupils in the team come from middle - class or professional families. The black learner is on a scholarship at the school.

Most of the boys had played in the school's first team for the majority of the season. Injuries had occurred which resulted in reserves being selected to join the squad. All of the players were interviewed, including the injured players and reserves. Their ages ranged from 11 - 13 with the median being twelve.

The sample was not randomly selected, as it was a specific team that was chosen so the demographics of the research may not seem representative but actually reflects the current racial composition of the school's first rugby team. Three members of the rugby coaching staff are involved in selecting the team. The selection process involves a series of games (trials) which are watched by the staff and which allow quite a few boys to participate and show their mettle. The selection was made in March 2006 prior to a tour to Johannesburg. Boys from both grade six and seven were invited to the trials that were held over a three-day period. The team changed slightly as the season progressed to accommodate both improvements from players in the lower teams and injuries that were sustained by players.

3.5 Type of Research

This research took a qualitative approach in order to explore the process that the boys undergo in doing gender. Qualitative methods are often used when a researcher, like myself, does not have sufficient known evidence to test hypotheses. I aimed to gather opinions, facts, stories and to gain insight into the experiences of the group of rugby players. Stenhouse (1988:49) described qualitative research methods as: "the collection and recording of data about a case or cases and the preparation of a report or a presentation of the case. It involves, generally, participant or non – participant observation and interviewing".

The purpose of the interviews was for respondents to describe incidents and feelings and for me to try and interpret their experiences and to get them to open up and discuss their views in detail not to test a hypothesis or find statistical differences amongst the group but to analyse the processes by which they construct their masculinity. The utilization of semi – structured interviews rather than a fixed set of questions allowed the participants to experience a conversational – like atmosphere and allowed the participants to respond in their own words (Patton, 1990: 280). This I see as being the strength of qualitative research. Interviews also help one glean information and data from the participants. Interviews are also flexible and adaptable which therefore allow for change and added interest.

3.5.1 Gaining Access

Being a teacher at the school meant that I had easy access to the school itself as well as to the boys who formed my sample. This was an obvious advantage for the research. This study and the interviews were conducted under the principle and guidelines of informed consent. Written permission was received from the headmaster, respondents and the respondents' parents (due the age of the participants). In addition I had to gain the confidence and trust of the respondents that is not so much an issue of ethics as of developing an approach that put the boys at their ease. Knowing the boys already and having coached many of them in other sports before, made them feel quite comfortable talking to me about their sport and themselves. Being older than the boys and of different gender may have caused a problem in the fact that I have a position of authority over them, however, when I reflect back on the interviews I found this not to be an obstacle. Boys chatted openly and were very forthcoming to me about their ideas and replies.

3.6 Sample Size

The research was based on a small scale of examples, meaning that there were only a few boys interviewed. Data was collected by using participants in the formal interview process (N = 20). All participants were members of the 1st rugby team in 2006, including boys who played only one game due to injury, etc.

Rugby is one of the most prestigious sports at Connaught Preparatory. The first team of a school is clearly held in the highest regard by both boys and the school. Being twelve and thirteen years old, the boys were also old enough to talk freely about their experiences of rugby as they had played the sport for several years. Unfortunately, the team consisted of all white boys excepting one player of colour. I think I would have found it interesting to be able to compare players of colour's attitude towards the sport and to see if they had similar views on the game.

3.7 Timing of Research

The selection of the team took place in April 2006. The team was taken on tour of Johannesburg during the Easter holidays before the season began. After returning from the trip, some boys were dropped from the squad and replaced by boys who were in the 2nd team. The team had a fairly successful season and managed to win most of their games. However, in one game, against a

fierce rival they were severely beaten (50 – 3). I conducted my interviews during the week after this loss

3.8 The Interviews

I began each interview by explaining the objectives of the research and indicating approximately how long the interview would last. I informed the participants that they could withdraw from the research at any time. All data was treated as confidential and pseudonyms were used when reporting.

I began my research by interviewing the 1st rugby team on a one to one basis, as I wanted to see how each boy reacted personally to the questions posed. Here they were not influenced by their peers' thoughts and ideas. I was hoping this would then be a clear and honest response from the boys. I recorded all interviews on tape and then transcribed the experiences. Once this was completed, I embarked on a second round of interviews. This round utilized a focus group format. On this occasion I probed issues that had been raised during the initial one-to-one interviews. Boys reacted quite differently in the group formats compared to the individual interviews. Many became far more vocal and adamant about their ideas and convictions. They seemed to fuel each others' ideas and responses to the topics. One group, in particular, became quite intolerant of boys who did not play sport at all. From being quite tolerant of their peers before, they seemed to spark a sense of fury amongst themselves towards the boys who did not play rugby or for those who did not play sport at all. These extreme views were helpful in generating contrasts in my analysis (between tolerant and accommodating views and intolerant and excluding views) in the data presentation chapter.

The respondents were not an object of study, but participants in the exploration of the research questions. After analysis, I consulted with the respondents to make sure that their descriptions of the experiences had been accurately captured. The interview process served two major purposes for my research. Firstly it was a means of capturing and gathering information with a direct bearing on the research objectives. Secondly it was used as an explanatory device to help develop relationships between me and the boys I interviewed. While I controlled the questions that were asked, the boys were free to add anything that they felt might be relevant for my research. At the end of each boy's interview, they were asked if they would like to add anything.

For the interviews, I formulated a schedule of questions. These were directly related to my main research questions. In the interviews themselves, probes and prompts were needed for the boys who are not often very forthcoming with answers. Probes were also needed for some boys as their answers were very curt. This especially applied to the quieter boys and a few of the junior boys, whose answers were short, as if they were embarrassed to answer or not at ease to chat. This only applied to the beginning of some interviews and boys tended to get more comfortable as the interview progressed.

The interview style was not haphazard and questioning was deliberate and focused on trying to elicit answers to the research questions. On the other hand, it was important to allow boys to volunteer information and hence to stray from the question schedule that I had prepared.

Nevertheless, I was concerned to obtain responses to all the questions from each boy, something that was easy to overlook in semi – structured interview contexts where expected answers take the interview away from the prepared schedule.

The tape - recorded interviews were semi structured and took on average 15 minutes per boy to complete. During the interviews, I asked the boys about four basic areas of sport: (1) their reasons for playing sport (2) how they felt about boys who did not play sport (3) the positive aspects of rugby and (4) the negative aspects of rugby. Interviews were conducted in my classroom. Some occurred during break time, others during the physical education lesson. We were lucky enough to have strict privacy during all interviews.

After individual interviews, I conducted group focus interviews to allow boys to chat in groups and feed ideas off each other. Here I selected certain boys who had demonstrated similar attitudes during the individual interviews and placed them together. The interviews took the form of in depth exploration in which respondents were encouraged to speak freely about whatever came to mind about the rugby season.

One study, similar to my study, was conducted in the UK by Frosh, Phoenix, Patel and Pattman and utilized the qualitative approach to positive effect. The topic, “What is the point of eleven men running up and down a bit of grass kicking a ball”, looked at the way in which boys talk about football and form their identities around the game. Their focus was not on how boys can be boys in ways which are socially beneficial or not anti – social, “but how different boys construct their

identities in relation to others” (Frosh, Pattman, Phoenix and Patel, 1999: 5). Their study was based on a three-year research project on the identities of 11 – 14 year old boys in various schools in London examining how boys assert themselves through football. Football is seen as a major site for the construction of gendered identities. Football produces modes of masculinity. How boys play football affects how others see them and how they experience themselves. While the research by Frosh, Pattman, Phoenix and Patel (1999) was conducted in the United Kingdom is a similar research project to my own, it was conducted in a co – educational environment. My research is based in a single – sex boys’ school and it will be interesting to compare the conclusions reached by these researchers with those of my findings. It will also be interesting to compare the results to a South African school and see if boys construct their identities in ways that are similar to their compatriots in the UK.

The 1st team contains a diverse group of boys. If I saw them out of the context of the first rugby team as a whole, their different personalities would immediately be obvious. They do not all hang around together at break times and are often involved in various other, non-sporting activities. The team included both Grade Seven and Grade Six learners and the divide between these two groups were extremely visible in their answers. The “juniors” or Grade Six learners seemed to ‘know their place’ in the team and while reserved in their bravado, enjoyed the acceptance they received from the senior members of the team. I also noted with keen interest the manner in which some of the boys spoke to me. Some were quite curt in their answers, while others seem more relaxed and chatted quite comfortably. Unfortunately, all the juniors (Grade Six boys) in the team were from my academic class, so they had a different relationship with me in that they seemed more ‘on their guard’. This meant that they seldom used slang and were extremely polite and careful in their answers. This was compared to some of the Grade Sevens whom I had never before taught. They often slouched in their chairs, used slang and were not so carefully prepared with their answers. They seemed to talk from the heart and were more open.

When interviewed in groups, talk amongst the boys was marked in certain groups by competition. Often they spoke over each other or tried to talk louder so that their opinion prevailed. One group especially, would not listen to each other and made conducting the interview quite difficult. Other groups listened intently to each others views and commented on or agreed with their team mates.

3.9 Dramatis Personae

Mr B has coached the team for the past two years and has been at the school for 9 years. He is a white, 33 years old, male teacher and comes across as rather militant and forceful. He has a softer side to him when approached and questioned and this is noted by the boys in the first team. Many boys fear him and his strict approach to sport. He played rugby at school and while not exceptionally successful himself at rugby, talks the game of rugby amongst the boys.

Team in order of age (all the names used are pseudonyms)

Harry (Captain) - Grade Seven, Scrum Half , 12 years old
Fred - Grade Seven, Right Wing, 12 years old
Andrew – Grade Seven, 1st Centre, 12 years old
Greg – Grade Seven, Loose head Prop, 12 years old
Leo – Grade Seven, Lock, 12 years old
Kevin – Grade Seven, Tight head Prop, 12 years old
Patrick – Grade Seven, 8th Man, 12 years old
Neil – Grade Seven, Lock, 12 years old
Ian – Grade Seven, Fly Half, 12 years old
John – Grade Seven, Full Back, 12 years old
Matthew – Grade Seven, Lock, 12 years old
Owen – Grade Seven, 2nd Centre, 12 years old
Ross – Grade Seven, Reserve Front Row, 12 years old
Steven – Grade Seven, Reserve Back Line, 12 years old
Trent – Grade Seven, Reserve Back Line, 12 years old
William – Grade Seven, Reserve Front Row, 12 years old
Edward – Grade Six, Hooker, 11 years old
Colin – Grade Six, Flank, 11 years old
Brett – Grade Six, Left Wing, 11 years old
Dave – Grade Six, Right Wing, 11 years old

In order to give the reader a sense of the boys that I interviewed, I shall introduce them at the beginning of this thesis. The order in which I introduce them is determined by the importance that

they play in my study. Some boys had very little to say and therefore they do not feature much in the data analysis chapter. Some of the boys, for example, are not quoted at all. Others, like Harry, Fred, Andrew and Patrick, contributed hugely to the discussion and are quoted at length in chapter 4. The boys' histories and characters are seen as a lens through which to understand their individual differences and similarities in their approaches to and experiences of sport.

Harry was the captain of the team for the 2006 season. Softly spoken, he was the only boy who had been selected for the first team in 2005 (when he was in Grade six), and so the coach decided that he should be the captain for the forthcoming season. He talks humbly about being captain and does not see it as a 'big deal'. A very talented all round sportsman, he is admired by his peers and valued as one of best sportsman at the school. Harry is a white twelve year old, from a middle class family. His father is a financier and his mother a housewife. His father was a very good cricketer during his school and university days.

The next learner who had a big impact on me and my study was **Fred**. He was one of the most interesting boys to chat to and had very definite ideas and opinions. Fred is a grade seven, twelve year old, white boy who had not initially made the first team and was therefore not part of the team that toured to Johannesburg at the beginning of the season. Slightly built and quietly spoken, he had proved himself during the early matches of the season and gained promotion to the 1st team. Fred played in the back line and was concussed with three games remaining in the season.

Andrew is also a twelve year old, grade seven, white, English speaking pupil. He is extremely bright and classified as one of the top three achievers in his grade. Popular and talented, achievements seem to come easily to Andrew, although he is humble when approached. He has an enormously compassionate side to him and his comments during the interviews revealed that. Andrew's father was a successful sportsman and achiever at both academics and on the sporting field. Both Andrew's father and grandfather were head boys of local independent high schools with his father being the recipient of the prestigious Rhodes scholarship. Andrew's father is a partner in a financial company and his mother, while holding a university degree in business, is a housewife.

Patrick is a grade seven, twelve year old, white boy. Big and physical, Patrick has been involved in incidents when he has bullied others at the school. Physically developed and 'street wise' he has an older brother at the school and seems to 'know the ropes' of the school. He is from a divorced

home and the family now lives with their mother's new fiancé. Patrick's mother is a teacher while his father works for a chemical company in England, where Patrick visits him during his holidays.

Greg is a very big twelve-year-old, grade seven boy. Although in the A - stream for academics, he tends to battle to keep up with the pace of the work. He classifies himself as an underachiever and says that he battles with academics. Being big and good at rugby, has given him a time to shine and be good at what he does. This is in opposition to how he feels in the classroom. Greg and Patrick have been the culprits of many bullying incidents in that they bully both their peers and boys in the younger grades. Greg's parents are divorced and he lives with his mother. His mother also works at the school. He sees his father on selected weekends and his father often attends his sports matches. Like Patrick, he is 'street wise' and seems to have seen all the latest films and brags about watching films on television that have high parental guidance (PG) ratings which involve scenes with violence, sex or strong language.

Kevin is the only player of colour in the team. He is an African, twelve year old boy who is at the school on a bursary. Kind and softly spoken he was reserved in the interview and did not give information readily. He opened up slightly when discussing in the group interview situation. Kevin was chosen as part of the provincial B team and is humble about his achievements. Due to the colour quota that is expected in Kwa Zulu Natal rugby, he was one of the lucky boys to be included in this provincial team. This is a huge achievement for this player. When asked of his background, he simply states that both his parents work.

Neil was seen as the 'hero' of the season. The fly half for the team, he got to kick the penalties and conversions and was the top point scorer of the season. A big, twelve year old, white, grade seven boy, it was reported that he was a serious behaviour problem in class during the rugby season. Apparently work had often not been completed on time and he had been reported as being disruptive and argumentative towards teachers. He himself had noted his change of behaviour and makes a joke of it, saying that teachers felt sorry for him because he had to work so hard on the field.

Edward, while only being a grade six learner, had a big impact on the research in that he had quite definite opinions and ideas. He is an eleven year old, white boy and has recently made a provincial u12 team. This means that he is one of the best 15 rugby players in the Kwazulu Natal area, a huge accolade for this learner. Self - assured and outspoken, Edward does not lack in confidence.

He is proud of his selection and made it known to me quite early on in the interview. Edward's father is in commodity trading and his mother is a university lecturer.

Some of the next grade six learners also played an important role in the research. While I expected them to be full of bravado and self importance, they proved to be quiet and unassuming about their obvious talent and inclusion in a very important team. **Dave** is a small, quietly spoken, white, eleven year old, lad. Highly talented in all sports and a very high academic achiever, accolades seem to come readily to him. He is extremely kind and thoughtful of his peers and he values the friendships he shares with his them. Dave played on the wing for the season. Both his parents are accountants and Dave tells me that his father was a good sportsman at school.

Colin is a very cheerful little grade six, white, eleven year old lad who plays flank. He stutters when nervous and experienced this during the interview. His peers absolutely idolize him and include him in all activities. Another very talented sportsman, he plays a variety of sports and seems to be good at many of them. He is a hard worker on the sports field and played as inside centre for the season. His mother is an attorney and his father an advocate.

Brett is an eleven year old, white lad in grade six. A talented sportsman, Brett is also talented in the classroom and is one of the top academics in his grade. He is popular amongst his peers and plays first team for a number of sports; i.e. rugby, hockey, cricket and water polo. His father is a quantity surveyor and his mother a university lecturer.

Ross, Steven, Trent and **William** are all twelve year old, white, grade seven boys. All four boys were on the reserve bench for the season and played part of the games. None of the boys played a full match for the first team.

3. 10 Limitations

I am aware of the fact that interviews are often flawed particularly when they are conducted with young people. Children sometimes shape their answers to please the interviewer. Their answers may not be a true reflection of how they feel. Being an adult and a teacher at the school means that the boys could have been on their guard when I interviewed them, trying to speak correctly and with reservation. Conducting research in the school where one teaches poses challenges. Being a teacher, I have a position of authority and power over the learners. This may affect the responses I received as learners may simply answer what they think I want to hear. Being a white,

female teacher, and interviewing boys about a predominately boy's sport - rugby - and about the ways in which they construct their masculinity, can also be considered a problem. I do think, however, that due to the fact that I coach a large number of the boys in other sports, like hockey, swimming and water polo, in the school, the boys would not have been cautious in the interviews. They were familiar with me as a person and were aware that I have substantial knowledge about sport. I was also not asking for highly personal experiences from the boys and I do not think that the learners felt uneasy when discussing the questions.

However, I did keep this factor in mind, when analyzing the experiences.

3.11 Ethical issues

I obtained ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's ethical clearance Committee. In my application to this Committee I pointed out that this project did not tackle a highly sensitive subject. Talking to boys about their reasons for playing sport and discussing their highs and lows from the season is not particularly controversial nor is it likely to evoke painful or traumatic memories. Boys were told at the outset that they did not have to answer questions that they were not comfortable answering. However, at no time during the interviews did this occur. Boys seemed comfortable about answering all questions. Some answered curtly and did not elaborate on their reasons, but most were free flowing in their answering and explanations.

3.12 Conclusion

This research explores the ways in which the rugby boys negotiate their masculine identities in the school situation through various positions such as being a boy, white, child, 1st team rugby player and school pupil (as seen in Morris, 1994; Collier 1995 in Skelton, 2001). Since very little research has been undertaken on this subject, I have had to draw on the methodologies developed in similar contexts to inform my research design.

In the next chapter I describe and analyse the material which I gathered in the research process using the research instruments and approaches described in this chapter.

Chapter 4 – Data Presentation and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

Boys use rugby culture as a vehicle through which they can legitimately perform a particular brand of 'powerful' masculinity. Consistent with studies of a similar nature (see Skelton 1997; 2000; Swain 2000) this masculinity can be described in positive terms as promoting physical skill and strength and positive social interaction such as friendship and teamwork but it can also be described in negative terms in the sense of providing a context where physical domination in the form of violence and the marginalisation of femininities or effeminacies are not only acceptable but considered to be the norm. It is important to note here that the performance of this brand of masculinity cannot be understood without contextualisation within the boys' peer culture.

Masculinity brings with it power relations. This chapter observes the manner in which the boys in a predominately white, middle class preparatory school and through the medium of rugby demonstrate this. Although the school has gone through a tremendous transition with the changing demographics in South Africa, the gender regime is still heavily vested in rugby. How this occurs is observed through the following methodical argument: Firstly, I observe the process by which the boys construct their masculinity through the manner in which they talk about their sport, their movements, and the way they play the game. This is then linked to the power aspect (as described in chapter 2). Here I observe how these boys give content to hegemonic masculinity that is seen as the dominant masculinity and evoking toughness, power and domination. Interestingly, Connell's first book published in 1987 was called "Gender Power", and it argued that some boys and men had gender power over other boys and men. The dominant masculinity predicated on power inequalities was termed hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity does not have a set content. It is fluid, constructed, contested and hence needs constantly to be defended and re-made. This process feeds male insecurities but also requires boys and men to be part of a project

of either defending or challenging hegemonic masculinity. In this study, I show how boys participated in the process of making hegemonic masculinity.

While the school has transformed vastly over the past few years, its gender regime is still heavily influenced by sport and the boys themselves perpetuate this. But the boys do not only contribute to hegemonic masculinity, they also undermine it and challenge it by contributing to counter hegemonic discourses. An example that I shall develop later in this chapter, is of the boys who site playing rugby for fun, for developing friendships and play down the winning aspect.

4.2 Reasons for playing sport

At the outset of the interviews when I asked the boys their reasons for playing sport, I expected to hear about how playing rugby reflected their understandings of what is required for a boy to be accepted as 'manly' by his peers; that is what constituted a form of hegemonic masculinity and how the boys attempt to meet the hegemonic norm or standard.

Fred: It's what we do... who we are...we all do it

Patrick: Boys play sport... we just do...if you don't play...like rugby...you're nothing

Andrew: For fun ... enjoyment... the exercise

The responses of the boys immediately showed that there was no one reason, common to all, for why rugby was the sport of choice. Their answers reflected three different approaches to sport. The first, Fred's reply, was an example of how sport played a part in defining who he was, part of his masculinity. This first group of boys play rugby because it is what everyone does. These boys cannot see out of the box of sport. For them there is no life without sport. Sport is not simply an organised school game in the afternoon, but also includes break time games, activities and lessons of physical education. Patrick's reply was an example of the group of boys who see the power that sport can bring; in particular the game of rugby. This second group of boys see rugby as a 'real man's' game. Their sport is not for the small or the weak. This group could not understand boys who did not play sport. They isolated the other boys and spoke in derogatory terms of them. Here the link between power relationships and hegemonic masculinity is shown. The way this group of boys talk about their sport and their performances gives content to hegemonic masculinity which in turn reflects issues of inclusion/exclusion and gender power. Andrew's group, while all played rugby and should have been grouped into the hegemonic group, contributed to the counter – hegemonic group. This last group played sport for the enjoyment of the game. They showed

tolerance of those that did not play and often had friends who did not play the game. Often their idea of sport was for long term enjoyment of the game.

Some boys also saw sport as playing a fundamental role in the development of young sporting stars for the future.

Brett: Playing in the first team is good, you can use it on your cv... you know when you apply for scholarships for high school... they look for things like that.

Many boys saw being “successful” at 1st team primary school level as a bridge and opening towards high school. Brett was very aware of this and commented that being selected to play for the first team meant that he could place this on his curriculum vitae. Having the “1st team rugby” written on it would boost his curriculum vitae and serve as a testimonial. The boys may be young but they are already highly aware of how marketable they are. They know the requirements for them to receive scholarships and bursaries to schools.

Some boys even saw themselves as having careers in the game in the future.

Edward: Maybe I can play rugby for a career... you know... play for the Sharks... you can earn a lot of money doing that.

This is an interesting comment to make at this age. What is extremely sad is that sport, on an elite level, is not available to all, especially higher up in school. Those who lack size or the skill required may have enjoyed the fruits of being seen as members of an elite at primary school level but may have to choose alternate behaviours higher up or even face marginalization from the main stream in which they were comfortably accommodated during their primary school years (Malina, 1999). This may be a difficult adjustment to make given the status and recognition that is bestowed on them at primary school level.

4.3 Playing rugby

Patrick: Rugby is the only game that counts... it's not like cricket or hockey

Rugby is still by far the most popular game played by the boys at Connaught Preparatory. It is not simply the participation in after school sports that are important for boys, but boys actively engage in rugby style games throughout the year during break time, before and after school. I observed the boys during break and it is quite amazing to watch how ten small games can all be played simultaneously on the same field during break times. Boys run across one another without anyone's game being disrupted. What looks to the adult eye, as complete chaos, is in fact highly organised and structured games with specific rules to which all abide. Balls fly over into other games, get thrown or kicked back and the games then continue. Break times at the school have specific rules of no tackling, but boys will try their luck and will tackle if they can possibly get away with it. Competition is fierce and even boys who did not play rugby as a sport, seem to join in the game to avoid being ostracised. Games are generally played within a grade, that is, the grade fours will generally play together. The grade seven boys game is tough and physical with boys often being tackled hard into the ground. Smaller grade seven boys seem to float around the periphery of the game in the hope, I would think, that they are not going to be thrown the ball. They are however, still participating. Boys who feel totally out of their depth tend to join in games of the lower grades. At times the juniors may watch on the sidelines, the games of the grade seven boys and it is here that one can see the boys in the first team's pride and skill at work. Here one can understand that while the school has gone through enormous change, it is the boys, themselves, who perpetuate the rugby regime. Through their constant playing of the game, they are reinforcing the gender regime that is heavily vested in the game of rugby. Listening to the boys further during the interviews, this was further emphasised.

4.4 "It's what everyone does"

Fred's reply that it was what everyone does was the first connection that sport played an important link in the construction of boys' hegemonic masculinity. Amongst rugby playing boys there is a common passion for sport which props up the hegemonic status of rugby in the school. However there are also fault lines which become clear when boys talk about their reasons for playing and about their fears (of failure, injury). These disclosures show that hegemonic masculinity within the school is not monolithic and also that boys who are the 'frontline troops of patriarchy' and exemplars of hegemonic masculinity are not exempt from frailty and vulnerability. It is these countervailing statements which can be seen to carry the prospect of change within hegemonic masculinity. Whether or not the content of hegemony changes is partly dependent on the role of the school which also has a role in keeping rugby to the forefront.

Identity is produced in everyday school contexts and the game of rugby is one way that Fred produces his gender identity. The image of sportsmen portrayed on television, is emulated and copied by the boys at Connaught Preparatory. They have a fantasy and ideal in their mind of the ideal male. They struggle to find an identity and acceptable masculinity, but being actively involved in sport seems to supply an outlet.

The heading for this section was a response from one of the boys when asked why he played sport. Fred is hereby linking his sport with the construction of his masculinity and his identity.

Fred: Its just part of my life... it's who we are... everyone does it.

Of course not everyone does sport, but for Fred all who mattered, all in his world, played sport. The fact is that within society all men are grouped as simply 'men'. Fred, in his simple way, was reinforcing this. Rugby was a game that all boys should play. Because some boys were better at the game than others, this allowed them to be in different teams. Fred did not differentiate himself from boys in other rugby teams, but from boys who played no sport at all. For Fred, sport was not a part of his gender identity it was, in fact, his gender identity. All that he did was part of his identity and for him all that counted was sport. He was not particular about only playing rugby, as long as boys played some form of sport. Because the interviews were held during the rugby season, for Fred the only sport being played at the moment was rugby and therefore all his energies were focused on this sport.

All boys should play rugby according to Fred. He seemed unable to grasp that rugby was not a sport that either suited all boys or was even a sport that actively encouraged all boys to play. He placed all boys in one homogenous box.

4.5 "Rugger Boys"

Hegemonic masculinity linked with toughness and power, plays a major role in the accepted, dominant masculinity. It also holds the most authority and status. Rugby players, due to the nature of the game, are therefore important role models in this masculinity. Here I look at the second group of boys who see rugby as the ultimate sport. For these boys rugby is for real boys, the

'rugger boys'. Boys in this group, by their actions and their words, help to give hegemonic masculinity at Connaught Preparatory a particular 'rugger' orientation.

The 'rugger boys' see rugby as being a game of physical strength and skill. In playing rugby they emulate their idols and mirror the images portrayed of real men on television.

Me: So why do you think some boys don't play rugby?

Fred: They're too small for the game. You know... they are little.

Rugby is mainly for the bigger, stronger boys.

During the interviews, when asked how they respond to boys who do not play rugby at all, the answers ranged from feeling sorry for the boys, to absolute disassociation. Many of the boys, in their answers, stated that some boys were just not up to it: they were too small or their parents did not want them playing the game. When they discussed these issues and how they felt about these boys, the pattern of conversation ranged from pity to outrage. Those who pitied the boys said they understood why they could not play as they were too small for the game.

This was an interesting observation from Fred, as some boys were themselves as small as the boys they were discussing. Fred was all of forty kilograms and had himself been badly injured during the season, but this did not deter him. He was simply braver than his fellow mates who "blamed" their size (being too small) for not playing the game.

Some boys, like Harry and Patrick were almost outraged at the boys who did not play at all. This became very evident when we chatted in group discussion interviews. The boys seemed to egg each other on.

Me: So why do you think some boys don't play rugby?

Harry: They're fat and lazy... they don't even try

Patrick: Ja, they just go home and sit in front of the TV.

Harry: At least we have something to do in the afternoons...

Patrick: They just play TV games and stuff like that.

Through the eyes of the boys, one can notice the intolerance and exclusion of boys who do not conform to the 'school routine' of playing rugby and in general, sport. Here the boys take very traditional positions of being mature in relation to those boys who were physically uncoordinated (Pattman, Frosh, Phoenix and Patel, 1999 : 9). Their hierarchy was clearly noticeable. They placed themselves above boys who did not play sport or rugby.

Both Harry and Patrick felt no compassion or understanding of boys who did not play sport at all. They simply thought that all boys should play sport. The conversation went further when I asked them whether it was not possibly due to their size or maybe they did not like sport was possibly their reasons for not playing. This was foreign to them, unacceptable.

Patrick: ... but look at Fred. He's little and plays...being small is no excuse... they just don't wanna...

Being small was not an excuse for these boys, the group of boys rather stuck to their idea that they were simply lazy by not playing. When asked in the group interview, Harry later thought that maybe boys did not play because their mothers did not want them to play. This led to an outburst of laughter. The concern from their mothers made the boys seem more of a 'sissy' to these boys. The fact that their mothers had to intervene on their decisions for not playing rugby was laughable. Patrick and Harry saw themselves as being mature enough to make their own decisions regarding sport and certainly did not need the intervention of their mothers to tell them what they could and could not play. They were daring and brave and could face the roughness that was associated with rugby. Talking in a group situation certainly was of interest to me. Gender identities were seriously discussed and questioned. I am not sure if all boys in this group would have been so critically opposed to non – playing boys if this discussion has occurred individually. But within the group scenario, they did not want to seem soft in front of their friends. Here these boys are giving content to the hegemony that is accepted by the school. They are making the 'guidelines' of what is accepted and what is not. These were the only three boys interviewed that had some real dislike for boys who did not play rugby.

Interestingly, no boy specifically mentioned race as to the reason for boys not playing sport. They mentioned the non-playing boys in one homogenous group.

Harry: They just don't play rugby.

Patrick: Rugby is just not for them.

At Connaught Preparatory only one player of colour, Colin, played rugby in the first team. I think the boys were polite when chatting to me by not mentioning race as to the reason for boys not playing sport and would not want to be viewed as racist. Very few Indians play rugby at Connaught, yet the boys made no mention of this.

4.6 Physical Aggression

I mentioned earlier that I would link power relations with hegemonic masculinity. This section looks specifically at this connection. The boys above were the verbally, physically, aggressive boys, those who were intolerant of those who did not play. Many of the boys saw physical aggression as one of the main draw cards for playing rugby. Physical aggression has long been associated with male behaviour. There are several aspects worth noting from the interviews with the boys regarding physical aggression. When asked for the best features of playing rugby, some of the answers included:

Andrew: You are allowed to test your limits... you get pushed quite far...

Fred: ...to get physical...

David: Tackling... hitting someone really hard that they go down... especially someone really big...

Colin: ... the tackling... you know using brute force

The physical side was an important reason for the boys playing the game. They were proud of making big tackles; this increased their self worth and upped their masculine identity. The bigger

the tackle on the largest opponent made them more respected by both their team-mates and the spectators. They also explained to me that it was possibly also one of the reasons behind boys not playing they game. They would be too small or too scared of taking the tackles or hits. Ross, one of the boys on the reserve bench was dropped to the second side for the rival match. I asked him if he was sad about being dropped just before one of the big games of the season.

Ross: No ways... do you know how big the first team boys were?

I was happy to play in the 2nd team for that game... at least I did not have to tackle some of those big okes... no way!!

While Ross would have lost his status of playing for the first team for this match, he was happy not to have to face the big tackles. This was of interest to me. While he came across in the interview as big and tough he opted rather to play for the lesser team when the challenge got tough. This is yet another area of boys' hegemonic masculinity being complex and fluid. While Ross is not now forming part of the subordinate group, his hegemonic position is certainly being tested.

While the best feature of rugby was being able to tackle other boys, it also proved to be their biggest fear. Being tackled by someone even larger than themselves was considered one of the worst features of rugby, along with injury.

Risk taking is a behaviour long associated with boys and men and this was no exception for this team. Boys understand the fact that by playing at first team level the risk of injury is greater. They presume that because they are playing stronger and tougher opposition, their risks are higher. Not once did they consider that the standard of rugby was better.

Minor injuries were seen as signs of warfare. Boys were quite happy to show me signs of tough games - grazes on their knees, ruck marks on their sides and backs. One boy, Leo, even commented that he could not remember a game when he was not injured. But he did add that this did not stop him from playing each game. By concealing the pain, he was sucking it in and showing that he was "man enough" to play the following week. Accepting the risks involved in the game of rugby and tolerating pain are ways of boys connecting masculine experiences with sport (White, et al, 1995: 177). No signs of weakness could be shown. Unless injuries were serious enough to have you sidelined for the week, you showed no signs of weakness, but simply bore the injuries with pride. By showing me their injuries and war wounds, the boys could prove that they have survived

the experiences of rugby. Taking one for the team was considered a praiseworthy achievement - character building. These were the “macho lads” (Mac An Ghail, 1996) or “rugger buggers” (Bhana, 2002).

4.7 The boys as role models

The boys, in their mannerisms and in the manner in which they talk, give content to hegemonic masculinity and this, in turn, is fed back into the school.

Patrick: At break... you know... the juniors watch us... they watch our skill.

Many of the boys interviewed saw themselves as role models for the junior boys. Playing at break time with the big rugby ball gave them an opportunity to ‘show off’ in front of the school. Playing well against opposition teams while all the other teams were made to sit and watch also gave them an opportunity to show their skill and knowledge of the game to their peers.

The boys spoke of their position in the team in relation to the rest of the school. They commented on the way their peers reacted towards them and how they felt towards them. Mention was also made of the opportunities that the school and teachers can give to them because they were in the first team.

4.7.1 By their peers

The recognition of peers fuels the processes by which the 1st team’s values are plugged into the hegemonic masculinity of the school itself. I stated earlier that hegemonic masculinity was not a fixed set of contents, but was in fact given content by the boys themselves. Recognition by their peers was important for the boys. This recognition was secured by public symbols that distinguished 1st team rugby players from the rest of the school boys. They were entitled to don special rugby jerseys and had their numbers (indicating which position they play in) on their backs of their jerseys. At the start of each season, there is an official “handing over” of jerseys. A tour squad is announced and then when they return from the tour, the ‘official’ fifteen are announced and jerseys are given to these boys. The boys in the team and their peers hold this session in high regard. The boys also explained to me that there is a rule that the boy who plays in the jersey for the most number of games during the season, gets to keep the jersey at the end. This factor had

proved a huge stumbling block for one lad. Fred had not been part of the touring squad to Johannesburg and had also not been part of the initial handing over of jerseys. He had, however, proved himself in one of the earlier matches and had been called up into the team. During the season, Fred had unfortunately been injured through concussion and while having to face the fact of not being able to play for the remainder of the season was only part of his troubles; he also faced the prospect of having to hand his jersey over at the end of the season.

All boys interviewed liked the idea that being in the first team brought them recognition both from their peers and their teachers and coaches. Recognition also came in the subtle form of field space.

Me: Does rugby bring anything positive?

Neil: Ja... at break time we are allowed to kick the ball.

Me: But surely all boys are allowed to do that?

Neil: No, only first team boys... we can get in some extra practice. The other boys are only allowed to use tennis balls, we get to use the full size rucker ball. The coach has given us permission to do this... so the break teachers can't say anything to us.

During break time, other boys were only allowed to play with tennis balls but some first team members were given permission to kick for poles. Being allowed a bigger ball and obviously commanding a larger area of the field, gave the boys a sense of recognition. Other boys would either simply watch them kicking or offer to 'fetch their balls' behind the post. Dominance of space in the playground was a powerful tool for some of these boys. They got to show the rest of the boys how good they were at the sport - this was a powerful position to be in. They had arrived and were seen as cool. Being cool is an important aspect in many a young boys life. Now during break time their peers and, even more importantly the junior boys in the school, would watch them kick for poles. They now possessed a control over the other boys.

Another big attraction of playing in the first side was that of officially running onto the field with the crowd watching. This was a time for them to 'show their muscles'.

Patrick: Do you know how cool it feels to run out on the field...
especially the night games... there's lots of people watching...
and with the lights and all... it's a fantastic feeling.

While all the other teams got to run on to the field at the start of each game, the first team had a tunnel made for them by the lower teams and got to run through this at the start of the fixture. This was seen as a huge privilege for the boys. The junior boys were all there in admiration of the first team running on to the field. The first team, here, were certainly seen as role models for the juniors. This was a place that the juniors aspired to be part of in the future years.

4.7.2 By the school

As I have said before, while the school itself does not alone establish hegemonic masculinity, it does a lot to uphold and reinforce it. Privileges are bestowed upon the team by the school. Some are physical features like the different rugby jerseys as explained above. Other features are somehow 'created'. These can range from how the masters behave towards the team to how they address the team in front of the other boys.

Me: What was the highlight of your rugby season?

Greg: Being man of the match... you know we get our name mentioned in the school weekly report. The teachers also congratulate you more... they say... like... well done on the game.

Me: Do they choose 'man of the match' from other teams?

Greg: No, only from the first team... the others don't really matter.

For the boys interviewed, many boys spoke about recognition from teachers; be it academic teachers or sporting coaches. Being in the first team made them more noticeable by teachers. The camaraderie between them and the coaches was also greater. The boys commented on coaches chatting to them more about their game and giving them tips for their next game. This was clearly

not evident for boys playing lower down. The boys seemed to have developed a closer relationship with their coaches. This was highly noticeable during the interviews when the boys referred to their coach as either Mr B (shortened version of the teachers surname) or simply as Coach.

For all the boys the attitude of both the coaches and the academic teachers had changed since they became members of the first rugby team. The boys certainly felt that the school bestowed more power on them in this position.

In this case, while rugby is a bonding activity for some young boys in primary school, it is not antisocial, but it does create divisions within the school between those who play (or excel) and those who do not. Recognition was also achieved by being named part of a team that travelled to Johannesburg for a pre - season tournament. This was a huge privilege.

Me: Why do you play sport?

Andrew: ... and then there's the tour... its a great atmosphere...
team spirit.

Colin: ... you also get to go on tour. For the Johannesburg
tour they chose 20 players, so I know that I am one of
the top 20 best players in the school... that's cool.

While only twenty boys were selected for the tour, the selection of this touring squad, caused a bit of concern for some of the boys.

Me: How did you feel when you made the team and some boys did not?

Patrick: Some boys should never had made the touring team...
they are only in Grade six and will get another chance
next year... some grade sevens were left out... but now they have proved
themselves and are playing in the first team.

Because of the importance of the touring squad, the team selection too was important. Patrick was obviously not happy that some Grade Six players had made the touring team above his Grade

Seven friends. By making their way into the first team later in the season was a way of him proving to the coach that he had made an error in the team selection.

4.7.3 By making Provincial Teams

Two boys from the side had made provincial teams during the season. One had made the U13 development team (Kevin) and the other an U12 team (Edward). Kevin made no mention of his team selection until I brought it up in his interview. For him he was proud of his achievement, but made no big fuss about it. When questioned about the team he merely made mention of where the tournament was going to be held and that they were going to a place he had never before visited (Frankfurt in the Free State).

Edward had a rather different approach. He told me very early on in the interview.

Edward: Do you know that I made the u12 rugby team that are going on tour during the holidays...(I nod)... ja... its really cool.

Me: How does that make you feel?

Edward: I have good self - esteem... I believe in myself... so I go in harder in the tackles. Now that I have made the provincial side I have more confidence... it influences you... I'm good at the game.

For Edward, being selected to the provincial side was his form of recognition. Making the first side was not good enough he needed further recognition. This also made him stand out amongst his peer group of first team players. I was interested that he made mention that because he had been selected; this made him 'good at the game'. I think for Edward it gave him another notch in his identity. He placed himself above the boys in the first team.

4.8 So how good are you?

Boys in the first team seem to hold a position of power over boys who do not play rugby or who play in the lower teams. While they hold this position of power, it also makes them vulnerable. Incidents like loosing a game played a role in the boys' identity. While they played in the first team and held a position of power over other boys, the boys realised the vulnerability of this position. Playing in the first team may have put the boys on a pedestal and given them power over the other boys but because the boys looked up to them and what they did, this position was vulnerable. When the team won and played well the other boys looked up at them, but when they lost and lost by a large margin, this position of power was questionable.

The interviews were conducted just after the first team had incurred their first big loss of the season against a rival local team. While the boys spoke positively of their season, they were saddened by their recent loss and tried to come to terms with it.

Me: What is the worst aspect of rugby?

Greg: Loosing... especially when you loose big...

Me: Why does this matter?

Greg: Everyone thinks we are useless... but we're just too small... the boy I played against must have weighed at least 100kgs...

Me: And what do you weigh?

Greg: Only 44kgs... there is no way I could have tackled him.

Me: What's the best feature of rugby?

Edward: Winning... and knowing you have played your best.
But its not fun when you play your best and still are
beaten... its like... not fair.

While an obviously better team beat the boys, their pride made them try and understand otherwise. By giving the excuse of being smaller than the other team was one of the ways of them dealing

with the loss. This is an interesting change of thought. Earlier the boys said there was no reason for boys not playing sport – even small boys could play. But their reason for the loss was because they were too small. Playing in the first team conferred status in the school and confirmed that these boys were good at the game. However, by losing they are possibly not good at the game. It evokes anxiety in the boys about their own masculinity and threatens their position.

4.9 The down side of playing 1st team

As with the previous section, the boys all began to realise the fragility of their position that playing in the first team brought. While playing in the first team brought many positive privileges, there was a down side to playing in this team. One of negative aspects was the risk of injury.

Being injured during the season would mean that their position in the first team was threatened. I am not sure if boys were worried about the physical injury that could come with rugby or the adjustment they would have to make when not playing for the first team any more. This would mean an adjustment in their identity.

Some aspects of the game worried boys even though they were not involved. One boy, Patrick, was seriously worried about collapsed scrums. When I asked him if he was involved in scrumming, he replied that he was in the back line because you had less chance of getting injured there than in the scrum. The scrumming was still of concern for him and he viewed this as one of the most dangerous aspects of the rugby game.

White, et al, reports on “how participation in violent sport, with its potential and actual injurious outcomes, reinforces and naturalizes notions of masculinity” (1995:159). Boys saw making a “hard tackle”, especially on someone quite big, as drawing signs of respect from both team members and those watching. One very small Grade Six boy in the team when asked if his friends supported him during the season, openly answered:

Dave: Ja, like Clive, he’s on the inside of me in the field...
he plays flank and I am on the wing. I always ask him
to tackle the guys before they get to me.

While Dave clearly did not understand what I meant by the question, I found his response quite honest. Support for Dave came from his friends on the field, not only spectators. Clive was not much bigger than Dave, but that's what friends did for one another. By Clive tackling the player before he got to Dave, it cut the risks of Dave getting injured.

While rugby was a sport that could involve serious injury, it was still worth the prestige that was bestowed on this sport. Sports that did not involve violence or run the risk of injury were down played. Boys who did not play rugby could have been in the chess team or been good at academics. Boys spoke of these boys with a carefree attitude and they were devalued as more masculine identities are produced during sports that are confrontational and have high levels of contact.

Interestingly, boys loved to play in the first team when they played smaller or weaker opposition; but when playing larger and tougher opponents, they preferred to play in the lower teams. This paradox seemed to haunt most of the players.

Me: How did it feel to watch the game instead of play?

Fred: (Fred is sidelined due to injury)

Its fine... especially when they play big opposition...

Like last night... they were beaten 57 - 3.

Fred had been devastated by being injured and not being able to play the rest of the season. However, he was quite comfortable with the fact that he was not playing this specific game. He used words like 'them' when referring to the first team. While he, only a week before, had been part of this team and held it in such high regard, when they had lost by such a great margin, he did not want to be a part of the team anymore. Because of the huge loss he pulled himself from the team. Throughout the interview, although he was injured, he still considered himself part of the team - that is - until now.

The team had enjoyed a fairly successful season up until the last week before the interviews. It seems that they had played the weaker school teams first and had recorded some good wins.

Unfortunately the tougher opposition were still to come. Fred had been concussed during the season and unable to play any more matches and seemed quite grateful that his season was over before the tougher games arrived. He distanced himself from the rest of the team and spoke often about “his season” in comparison to the rest of the team’s season.

Me: Are you sad you did not get to play in last night’s game?

Fred: No, not when they are beaten like that... and the guys were huge... I am sure they were over aged.

While rugby was considered by many of the boys as the most masculine game one could play, when asked about their thoughts on the end of the season, their ideas seemed to shift.

Me: The season is nearly over, what happens now?

John: Well... its okay ‘cos we play hockey next term and that’s cool. I’ve joined an outside club already so I hope to make the first team this year.

Me: Is hockey as cool as rugby?

John: Ja, you still get to tackle... although slightly different... I guess. But you are still playing in a team... and you get to have team talks and you have to play with each other.

For John, it seemed the aspects of rugby that were of most concern to him were the tackling and the team bonding. These factors featured in both rugby and hockey seasons. Interestingly, he said that he did not feel the same about the cricket season even though he played in the first team. Cricket is seen in high regard at the school but John noted that you did not have a game plan at cricket; everyone seemed to do their own thing on the field. There was no feeling of team spirit or closeness that was felt in the rugby season.

4.10 It’s a game for all

Hegemonic masculinity involves a sporting toughness, hardness while also excluding those boys that are not able to play the game. However, some of the 1st team rugby players pointed out that the game could include boys who might not be skilled ball players and who had bodies that might not look sporty. Andrew, for example, viewed rugby as a sport for all.

Me: What's the best feature of rugby?

Andrew: You are allowed to test your limits - you get pushed quite far. It also has different physical attributes... short people can play in the scrum or scrum half and then the bigger boys or tall boys can also play... everyone has a place to play.

Andrew clearly liked the idea that rugby was extremely accommodating for all players. He never saw someone as being too small for the game. Simple participation was what Andrew was noting. He said there was no reason for boys not playing the game. This makes for a dilemma in Andrew's understanding of sport. While he empathised with boys who did not play, he saw no real reason for them not to play the game.

Andrew: Like Daniel, he doesn't play, but he comes to watch every game... he's a cool friend.

Daniel and Andrew are in the same academic class at school. Both are good academics and while Andrew is also a strong sportsman, Daniel plays little sport. These two friends seem to share an understanding. Daniel does not play rugby and Andrew accepts this and remains his friend. Here Andrew is contributing to the counter – hegemonic group. While a strong player who has all the necessary physical attributes that contribute to hegemonic masculinity, his understanding of the game and reasons for playing it, contradict the hegemonic regime. Here, the third group of boys is understood, those that constitute a counter – hegemonic group.

While Patrick and Harry saw the negative side of boys not playing sport and were condescending of them, all the others maybe noted the fact that some boys didn't play but were not condescending or mocking. Most of the boys showed understanding and compassion.

Colin: It's okay that some guys don't play... some are good at other sports. You know they play tennis... some swim... some even choose to play chess... I can't play chess... I'm useless.

Brett: Some of my friends don't play... they are swimmers and swim all year round... that's cool for them... I suppose.

Dave: Rugby is not a game for everyone... we can't all play.

These were the junior boys in the team and I somehow expected them to act with more bravado, but this proved not to be the case. All of them understood that not all played the game of rugby. Not one of them spoke down of non – rugby players. They even valued friends that did not play the game, yet came and supported.

4. 11 Conclusion

From the boys' interviews, I realised and noted several main ideas. Firstly the role that sport played in the lives of these boys is vastly more important than I had imagined. For some, their lives were sport. Their identity was not made up of sport, their identity was sport. Their identity and self-esteem was established in comparison to other boys and related to how well they could play the game. Sport was therefore an integral part of their identity; building up their own and comparing themselves to others. They thus gave content to the hegemonic masculinity of the school.

Secondly, while rugby gave some of the boys status and power, it also made them hugely vulnerable and rendered their masculinity fragile. The power was not total power and continuous: every boy felt the vulnerability that playing in the first team exposed.

Thirdly, while many boys contributed to the content of hegemonic masculinity in the school, there were a few boys in the team who also contributed to counter – hegemonic discourses. This group accepted the boys who did not play and sited playing for fun and enjoyment as the main reason for their playing of the game.

Chapter 5 - Conclusion

5.1 Overview of the Study

This study set out to examine and understand the process through which boys constructed their masculinities through the medium of the team sport, rugby. Using qualitative methods and listening to learners in both individual and group interviews, I tried to better understand their positions. The analysis and examination highlighted the importance that sport played in the construction of young boys' masculinities. Understanding children, and boys especially, and the construction of their gender identities gives one a greater insight into the lives of the young boys who played in the Connaught Preparatory School's 1st rugby team and who constitute the study group of this study. It also asks teachers and schools to abandon the idea that "boys will be boys". Not all boys are the same and they are never 'simply boys'; they are forever facing dilemmas and choices in their lives.

This thesis finds that sport, and in particular, rugby, is a central feature of boys' constructions of masculinity. Due to the physical nature of rugby and the hype that surrounds and the support that is given to the sport, it has become part of the hegemonic learner culture at Connaught Preparatory School. The hegemonic masculinity constructed and enacted by the boys is not fixed; it is contested and changes. The 1st XV rugby team and its members are an important part of the process that gives content to the masculinity that is hegemonic at Connaught Preparatory. The boys try and live up to the ideals of masculinity that they see on television, hear from and see in their fathers and find in other boys. In selecting a set of sporty values, these boys perpetuate rugby as the preferred sport and a rugged school boy masculinity as the hegemonic gender identity of the school. "Boys are subject to pressures of hegemonic patterns of conduct in different ways and they struggle in the construction of their gender identity" (Bhana, 2002: 206).

While the 1st rugby team aspire to meet the ideals of hegemonic masculinity at the school, they inevitably fall short and this renders them vulnerable. They are vulnerable in a number of ways. Their bodies are prone to injury and when they are injured they are unable to contribute to the hegemonic masculine norm and, in failing to do so, they run the risk of being banished to the margins. In addition, when they are fit and playing rugby for the first team, they run the risk of humiliation when heavy losses are incurred against rival teams. Susceptible to these conditions makes their construction of masculinity a delicate and fragile situation to be in.

While the boys contribute to hegemonic masculinity they also, at times, undermine it by contributing to a counter hegemonic masculinity. Some boys place their emphasis on the fun of playing sport rather than on winning. They emphasize the friendships that playing rugby makes possible and note the importance of caring for one's fellow rugby players. When these values are expressed, they threaten or at least challenge the win-at-all costs attitudes of the school (teachers, coaches and boys).

Among the pressures that the boys have to deal with is the pressure placed on them by the school. This is a pressure to conform but it also comes with privileges. Despite the school philosophy professing to uphold equal opportunities and treatment of all learners, the boys that played in the first rugby team were certainly afforded privileges and opportunities. These privileges and opportunities were conditional – on continuing to play for the rugby team, on winning – and came to an end when the rugby season was replaced by the cricket season. The boys appreciated the conditionality of their power and were aware of its limits and dangers. So while schools may think they are doing the right thing by affording these boys extra privileges they are also exposing these boys to an array of vulnerable situations that they must understand and endure.

5.2 Implications of the Study

This study highlighted that rugby is a major site for the construction of gender identities. Rugby produces certain modes of masculinity where particular boys are located in relation to others. Boys in this position exhibit a particular form of masculinity. This can be understood as the hegemonic or dominant form. Being good at rugby gives the boys status and it affects how they are seen and how they experience themselves (Pattman, Frosh, Phoenix and Patel, 1999: 23). Being in the first side allows them to establish a pattern of hierarchy. Hierarchy is developed within their peer group and amongst the boys in the rest of the school. During the rugby-playing season (the second and

third school terms) the first team rugby players have iconic status amongst the learners at the school and thus contribute to the establishment of masculine norms at the school. What the first team rugby players do is emulated by, especially, younger boys and in this way, the first team rugby players give content to the hegemonic masculinity of the school.

The study gave me a greater insight into the game of rugby. Boys see rugby as a hard, tough and physical game that allows them to express themselves in physical ways as opposed to the intellectual ways that are demanded by academic work. Boys who excel in the game, by playing at first team level, see the sport as not simply a game, but as “play(ing) a key role in making boys tough and active through the repudiation and denigration of characteristics constructed as feminine and through policing the gendered identities of self and others” (Frosh, Pattman, Phoenix & Patel, 1999: 24). However, not all boys in the first rugby team are part of this group. There were those that dissented and opposed the hegemonic norm. These boys understood and tolerated boys who could not or did not play the game. While rugby was a game that they played and rewarded them with privileges, these boys regarded it as simply another sport, something to do and enjoy.

This study shows that boys’ identities are not fixed, but fluid and malleable. There are huge contradictions when gender identities and sport are concerned.

5.3 Conclusion

This small-scale study provides research material that illustrates the importance of sport in the development of a young boys’ masculinity and the vulnerable and fragile situation these boys find themselves in as a result. Sport is a medium for boys to interpret their understanding of desirable masculine behaviour and a site in which to develop their own masculine identities. The gender identities that they perform need to be constantly reiterated and defended and this unceasing social demand renders the boys vulnerable as they may ‘make mistakes’ or not live up to the standards they set themselves. School sport is therefore an integral site for the construction of male identities. The teachers, school and the boys’ peers are therefore intrinsic in the construction of gender identity.

The school while rendering rugby and sport such an integral part of the boys’ life, also makes these boys highly vulnerable to failure. Placing them on a pedestal and making them role models to their peers means that this position is also challenged and susceptible to failure by the boys. Coaches

and schools need therefore to advise boys on the position that they hold. They are role models for their peers and are subject to the pressures of meeting hegemonic ideals.

Rugby is not simply a game just to be played, Sport is just one area for boys to develop their masculinities, but with it comes tension, vulnerability and struggles. It is not simply a game. It is central in the lives of these boys.

“But, it’s neither the winning nor the scoring,
Nor the cheers,
It’s the friendship and the memories,
that last you through the years.
It’s the spirit of trust,
that’s born of honour, not of fame,
that’s really what matters,
when you play the sporting game.”
Anonymous (School Brochure, 2005)

Appendix

Questions used to guide interview process

1. What sports do you play?
2. Why do you play rugby at school? Do your friends hold the same views?
3. What do you think about the boys that do not play rugby or do not make the first team?
4. Are there any benefits from playing rugby at our school?
5. Do you see your position in the first rugby team as being special? In what ways?
6. Are there any disadvantages to playing rugby – especially at first team level?
7. Is there anything else you would like to add?

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