The construction of masculinity and risk-taking behaviour among adolescent boys

in seven schools in the Western Cape

A mini-thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Alethea Jeftha

UNIVERSITY *of the*

WESTERN CAPE

Supervisor:

Prof. Tammy Shefer

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Key words

Masculinity, Adolescents, Risk, Boys, HIV/AIDS, Substance use, Qualitative study
Western Cape, Schools, Focus groups.

Declaration

I declare that *The construction of masculinity and risk-taking behaviour among adolescent boys in seven schools in the Western Cape* is my own work, and that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Alethea Jeftha

UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

Date: ....

Signed: ....

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Abstract

The term risk-taking has often been used to describe some of the behaviours and their associated negative outcomes occurring during adolescence (Irwin & Millstein, 1991). Statistics have shown that South Africa has one of the highest rates of HIV/AIDS infection in the world, with most infections occurring during adolescence. Adolescents have thus been identified as a prime focus group for HIV/AIDS preventive programmes (Reddy *et al.*, 2003).

For many years women have been targeted as key agents for change in HIV/AIDS preventive programmes. Recently, there has been a growing focus on boys and men in the literature on HIV/AIDS, sexuality and gender-based violence (see, for example, Morrell, 2001; Connell, 2000). It is argued that in the context of HIV/AIDS, young men in particular, across geographical borders, race, culture and class, play a central role in the pandemic (Abbott-Chapman & Denholm, 2001; Shefer, *et al.*, 2005).

The central aim in this study was to explore the relationship between current constructions of masculinity and risk-taking behaviours among a group of young South African men. It was an exploratory study, focused on exploring how young men construct their masculinities, and how this intersects with or impacts on adolescent male risk-taking behaviours.

The study was conducted within a qualitative feminist methodological framework and data were collected through the use of focus groups. A sample consisting of eight to ten

young school-going males between the ages of 15 and 16 years was selected from seven schools within the Western Cape. All data collected were then qualitatively analysed through the use of thematic content analysis (TCA). With regard to key findings, the study highlights the complex nature of being a young man in a modern, technologically fast, and often confusing society. Although buying into many of the dominant discourses on masculinity, such as the importance of being a provider, being (hetero)sexually active, etc., some of the participants distanced themselves from the traditional constructions of masculinity and being a 'real man', by asserting their ability to resist peer pressure and argued that it was 'others' who followed these paths of substance abuse, practicing unsafe sex, of violent or abusive relationships, consumerism and gangsterism. Participants thus presented images of responsible manhood, and although they argued the importance of 'being yourself/ being your own man', this was a contradiction in itself, for even though they wanted to be individuals, there was a stronger need to fit in with their peers, and so doing protecting themselves from being ridiculed or rejected. Conforming to the dominant/hegemonic masculinity was thus expected and, in most cases, accepted.

A key conclusion drawn at the end of this project was that some traditional notions of manhood still held sway, and these tied in strongly with how these participants constructed their masculinity. The study also highlights the participants' inability to identify what it meant to be a real man. Manhood was something to strive for and still to be obtained.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statistically, South Africa has one of the highest rates of HIV infection in the world, with the bulk of these infections occurring during adolescence (Agenda, 2002; Nelson Mandela/HSRC study of HIV/AIDS, 2002). For many years numerous studies have focused on adolescents and their vulnerability to various risk-taking behaviours and practices. With the Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) epidemic on the rise, many studies have started to focus on adolescent sexuality and adolescents' vulnerability to infection. This is partly due to the finding that of the 27 million people living with the HI virus in sub-Saharan Africa, nearly 10 million of those infected are young people aged between 15 – 24 years, and half of the 3.0 – 3.4 million cases reported occur in this age-group (Nelson Mandela/HSRC study of HIV/AIDS, 2002; Patman & Chege, 2003; Bankole *et al.*, 2004). With findings such as these in mind, many studies set out to develop and evaluate intervention programmes to help control the spread of the virus.

Many of these interventions have been less than successful though, as they focused primarily on women as key agents for change, with little or no focus on men and their agency in the spread of HIV/AIDS (Shefer *et al.*, 2005). This was partially due to the misperception that women were in charge and in control of their reproductive health, ignoring men's agency and their power in how sex is negotiated.

This realization has sparked a renewed approach to the fight against AIDS – the call for men to become more active in reproductive health and to take charge of their agency in the fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The current study set out to explore the relationship between contemporary constructions of masculinity and risk-taking behaviours among a group of young South African men. The study also aimed to gain a better understanding and insight into young men's perceptions and understandings of being a man and, more specifically, how this is linked to the taking of risks and feelings of invincibility in men/boys.

The study of the construction of masculinity is still a relatively new field of study, especially within South African academia. It has been argued that interest in the study of masculinity only became apparent through developments in feminist theorising of gender and the feminist movement. Historically, masculinity has been seen in essentialist and normative terms, i.e., the way men behaved was always seen as typical, natural male behaviour and thus not viewed as requiring any exploration. Robert Morrell (1998: 605) summed this up:

> The inclusion of women in the study of the past and the recognition of their agency has filled an important lacuna, but also has made evident the corresponding gap in knowledge about men. The dominance of men in the public record has obscured the fact that little is known about masculinity.

Although the socially constructed nature of gender, both femininity and masculinity, is now widely acknowledged, this insight still needs to be applied to the study of masculinities. In order to do so, Morrell (1998) stated that it has become necessary to

draw attention to the potential role of the masculine ideology (the beliefs about what men are like and how they should act) to assist us in researching how young men construct their masculinity. Tied into this are the specific gender or sex roles ascribed to us. Sex – or gender – roles can be defined as characteristics, behaviours, and interests defined by a society or culture as appropriate for members of each sex. As such they have broad implications for gender roles and sexual behaviour (Gulotta, Adams & Motemayor, 1993). Traditionally, appropriate gender roles for men in most societies documented have been that of the primary breadwinner, head of the household, and the holder of leadership roles, not just in their families, but also in their communities (Morrell, 1998). These activities were assumed to be paralleled to typically male personality characteristics, such as assertiveness, confidence, bravery, and independence with associated interest in sports, active pursuits, and competition (Gullotta *et al*., 1993; Messner, 1998; Connell, 2000).
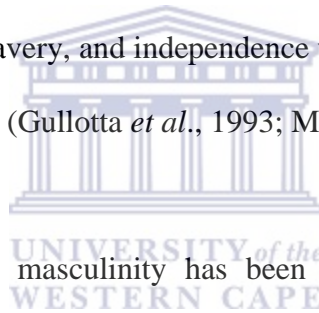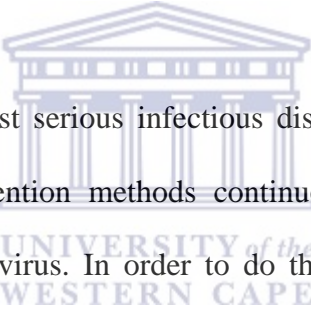
On a sexual level, traditional masculinity has been viewed as being tied up with heterosexuality (Gullotta *et al*., 1993). Traditional sex role stereotypes were, and in many respects still are, for men to be the 'hunter' and initiator of sexual activity, the one with the more powerful and demanding sex drive, the leader and initiator in sexuality, and the powerful figure in an intimate relationship. The media and popular culture are packed with male role models for teenage boys that represent a strong expression of sexuality, coupled with minimal affectionate involvement with their sexual partner. The hard-drinking, womanising leading characters in current movies are potent examples of this stereotype (Gullotta *et al*., 1993). Boys who are less rigid in their aim toward sexual gratification, or who do not talk or brag about their sexual experiences, risk derogatory

labels that reflect unwelcome attributes, such as unattractiveness (nerd) or having homosexual leanings (*moffie*). It is said that if a young boy is sexually active, his reputation is likely to be enhanced rather than diminished, as it would have been in the case of young girls (Gullotta *et al*., 1993).

In recent studies by key theorists in critical men's studies, such as Connell (2000) internationally and Morrell (2001) locally, the concept of masculinity has been applied to develop a deeper understanding of boys and men, and to assist in HIV/AIDS prevention programmes. Another example of the recent interest in men is the UNAIDS/PANOS (2001) resource book on young men and HIV, where it is argued that of all groups, young men are the most likely to be involved in activities associated with HIV risk, including drug injecting and unsafe sexual practices. This argument relates to an understanding of how masculinity is constructed in different cultures, and the pressures on young men and boys to conform to dominant versions of masculinity, and how this is linked to risk-taking. Many of the traditional expectations of young men inadvertently demand risk-taking on a number of levels, in sexual and other arenas, such as using substances or abusive and violent behaviours (Gullotta *et al*., 1933; Shefer, 2005).

It is thus not surprising that the period of adolescence has for many years been used synonymously with risk-taking, with much research and theoretical work focusing on the extent to which adolescents engage in risk-taking behaviour, particularly in substance use (alcohol consumption, smoking and the use of other substances) and unsafe or risky sexual practices (Irwin & Millstein, 1991). Not much has changed over the last decade.

Risk-taking is still used as a synonym for adolescent risky behaviour, but the dangers seem to have increased, especially when taking into consideration the alarming number of HIV infections among adolescents (Garbus, 2002; Shisana & Simbayi, 2002). G. Stanley Hall (1940), a key figure in the study of adolescence, regarded this period as being filled with "'storm and stress' in which conflict and confusion inevitably accompany awakening sexual impulses, bodily changes, and an increased awareness of self and society" (Moore & Rosenthal, 1993: 22; see also Shefer, 2005). Although there is currently some debate about the inevitability of 'storm and stress', it is still widely acknowledged that the period of adolescence is potentially a vulnerable one, particularly with respect to risk-taking (Moore & Rosenthal, 1993; Shefer, 2005).

AIDS has now become the most serious infectious disease globally. We thus need to explore new and better intervention methods continuously in order to assist in the reduction of the spread of the virus. In order to do this we need to gain insight into adolescents' perceptions and understandings of their risk-taking, and how these link with their broader identities, which is what this project set out to do.

Many factors contribute to the increased vulnerability of adolescents with regard to HIV infection and other risks to their health and well-being that range from biological to social. Writing on adolescents in the United States, Bower and Wingood (1992) assert that characteristics that pose a threat to adolescent sexual health include: the fact that they are social and sexual beings; they tend to experiment and take risks; and most importantly, while they seek independence from their parents and other adults, they tend

to conform to peer pressure. It is for these reasons that studies of adolescent sexual and other risk-taking behaviour are imperative if we want to reduce the number of sexually-transmitted infections and various risk-taking behaviours amongst the country's adolescents.

A wide range of research studies have been carried out abroad and locally pertaining to the issue of sexuality among adolescents (see, for example, Agyei *et al*., 1992; Luster and Small, 1994; Harrison, 2002; Morrell *et al*., 2002). Most studies concur that adolescents are at higher risk for HIV infection because young people, specifically adolescents, are still negotiating their gender identities and exploring their sexualities (Morrell *et al*., 2002).
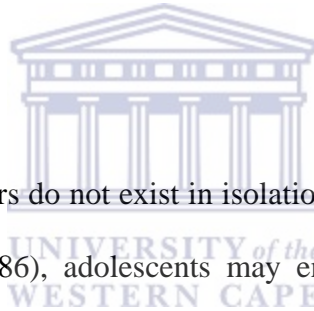
Given that risk-taking behaviours do not exist in isolation, but tend to be allied with each other (Irwin and Millstein, 1986), adolescents may engage in a range of risk-taking behaviours. Research has focused on a variety of risk-taking behaviours, ranging from alcohol use, drug use and drug trafficking, cigarette smoking, weapon carrying, reckless driving, poor nutritional habits, and even tattooing and body piercing. In all of these studies correlations have been found between some of these risk-taking behaviours, substance use and early sexual activity (Roberts & Ryan, 2002). Given that risk-taking appears to be strongly associated with masculinity (assuming hegemonic notions of masculinity are associated with sexuality, violence, and generally taking risks, being 'macho' and rebellious), adolescent males may be particularly vulnerable to multiple risk-taking practices.

This again speaks to the heart of this project, as in this study I set out to gain a better understanding and insight into young men's perceptions and understandings of being a man and, more specifically, how this is linked to the taking of risks and feelings of invincibility in men/boys. In order to shed some light on this, an exploration of the idea of manhood or the construction thereof is essential. As adolescence is believed to be the time when these ideas are constructed, internalised and applied, adolescents seemed to be the ideal target group for this study (Harrison, 2002; Thorpe, 2002).

Adolescents were not targeted only for this reason, but also, as stated earlier, because of their age-related vulnerability to a wide range of risk behaviours. Adolescents are reported to engage in a greater range of risky behaviours then any other age group. These can range from poor dietary habits to drug and alcohol abuse to other risky behaviours, such as driving while under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol, driving with someone under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol and engaging in unsafe sexual practices (see, for example, Reddy *et al*., 2003).

It is in this context that it is argued that adolescence is the ideal period in young people's lives to start developing intervention models to assist adolescents in gaining a greater understanding and knowledge of their identities and of their risk-taking behaviours and their potentially negative outcomes. There is thus a clear need to understand such identity constructions and related practices better in order to develop interventions. This study was part of a larger study on male adolescents in the Western Cape that hoped to

reveal how they construct their masculinities and how this intersects with risk-taking behaviours towards the development of interventions for young men in local contexts.

I will now briefly outline what will be covered in the remaining chapters. In chapter 2 I will be looking at literature, research and studies done locally and abroad on adolescence, where I will be focusing specifically on contributing factors that may lead to adolescents' increased vulnerability to risk-taking. Key areas explored include biological factors (i.e., hormonal factors), environmental and social factors, and psychological factors. Finally, I will be exploring other theories around adolescents' vulnerability to risk-taking.

Chapter 3 explores theories centred on the construction of masculinity. By doing this I will attempt to shed more light on the problematic nature of dominant forms of masculinity and how this may inevitably contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS. This chapter thus sets out to make clear the need for alternatives to current hegemonic forms of masculinity.

Chapter 4 advocates my choice of method followed in the study. As my research was grounded within a feminist methodological framework, key feminist principles had to be adhered to. In the chapter I thus advocate my choice of data collection method, namely focus groups, the procedures followed throughout the data collection and the method used to analyse all the data collected. Ethical considerations and some self-reflection are also explored here.

Chapter 5 presents the key themes that emerged in the analysis of the data relating to the participants' understanding of their risk-taking behaviours and how this intersects with how they construct their masculinity.

In chapter 6 I provide an overview of the key findings of the study, contributions the study can make to knowledge production in this area, and I conclude by looking at limitations of this study and making some recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

THEORIZING ADOLESCENT RISK-TAKING

Introduction

For a number of years the term risk-taking has often been used synonymously with adolescents, particularly male adolescents. In spite of this, few studies, until relatively recently, have focused on the relationship between the construction of masculinity and risky male behaviour. This, in part, can be attributed to the fact that the construction of masculinity has for years gone relatively unexplored. This, however, seems to be changing. In recent studies, especially studies pertaining to the spread of HIV/AIDS, the call for men to become more involved in curbing the spread of this deadly virus has become more prominent. Recognizing men's agency in this pandemic has to become imperative if we are to curb the spread of this virus successfully, not only because, generally speaking, men have been found to have more sex partners in their lifetime than women have, but also because it has been found that they may also partake in a greater number of other risky behaviours than women do (including drug usage and participating in unprotected sexual activities). Furthermore, we are still living in a patriarchal society that more often then not recognizes these and other risk-taking activities as normal, acceptable and even desirable male behaviour. Keeping this in mind we will need to work with men as partners if we are to obtain any success. However, before we can start we will first need to take a closer look at the masculine ideology.

Throughout the following chapter I will be exploring various theories around the adolescence period and adolescent risk-taking. Firstly, I will explore those aspects of adolescence that have lead to this period being described as being filled with 'storm and stress' by looking at both physical changes and other changes occurring during this developmental period. Secondly, I will move on to various risk-taking activities adolescents sometimes engage in, and thirdly, I will tie this together by exploring possible factors that contribute to adolescents' increased vulnerability to risk-taking.

Adolescence

G. Stanley Hall coined the term 'storm and stress' to describe the natural moodiness of adolescents (Moore & Rosenthal, 1993; Shefer, 2005; also see Dacey & Travers, 2002). Although now there is some dispute about the inevitability of storm and stress, many theorists still continue to identify this as a turbulent period in development (Gullotta, *et al*., 1993).

Having said this, though, many have argued that too much has been made of this 'turbulent period' that wasn't even recognized as such during pre-industrial times. To these theorists adolescence is seen primarily as a 20th century phenomenon (Ayman-Nolley & Taira, 2000; Abbott-Chapman & Denholm, 2001). According to Abbott-Chapman and Denholm (2001), two kinds of people existed in pre-industrial societies: a consumer (child) and a producer (adult). There was no real need for any period in between, and where a need did exist to mark the transition from child to adult, it was normally characterized by a quick and short mechanism ranging from a few hours to

months, but never long enough to constitute a separate period in development (Ayman-Nolley & Taira, 2000). "The Industrial and technologically fast advancing modern world" is believed to be responsible for the creation of this 'new period' of life spanning from ages 12 to 21, known as adolescence (Ayman-Nolley & Taira, 2000: 35).

Despite the debates around this period, many theorists have continued to recognize this as a difficult period and continued to emphasise the conflict-driven nature of this stage in development, while others, such as Ayman-Nolley and Taira (2000), have argued that some theorists may have become overly obsessed with the 'dark side of adolescence'. In their study, *Obsession with the dark side of adolescence,* they explored some studies conducted during the 20th century that focused specifically on adolescent development. In their study they looked at various theories on adolescent risk-taking. They found that most theorists during the first half of the 20th century characterized this period as a rather 'dark and dim' stage in development. Theorists such as G.S. Hall (1904) and Anna Freud (1937) both adopted this somewhat negative viewpoint of adolescents. Ayman-Nolley and Taira (2000)argued that it was during adolescence where adolescents' "impulses and unruliness are intensified to the point that it turns into criminal behaviour" (Ayman-Nolley & Taira, 2000: 36). Even with this dark perception of adolescents some theorists continued to recognize and advocate the positive side to adolescence. Theorists such as Piaget, Vygotsky and Erikson all believed that it is during this period where 'positive roles and values' are developed (Ayman-Nolley & Taira, 2000). Erikson (1968) recognized the stressful nature of coping with the numerous biological changes occurring during adolescence, though he also stated that "it is none the less a necessary

accompaniment of adult adjustment" (Ayman-Nolley & Taira, 2000: 45; see also Pittaway, 2000). Ayman-Nolly and Taira (2000, 45-46) argue that:

> … the popular topic of risk-taking behaviour in adolescence studied as a negative factor may, in fact, be the other side of the very mechanism that brings about healthy and much needed change to our society: the change for which the 'adults' are not willing to take the risks. Although some friction between the two generations may be healthy for growth, we may want to utilize the half-full cups of the adolescents in order to gain more systematic growth for them and for the society as a whole.

Adopting the half-empty cup ideology may in the end have a less desirable effect than adopting the more positive view of adolescence. Erikson (1969) believed that by constantly adopting this negative attitude towards adolescents, it might limit or deprive them of various forms of expression, which in turn may very well contribute to adolescents' resistance to conform to societal norms and values (Ayman-Nolley & Taira, 2000). Current theorists such as Joan Abbott-Chapman and Carey Denholm (2001) also identified possible problematic aspects of labelling certain behaviours and certain groupings as 'high risk', as this may inevitably contribute to perpetuating such practices. They argued that being "labelled as 'high risk' may beseech the symbolic meaning of 'otherness'" as stated below byAbbott-Chapman & Denholm, 2001: 282:

> The negative connotation of the word risk creates fundamental problems in the notions of 'risk-taking' - namely, differences in perceptions regarding the inherent value or worth of some actions or behaviour between the risk taker and the risk assessor. Risk-taking implies intent on the part of the actor, but the intentions of the action are not fully appreciated or acknowledged with this one-sided view of risk.

As many adolescents engage in numerous dangerous risk-taking activities it has become imperative for us to explore reasons why they participate in these risky practices.

Adolescence and risk-taking

During your youth, you are expected to explore and experiment, yet in doing this you may be exposed to various health risks, such as smoking, drinking and unsafe sexual exploration. Even though these might seem like the normal course of experimentation during this period in development, we will do well to note that experimentation with some of these risks and other risky activities (violence, criminal behaviour, suicide, eating disorders and other psychiatric disorders, and drug abuse, to name but a few) could have some serious negative – even fatal – consequences for adolescents (Rolison, 2002; Irwin & Millstein, 1991).

As adolescents seek to develop their own identity, opinions and values, they tend to experiment, which also entails taking some risks (Ayman-Nolley & Taira, 2000; Rolison, 2002). Even though there have been some heated debates with regard to whether or not risk-taking can be beneficial (see, for example, Pittaway, 2000), the dangers of various risk-taking activities are still very real. The alarming number of HIV infections among our country's adolescents could serve as proof of one of the many negative consequences of partaking in some of these risky activities (Garbus, 2002; Nelson Mandela/HSRC Study of HIV/AIDS, 2002).

A wide range of studies has been carried out, both abroad and locally, pertaining to the issue of sexual risk-taking among adolescents (see, for example, Agyei *et al*., 1992; Harrison, 2002; Morrell *et al*., 2002; Luster & Small, 1994). Most studies concur that adolescents are at higher risk of HIV infection because young people, specifically

adolescents, are still negotiating their gender identities and exploring their sexualities (Morrell *et al*., 2002).

Over the last decade, Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) has become the most serious infectious disease in contemporary history. Despite the great advances made in the medical field, there is still no preventive vaccine or medical cure for this deadly disease. Consequently, efforts to change high-risk behaviours remain the only available means to prevent HIV infection (DiClemente & Peterson, 1994).

Since HIV is largely transmitted through sexual contact and the sharing of drug-injecting equipment, it can be prevented through appropriate behavioural changes (DiClemente & Peterson, 1994). While sexual abstinence is the most obvious method of preventing sexual transmission of HIV, a substantial proportion of adults and adolescents still fail to adopt this strategy (Anderson *et al*., 1990; DiClemente, 1990; Catania *et al*., 1992; Hein, 1992; Best 2000). The expectation that sexually active adolescents will routinely adopt sexual abstinence as an HIV-prevention strategy is thus unrealistic. Therefore, appropriate and consistent use of condoms represents the most effective strategy to reduce the risk of exposure to HIV (Van de Perre *et al*., 1987; Cates, 1990; Cates & Stone, 1992; UNAIDS, 2001). With this knowledge, however, a great number of adolescents and adults still fail to adopt appropriate preventive methods (Becker & Joseph, 1988). Greater knowledge about intervention methods and adolescents' vulnerability to HIV infection has become vital in the fight against HIV/AIDS. In order

to achieve this, we need to gain insight into adolescents' perceptions and understandings of their risk-taking, and how it links with their broader identities.

Given that risk-taking behaviours do not exist in isolation, but tend to be allied with each other (Irwin & Millstein, 1986; Gonzalez & Field, 1994), adolescents may engage in a range of risk-taking behaviours. Research has focused on a variety of risk-taking activities, ranging from alcohol use, drug use and drug trafficking, cigarette smoking, weapon carrying, poor nutritional habits, and even tattooing and body piercing. In all of these studies correlations have been found between some of these risk-taking behaviours (Roberts & Ryan, 2002). One such study done by Jessor and Jessor (1977) found that substance use, precocious sexual intercourse, minor delinquency, aggressiveness and a trait, which they labelled 'unconventionality' (social risk-taking), were consistently interrelated. A close association between alcohol use and accidental injury has also been found. In many studies, alcohol has been implicated in a number of unintentional injuries. These include drownings and death or injury by fires, falls and accidents associated with non-motorised vehicles such as bicycles and skateboards (Lerner *et al.*, 1991).

High rates of substance use have long been documented among adolescents, and the daily use of cigarettes in high schools still remains high according to the self-reported onset of cigarette smoking, for which the mean age is 12 years (primary school) (Lerner *et al.*, 1991). In a North American study conducted by Johnston *et al.* (1988) alcohol was found to be the most commonly used or preferred substance of choice, with high school seniors reporting to have had five or more drinks in a row. In the same study the onset of

cigarette smoking, as with the onset of alcohol consumption, was found to be around the age of 12 years, with males reporting more frequent and heavier alcohol consumption than females, whereas females reported more daily cigarette usage than did their male counterparts (Johnston *et al*., 1988).

A number of studies have documented a positive correlation between substance use and sexual activity. Jessor and Jessor (1977) documented the association between the use of marijuana (*dagga*), cigarettes and alcohol, and early sexual activity (Lerner *et al*., 1991). A study conducted in North America found that early sexual activity, ineffective contraceptive use and cigarette usage were all positively correlated (Lerner *et al*., 1991). An African study also found that teenagers who engage in early sexual activity are more likely to have sex with high-risk partners or multiple partners, and are less likely to use contraception and/or other methods that offer protection against STIs and HIV infections (Maharaj, 2000).

In a study by UNAIDS (2000) a direct connection has also been found between drug and substance use, and HIV transmission. In the study they found that:
a) injecting drugs is estimated to be directly responsible for over 5% of HIV worldwide,
b) the use of recreational drugs, including alcohol, are all associated with unsafe sexual activity that can, in turn, result in HIV infection, c) worldwide, men are more likely than women to use such substances, d) of the estimated six to seven million persons around the world who inject drugs, four-fifths are men, and e) male drug injectors are more

likely to have non-injecting partners and are more likely to share needles, thus putting their partners at greater risk of infection (UNAIDS, 2000).

Given these findings many theorists have tried to shed some light on the reasons why particularly adolescents are more vulnerable to taking such risks.

Factors contributing to adolescents' vulnerability to risk-taking

Writing on adolescents in the United States, Bower and Wingood (1992) assert that there are various characteristics that pose a threat to adolescent sexual health. These include, firstly, the fact that they are social and sexual beings; secondly, they tend to experiment and take risks; and thirdly, even though adolescents seek independence from their parents and other adults, they tend to conform to peer pressure. It is for these reasons that studies of adolescent sexual risk-taking are imperative if we want to reduce the number of sexually-transmitted infections and other risk-taking behaviours amongst the country's adolescents (Luster & Small, 1994; UNAIDS, 2000). Various factors may contribute to risk-taking.

Biological/hormonal factors

A study by Udry (1988) focusing on the effect of sex hormones on adolescent risk-taking, while specifically looking at five behaviours (getting drunk, smoking cigarettes, truancy, having sex, and using marijuana/*dagga*), found that a high level of free or access testosterone added significant variance to a social model. In Irwin and Millstein's (1986) Causal Model of Adolescent Risk-taking Behaviour they also found that early timing of

puberty maturation for both boys and girls is a good predictor of several risky behaviours, including unprotected sexual activity, substance use, and physical fights (see also Lerner *et al*., 1991). Although there are clearly studies highlighting the biological level of adolescent risk-taking, there are far more studies that illustrate the social contexts that facilitate such practices.

Environmental and social factors

The role of the environment remains an important predictor in the onset of risky behaviour. Adolescents in non-traditional families have a greater tendency to exhibit substance-use-related behaviours earlier than their counterparts from more traditional families (Field, 2002). In addition, the effects of emotional detachment are powerful predictors of initiation and maintenance of risky behaviours (Lerner *et al*., 1991; Gonzalez & Field, 1994; Field, 2002). The protective role of supportive environments during adolescence must thus be acknowledged as playing a preventive role. Family and peer factors remain crucial, with parental behaviour and style being important factors in the onset of risk-taking activities (UNAIDS, 2000). Increased parental involvement has been found to prevent not only the onset of risky behaviours, but also to limit possible negative outcomes, for example, male violence (Morning Edition: NPR News, 2003). A UNAIDS-funded research study found that a large proportion of men in prison and men who are violent toward women have either witnessed violence in their own homes or have been victims of violence themselves (UNAIDS, 2000). They also found that the lack of a father figure or meaningful male role models plays a great part in male violence (UNAIDS, 2000). Other factors, such as the sense of disempowerment that comes from

the growing rate of unemployment and not being able to be the provider like a 'real man' is supposed to, also played a significant part in this deterioration, as they leave some men feeling that they are lacking any meaningful role in the family or community, and thus cause some of these men to turn to violence as a way of feeling like a 'real man' (UNAIDS, 2000).

Psychological theories

Many studies highlight the range of psychological determinants linked to the establishment of identity, one of the key challenges in adolescence according to developmental theorists. In a study by Gonzalez and Field (1994), they argued that adolescents purposely seek out risky behaviours as they believe that such behaviours permit them to take control of their own lives; to express possible opposition to adult authority and conventional society; to help them to deal with feelings of anxiety, frustration, inadequacy and failure; to help gain acceptance with peers and to help demonstrate identification with a youth subculture; to confirm their personal identity; and lastly, to affirm maturity, thus marking their transition into young adulthood.

In a study by Rolison (2002), also dealing with the factors that influence adolescents' decisions to engage in risk-taking behaviour, she explored various studies conducted in this field, and looked at possible reasons why adolescents engage in various risk-taking activities. Firstly, she examined the idea of sensation-seeking which she identified as "a need for varied, novel, and complex sensations and experiences, and the willingness to take physical and social risks for the sake of such experiences" (Rolison, 2002: 586). A

study by Jessor and Jessor (1977), in which they looked at risk-taking as a function of pleasure-or-fun-seeking behaviours also speaks to this. Secondly, in Rolison's study, she draws on the widely-used construct of Locus of Control, which she defined as the "perception one has of the control one has over the events that occur in one's life" (Rolison, 2002: 586).

> Internal control refers to the perception of positive and/or negative events as being a consequence of one's own actions and thereby under personal control; external control refers to the perception of positive and/or negative events as being unrelated to one's own behaviours in certain situations, and therefore beyond personal control (Rolison, 2002: 586).

And thirdly, she looked at risk-taking from a Decision-Making Perspective where she explored why adolescents' decision-making may be different from that of adults' when it comes to risky behaviours. This she speculatively ascribed to, firstly, adolescents and adults considering different options; secondly, adolescents and adults differing in identifying the possible consequences of an option chosen; thirdly, adolescents and adults placing different values on possible consequences; fourthly, adolescents assessing the likelihood of consequences differently from adults; and fifthly, adolescents using a different decision rule (Rolison, 2002). However, a study by Gonzalez and Field (1994) found that differences in interpretation might not necessarily explain why adolescents engage in risk-taking behaviours. In their study they found that adolescence described both physically daring activities and rule-breaking as risky behaviours, as did adults. With this they thus concluded that even though their perceptions may differ from those of adults, adolescents could discriminate between risky behaviours (Gonzalez & Field, 1994).

It is evident that hardly any work in the area of adolescents and risk-taking has explored the role of gender and the pressures, in particular on young boys and men with respect to their identities and roles as boys/men during this period. In the next chapter I will be looking at gendered constructions to help shed some light on possible reasons for male adolescents' risk-taking.

CHAPTER 3

THE CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITIES AND RISK-TAKING

Introduction

Throughout this chapter I will explore theories focusing on the construction of masculinities, and national and international research on masculinities, as well as the intersection between masculinities and risk-taking. Before I move on to this, though, I will first take a closer look at what made it possible for the study of masculinities to be studied within a feminist paradigm, in particular the impact of the broader framework of post-structuralism. Then I will focus on:

a) the construction of masculinities, b) adolescent and social construction of sexuality, c) gender construction, d) masculinity and sexual practices, and e) the construction of masculinity and risk-taking, respectively.

In the final section, I will explore various theories on how the constructions of masculinities intersect with, or impact on, adolescent male risk-taking behaviour.
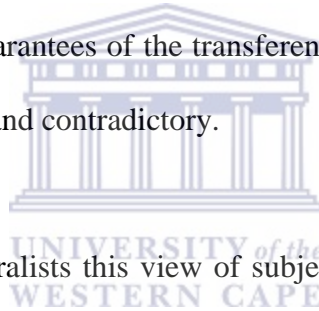
Post-structuralism

This study is located within a post-structuralist paradigm. Butler and Scott (1992) warned that post-structuralism is not a position such as socialist feminism, radical feminism or liberal feminism, but rather a crucial inquisition of the prohibitive operations by which positions are established. As such, post-structuralist deconstruction can be

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viewed as a methodology that is used to examine, for example, how commonly-accepted facts about women's or men's lives come to be established and maintained (Trinh, 1989; Rai, 1996). In this regard, Spivak (1994: 67) comments:

> Deconstruction does not say there is no subject, there is no truth, and there is no history. It simply questions the privileging of identity so that someone is believed to have the truth. It is not the exposure of error. It is constantly and persistently looking into how truths are produced.

Post-structuralist analyses seek to explore the relations between discourses, subjectivities and power (Hughes, 2002). Post-structuralism also asserts that there is no fixed structure to language. In this view Post-structuralists argue that language is central to the development of subjectivities. Here the argument suggests that just as language is multiple and varied with no guarantees of the transference of intended meanings, so too, subjectivity is multiple, varied and contradictory.

For many feminist post-structuralists this view of subjectivity as a process is a positive one. This is because it gives rise to the possibility of creating new gender discourses and, by implication, new subjectivities and ways of being and doing. This, I believe, is the key or one of the main reasons why masculinity studies can now be studied within feminism.

Post-structuralist conceptions are offered as a way of going beyond binary opposition. Also, by going beyond only focusing on women within feminism it has facilitated a questioning of simplistic accounts of socialization that would suggest that we are born into the world as blank slates on which an appropriate gender is inscribed. A post-

structuralist's explanation would encourage us to recognize that we do not all turn out to be the same. Here the notion of studying not only women, but also men in essentialist terms, should be taken into consideration. It would also encourage us to understand that, as much as we might take up particular discursive positions, we can also resist them.

Looking at this, namely resistance, in terms of masculinity, men can now start to realize that there are different ways of being, and that the hegemonic way (oppressive, abusive, violent and unattached) is not the only way to be a man. This is because one of the main features of post-structuralism is that it stresses

> … the doubled sense of 'subject' (subject/ed to and subject of action) ... which allows for an individual who is socially produced, and 'multiply positioned' – neither determined nor free, but both simultaneously (Jones, 1997: 263).

The construction of masculinities

Throughout the literature explored, it is evident that there are clear differences between male and female adolescents with regard to risk-taking, with boys appearing to engage in more extreme risk-taking behaviours than their female counterparts. Thus, the need to understand better how masculinity is constructed more broadly, and specifically among male adolescents, and its effects on risk-taking practices has become imperative.

In the last decade much has changed in South African governance. We have one of the most advanced constitutions in the world, which advocates equality for all, in all spheres, gender equality being one of them. These developments sparked the need for knowledge production in a wide range of arenas, even some that may have previously been left unexplored. The construction of masculinity is one such sphere:

> The dominance of men in the public record has obscured the fact that little is known about masculinity. Men have generally been treated in essentialist terms. Although the socially constructed nature of masculinity is widely acknowledged this insight that still need to be applied to a study of the region's history (Morrell, 1998: 3).

For years we have talked about masculinity as if it were a single identity, although studies have proved masculinity is a collective gender identity, i.e., there is not just one universal masculinity, but many masculinities (Morgan, 1992). Because masculinity has been, and in most cases still is, seen in essentialist terms, it has become critical to draw attention to the potential role of masculinity ideology, i.e., the beliefs about what men are like and how they should act, to guide us in researching how men construct their masculinity. Masculinity is not a natural attribute, but rather a socially constructed entity; it is fluid, and therefore not of fixed character types, but configurations of practice generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships (Morrell, 1998; UNAIDS, 2000).
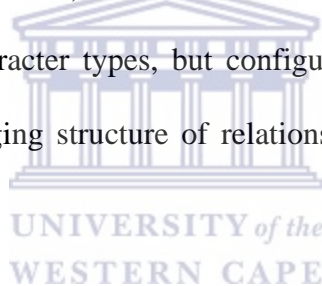
Aside from other factors, class and racial factors also contribute to the form a masculine identity might take. This means that in any society there are many masculinities, each with an individual characteristic, shape and features (Morgan, 1991; Connell, 1993). The shape of these masculinities changes over time, being affected by changes elsewhere in society, and at the same time these masculinities affect society itself. All masculinities are not equally powerful as social forces. In an article by R.W. Connell (1993), a key thinker in this field, four fluid categories or different types of masculinities are outlined:

a) Dominant/Hegemonic Masculinity type;

b) Complicit Masculinity type;

c) Submissive Masculinity type;

d) Oppositional/Protest Masculinity type.

The first of the four types, and the most researched type of masculinity, the *Dominant/Hegemonic Masculinity* type, is seen as the most dominant form of masculinity in past and current society. In addition to positioning itself in opposition to women, hegemonic masculinity also takes on its status in relation to other forms of subordinate masculinities, with the values expressed by non-hegemonic forms of masculinity having little currency or legitimacy. Hegemonic forms of masculinity present an idealised version of masculinity, of how men should behave, but more importantly, how 'real men' should behave. The concept of hegemonic masculinity provides a way of explaining that although a number of masculinities co-exist, a particular version of masculinity holds sway, bestowing power and privilege on men who own it and claim it as their own.
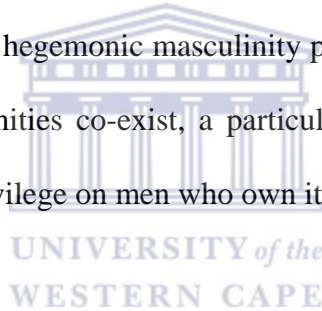
While there is no direct relationship between class, race and masculinity, it is argued that hegemonic masculinity in the USA and many other European countries is still overwhelmingly the masculinity of white, ruling-class men. This is true even in South Africa (although it may be argued that it is less so now than in many European countries). Hegemonic masculinity was always defined as that of a white, educated, heterosexual, Christian male type (Kimmel, 1996). This, however, seems to be changing. In South Africa at present, hegemonic masculinity is arguably not as easily identifiable as it may have been before. Since the cultures in this country are so diverse, attempting to identify one type of masculinity as the dominant or hegemonic type masculinity could prove to be

problematic since many types of dominant masculinity types may co-exist (Morrell, 1998).

Over the years masculinity has been equated with the hegemonic masculinity type. There was – and still is – no room for 'sissies', that is, men who did not fit this type. A man ruled his household/family with an iron fist. His job was to work to provide for his family. Playing with the baby and changing her/his nappy, or helping with the older children's homework was not his job. A man's traditional role was that of the economic provider. This then meant that women were the ones expected to look after the children, take care of sick family members and take responsibility for the day-to-day running of the household (UNAIDS, 2000). This, however, seems to be changing with the inclusion of women in the public sphere. Mike Donaldson (1993) from the USA also looked at some defining features of the hegemonic masculinity type, for example, misogyny, homophobia, racism and compulsory heterosexuality. However, it should be noted that, as with the other masculinities, hegemonic masculinity is also not stable. It is constantly responding to challenges, accommodating or repelling rival representations of masculinity (Connell, 1993).

Fortunately this is changing. Men are becoming more involved in their families' lives and, more importantly, in their children's lives – but this change has not been made known because it doesn't correspond with the dominant/hegemonic masculinity ideology (Morrell, 2001). Although hegemonic masculinity takes on different forms in different cultures, the aspects outlined have been relatively universal and normalized. Only by

challenging this norm will the other types of masculinity(ies) be able to come to the fore. On reviewing the growing body of literature on masculinities, I found the bulk of the research seemed to focus on hegemonic masculinity. This, I believe, is because little to no focus has been given to the other types of masculinities.

To move away from this dominant type of masculinity would mean that we would have to give more exposure to the less dominant, alternative masculinity types. Broadly speaking, men are expected to be physically strong, emotionally robust, daring and virile. Some of these expectations translate into attitudes and behaviours that have become unhelpful – or frankly lethal – with the advent of AIDS. Other types of masculinities, on the contrary, represent valuable potential that can be tapped by AIDS programmes (UNAIDS, 2000). This could be of great importance in the struggle for gender equality because by challenging the dominant/hegemonic masculinity types and giving more exposure to alternative types of masculinity, it may inevitably lead to a decrease in gender-based violence and other forms and consequences of gender inequality.

Not much research has focused on the three remaining types of masculinities that have been outlined by Connell (1993). Complicit Masculinity can be defined as the type of masculinity that does not always agree or comply with the dominant type. It can sway either way, with the Dominant masculinity or with the Oppositional masculinity. The Submissive Masculinity type, on the other hand, can be defined as always submitting to the greater power or the dominant form of masculinity. A key feature of this type of masculinity may be its nature not to challenge anyone or anything but simply to go along

with whoever or whatever may seem more powerful at the time. The fourth type of masculinity identified by Connell was the Oppositional/Protest Masculinity. This can be defined as the type of masculinity that is in constant opposition to the Dominant masculinity. This masculinity type would be seen always to be in direct opposition to the Hegemonic masculinity, i.e., fighting for everything the hegemonic masculinity type is against. Examples of this type of masculinity would be pro-feminist men and alternative sexualities.

It should, however, be noted that even though various types of masculinities do exist, it may not always be that easy to distinguish between them as they are constantly changing and shifting. Any one man may position himself in different masculinities in different relationships and contexts, and masculinity as a social construct is thus always prone to internal contradiction and historical disruption (Connell, 1993). Caution should, therefore, be taken against trying to box/label any one man as belonging exclusively to one masculinity type. Yet it is important to strive towards a theoretical classification that allows us to make sense of the power aspect of masculinity.

Great challenges for HIV prevention stem from traditional expectations that men should take sexual risks (unsafe sex), have frequent sexual intercourse (often with more than one partner), and exercise authority over women. Among other things, these expectations encourage men to force sex on unwilling partners, to reject condom use and the search for safety as 'unmanly', and to view drug-injecting as a risk worth taking. Changing these

commonly held attitudes and behaviours must be part of the effort to curb the AIDS epidemic (UNAIDS, 2000).

We thus need to find a careful balance between recognizing how some men's behaviour contributes to the epidemic without pointing the finger at all men and their actions. Blaming individuals or groups has never been a successful way of encouraging greater involvement in HIV prevention and care. Instead, efforts should be made to encourage positive behaviours and responses. We should aim to build upon successful work and include as many men as possible in the global struggle against AIDS (UNAIDS, 2000).

Too often in the past it has been assumed that, if only they wanted to, men would change their behaviour. Far too frequently some men's apparent unwillingness to offer care and support has been viewed as evidence that all men make no real investment in their own or their families' future. Yet men's actions, like those of women, are constrained by traditional beliefs and expectations, and influenced by divisive cultural beliefs and social norms (UNAIDS, 2000).

This is not to excuse the actions of some men who rape, who commit acts of violence or men who discriminate, for this cannot be excused. It is, however, necessary to recognize the power that men exert and the fact that a collective, as well as an individual, effort is needed to achieve greater equity and a proper balance of responsibility for AIDS prevention and care (UNAIDS, 2000).

For years masculinity has been seen in essentialist terms and we were lead to believe that it could not be changed. However, its socially constructed nature has now been made known, i.e., all masculinities are fluid and, therefore, changeable. Alternatives to dominant masculinities, i.e., 'the ruler with the iron fist' ideology, need to be advocated. Bearing in mind the urgency of curbing the spread of HIV, it has become vital to challenge harmful concepts of masculinity, including adult men's perception of risk and sexuality, and how boys are socialised to become men (UNAIDS, 2000).

By focusing on men we cannot lose sight of prevention programmes with women, but rather the aim is to complement these by work which more directly involves men. Everyone at risk of infection, whatever their gender, status or sexuality, has the right to protection from HIV.

Gender Construction

Although masculinity is still a relatively new field of study in South African research, it has been the focus of study for more than 25 years abroad (Morrell, 1998). Its recent application to the study of sexuality, as well as in other areas of (young) men's lives, may prove to be an important development that may be of immense value and use to the area of male adolescent risk-taking.

At birth we are all ascribed certain sex/gender roles. Gullotta *et al*. (1993) define sex or gender roles as those characteristics, behaviours, and interests defined by a society or culture as appropriate for members of each sex. As such they have broad implications for

sexual behaviour. In Western society, traditionally, appropriate sex/gender roles for men have been as worker, primary breadwinner, head of the household, and holder of leadership roles in the community.   These activities are paralleled with typically perceived male personality characteristics, such as assertiveness, confidence, bravery, and independence, with associated interests in sports, active pursuits, and competition, i.e., the hegemonic ideology.

Traditional roles have been debated greatly and have undergone much change in the last two or three decades, so that most activities viewed as appropriate for one gender are now seen as (more or less) acceptable for the other. However, traditional stereotyping puts enormous pressure on young men and it may inevitably pressure them into partaking in various risk-taking activities to prove their manhood.

It is thus not surprising that worldwide HIV infections and AIDS deaths in men outnumber those in women on every continent except sub-Saharan Africa. But even here the effects on men are enormous. By the end of 1999, ten million African men were living with HIV, as compared with seven and a half million infected men in the rest of the world combined. Young men are at particular risk compared to men who are older, as about one in four people living with HIV is a young man under the age of twenty-five (UNAIDS, 2000).
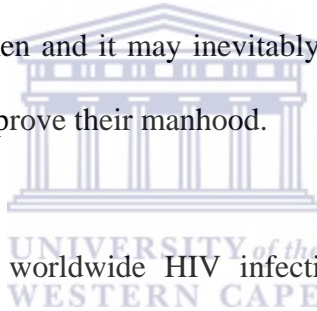
Masculinity and sexual practices

As raised in Chapter 2, G. Stanley Hall (1940) regarded adolescence as a time in which "conflict and confusion inevitably accompany awakening sexual impulses, bodily changes, and an increased awareness of self and society" (Moore & Rosenthal, 1993: 22). Many other theorists have also continued to emphasize the conflict-driven nature of this stage of development, either implicitly or explicitly, while emphasizing the stressful nature of adolescence. On the other hand, cross-cultural studies have suggested that the level of conflict and stress experienced by adolescents can vary greatly, at least in part, as a function of the prevailing cultural norms with regard to sexual expression. Although a number of theories (Psychosexual Theory, Psychosocial Theory, Lerner and Spanier's Sexual Socialisation Model, Adolescent Sexuality as a Developmental Task, The Biosocial Model of Adolescent Sexual Behaviour and Sociocultural Interpretations of Sexuality) have all contributed greatly to the study of adolescent sexuality, many theorists are now looking to gender construction, which is what I will be exploring in the next section.

Sexually speaking, the traditional sex role stereotype for a man is to be the 'hunter' and initiator of sexual activity, the one with the more powerful and demanding sex drive, the powerful figure in a relationship. The media and popular culture are constantly flooded with male role models for teenage boys that stress strong expression of sexuality coupled with minimal affectionate involvement with one's sexual partner. For these men (and boys), there is no requirement to keep their sex drive under control until the right (read good, chaste, pure, committed) women come along. Boys who are not so strongly

motivated towards sexual gratification, or who do not talk or brag about their sexual experiences in this way, risk derogatory labels that reflect unwelcome attributes, such as unattractiveness (nerd) or having homosexual leanings (*moffie*). It is said that if a young boy is sexually active, his reputation is likely to be enhanced, rather than diminished, as it would have been in the case of young girls (Gullotta *et al*., 1993; Messner, 1998; Connell, 2000).

But sex roles do not tell the whole story about influences on boys' and girls' sexuality. People act differently within the same culture, partly because they follow different 'scripts' or behave according to particular 'discourses'. Script and discourse analyses examine sexual behaviour from a sociological perspective, capturing the ways in which we are constrained in our actions and attitudes by the social influences around us. Gagnon and Simon (1993: 35) view scripts as "learned rules of sexual behaviour that consist of directions for what we will do and plans of action for how we will do it, and with whom". In their study Gagnon and Simon found that adolescents do not, initially, develop their sexual scripts from experience; these experiences only become important later. Rather, early scripts arise out of listening to others talk and absorbing the popular culture through watching movies, videos, or television, reading magazines and books. In this way, teenagers get a sense of what is appropriate and inappropriate sexually for someone of their age and gender (Gullotta *et al*., 1993; Connell, 2000; Messner, 1998).

Hollway (1984) looked at stereotyping through the use of discourse analysis (discourses that are reflected in the ways we talk about sex and relationships). Hollway suggests that three discourses represent male-female interactions in Western society, namely the Male

Sex Drive Discourse (in this discourse the focus is on men's natural/biological, uncontrollable need for sex); the Have/Hold Discourse (gives prevalence to marriage/one partner to have and to hold for women); and thirdly, the Permissive Discourse (gives preference to open and free sexual exploration) (Gullotta *et al*., 1993; Messner, 1998; Connell, 2000).

Constructions of masculinity and risk-taking

Although a number of theories have greatly contributed to the study of sexual behaviour and risk-taking among adolescents, researchers are now moving away from these types of theoretical perspectives and are instead looking at gender construction as a central component for addressing risky sexual and other risk-taking practices. Morrell *et al*., (2002: 11) stated:

> To create in a learner commitment to gender equity, a gendered self-awareness and a respect for fellow human beings is not only to contribute to better schools, safer schooling and gender harmony in schools, it is also to make a contribution to a better and safer society. There are obvious health benefits associated with such advances, for example, gender equity reduces power imbalances between men and women, it facilitates the negotiation of safe sex, and fosters gender identities that are not vested in domination and subordination.

Given that risk-taking appears to be strongly associated with masculinity (and given that hegemonic notions of masculinity are associated with sexuality, violence, and generally taking risks, being 'macho' and rebellious), adolescent males may be particularly vulnerable to multiple risk-taking (UNAIDS, 2001). It is a well-recognized fact that all over the world women are at special risk of HIV infection because they lack the power to determine where, when and how sex takes place. But the same expectations, cultural
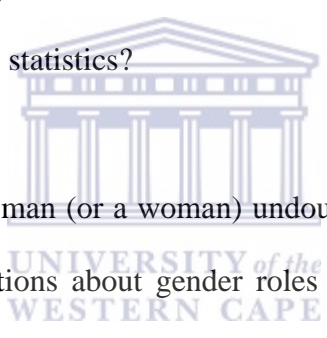
beliefs and social customs of men that so disempower women, also heighten men's own vulnerability. As mentioned earlier, HIV infections and AIDS deaths among men outnumber those of women on every continent except sub-Saharan Africa. The younger the men are, the more they are at risk. Men under the age of 25 years make up about a quarter of the 36.1 million people currently living with HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS, 2001). In order to curb the spread of the HIV epidemic, harmful notions of masculinity will have to be reshaped, along with the many common attitudes that shape how boys are socialised to become men, and how men regard risk. The customary association of manhood with physical strength, emotional indifference, virility and daring can translate into behaviour that threatens the health and well-being of men and their sex partners. At the same time, men can play a powerful role in tackling AIDS (UNAIDS, 2001).

It was found that boys tend to use alcohol and other drugs more often then their female counterparts. This risk-taking was found to be linked to sexual risk-taking.

> [This] risky male sexual behaviour could affect women negatively, encouraging some men to have sex only for physical gratification, to have multiple partners and to treat women with little respect or even violence. Boys generally begin sexual relationships at an earlier age, have more partners and are more sexually active before marriage than girls. Also, boys frequently see irresponsible or abusive behaviour towards women and girls, often within their own families, which can encourage them to act irresponsibly; as men grow older, these unhealthy behaviours may become more difficult to change (Finger, 2000: 1).

In a number of countries, men have been found to have a lower life expectancy at birth and experience higher death rates during adulthood than women. A possible explanation for this could be that young boys are often brought up with the perception that they are

immune to illness or risk. They are lead to believe that 'real men' do not become ill (UNAIDS, 2001), which places an enormous burden on them. In many societies young men are discouraged from showing affection or other emotions, while they are encouraged to seek control, success and power. Such pressures may prompt boys to act aggressively, leading to injuries, accidents and criminal activities. Many men may feel stressed when they are not able to live up to the expectations of the social norms of manhood. There are clear patterns of sex differences in substance use and suicide rates, with boys in developing countries generally reporting higher rates of substance use and boys committing suicide at much higher rates than young women (Finger, 2000). This begs the question: has placing men under these enormous pressures to perform and conform led to these frightening statistics?

Beliefs about what it is to be a man (or a woman) undoubtedly underpin these statistics. Together with cultural expectations about gender roles and behaviours, they influence how people act and the risks they take. Working with and persuading men to change some of their attitudes and behaviours has enormous potential to change the course of the HIV epidemic, and to improve the lives of their families and their partners (UNAIDS, 2000). It has now become imperative to strike a balance between recognising how men's behaviour contributes to the epidemic, while also building on their enormous potential to make a difference (UNAIDS, 2001).

Research shows that people are more likely to adopt and maintain behavioural patterns that they learn at an early age. Preventing HIV infections among adolescents could,

therefore, be a good way to curb the AIDS epidemic, as about one third of the world's 34 million HIV-positive people are between 10 and 24 years of age (UNAIDS, 2001; Best, 2000). About a third of the 333 million new sexually-transmitted infections (STIs) reported each year (excluding HIV) occur among people younger then 25 years (Best, 2000). Given the appropriate information and life skills, boys and young men can be empowered to make responsible and healthy choices that include abstinence and delayed sexual activity, as well as safer sex (Best, 2000; UNAIDS, 2001).

In the chapter that follows I will be looking at the methods followed to gather and analyse data for this study.

CHAPTER 4

THE STUDY

Introduction

In this study I set out to explore the relationship between current constructions of masculinity and risk-taking behaviour among a group of young South African men. In conducting focus groups with adolescent males at seven different schools, the intention was to document how these young men perceived the construction of their masculinities and how this may have impacted on their possible participation in various types of risky behaviours. I believed that this would shed some light on the high injury and mortality rates among South African adolescents, as well as the high number of HIV infections among our countries' adolescents (UNAIDS, 2000; Shisana & Simbayi, 2002). In this chapter I outline the methodological framework of the study, the central questions that framed the method of data collection, focus groups, the model of understanding that informed these questions and the methodological approach that I adopted in the analysis of data in the study.

Aims and Objectives

The central aim of the study was to explore a group of adolescent males' perceptions and understandings of the concept of masculinity, and how this intersects with their risk-taking activities. The study was conducted with the intention that it would provide new information for our conceptual understanding of masculinities in local contexts in South Africa, as well as for educational recommendations for intervention models towards safe sexual practices and other risk-taking behaviours that young men are at risk of.

The objective was to conduct three focus groups with similar groups of adolescents at seven schools within urban, as well as rural Cape Town. The study was conducted to explore what these groups of male adolescents understood by the concept of being a man, and how this was linked to risk-taking behaviour among young men in this age group. In reviewing transcripts gathered from the focus groups, I intended to identify various themes and discourses at play around perceptions of risk-taking behaviour offered by the participants. The broader questions I aimed to address were:

❖ How do the participants understand risk-taking behaviour and their own vulnerability as young men facing risks in relation to unsafe sexual practices, substance use, criminal or violent behaviour?

❖ How do participants understand their vulnerability as young men to risk-taking behaviours?

❖ How do participants' constructions of masculinity intersect with, or impact on, risk-taking behaviours?

Male adolescents are believed to be more vulnerable to risky behaviour. This study set out to explore the relationship between the period of adolescence and the construction of male masculinity. The questions were developed to bring into context theories around (male) adolescent risk and bring into conscious discourse these young males' understandings of their identities and of risky behaviour. The study allowed young men to speak freely about potentially risky practices. I believe that it also aided these young men in exploring alternatives to dominant ideas or beliefs of what men should be like (i.e., challenging dominant or hegemonic masculinities).

Methodological Framework

Bearing in mind the high rate of HIV infections among South Africa's adolescents, I hoped that this study could shed some light on this epidemic. The young men in this study shared knowledge of how they experienced risk within both their personal, as well as their social capacity as young men. Data collected through their discussions on this topic will be utilised for recommendations for future development of theoretical and educational interventions.

In accordance with feminist principles, the use of qualitative techniques seemed to be most suitable for this study. The study also dealt with various types of risk-taking behaviours, including risky sexual practices. As my research was also explorative, I believed that it would benefit more from a qualitative methodology as I was interested in young men's perceptions about what it meant to them personally to be a man and how this related to them engaging in risk-taking activities.

In an article by Anna Strebel (1995:59) dealing with benefits of using qualitative methods, such as focus groups, in AIDS research she stated:

> It is [also] thought that more traditional quantitative methods do not allow for the complexity of issues, depth of understanding and flexibility of exploration around 'touchy' subjects needed for research in this sphere. Moreover, feminist researchers have found qualitative methods to be particularly suited to enhancing an understanding of gender relations.

Many feminist researchers thus follow a qualitative methodology as it is believed to be more suitable for the in-depth data required to enhance understanding, and it also

facilitates more freedom in exploring a variety of issues within any given study. Qualitative techniques and analysis also provide researchers with an opportunity to capture the richness of themes emerging from the participants' talk, rather than reducing their responses to quantitative categories (Smith, 1995).

The study was also located within a post-structuralist paradigm. Post-structuralists moved away from viewing and studying men and women within essentialist terms by identifying how both men and women are constructed in and through gender. This, in turn, identified ways in which both men and women are repressed and oppressed by, and within, patriarchal systems (Hughes, 2002). At this point I think it is important to note that my intention with this study was not to minimise or downplay the effect that an oppressive patriarchal system has had on women the world over. Rather, this study was conducted with the intention of bringing to light and documenting the effect that the same oppressive patriarchal system has had on men, and how boys' and men's practices need to be understood within the broader framework of gender and gender power relations.

Feminist qualitative research

Feminism can be said to be both a theory and a practice, a framework that informs personal and political lives. Its purpose is thus to understand women's oppression better in order to assist in ending it. Feminist researchers, therefore, set out to be part of the process of discovery and understanding, but also to create and facilitate change (Kelly, Burton & Regan, 1994).

The central aim of feminist research was, and still is, to provide women with an understanding of their everyday world, in order to help bring to light women's shared conditions and problems from a woman's perspective (Lather 1988; Acker *et al*., 1991). Early definitions of feminist research centred on the creation of knowledge 'about' and 'with' women. My research was not carried out on or with women, but rather focused on (young) men and their experiences. In spite of the selection of participants, namely males, the research was carried out and analysed whilst adhering to key feminist principles and values, and through the lens of a gendered theoretical and methodological approach.

Upon first deciding to make the construction of masculinity the focus for my research, I had some reservations about carrying out such a research project within a feminist paradigm. I had two main concerns about doing this project in this respect. Firstly, it would be focused on men and not women, and thus be in opposition to the main aim of feminist research, i.e., to provide women with an understanding of their everyday world, in order to help illuminate shared conditions, and to identify problematics from the perspective of women's experiences (Lather 1988; Acker *et al*., 1991). My research focused only on the problems and risks (young) 'men' face with regard to the construction of their masculinity.

The second concern related to where women would fit into the project, and who would be empowered by this research project. Feminist research puts emphasis on the importance of being empowering to participants (Maynard, 1994; Lather, 1998). Given that participants in this study would be men, it would thus supposedly be empowering men

and not women. On the other hand, there has been some challenge regarding the notion that feminist research should always be empowering to their participants, and the assumption that researching men detracts from women's empowerment or empowers men at the expense of women. Kelly, Burton and Regan (1994: 38), for instance, argued that,

> Where our research involves studying men or institutions, how we think about power, and the 'power' of the researcher, shift dramatically. Rather than 'sharing' it, our concerns are how to limit its potential use against us, and how to conduct a study, which reveals its surface and hidden forms in relation to the research question/topic. In this context the 'empowerment' of research participants is not, and indeed should not, be our goal. If that concept has any meaning it must relate to the groups over which these individuals and institutions exercise power.

My research set out to empower these young men only in so far as it may challenge them by making them more aware of the way in which dominant discourses on masculinity may facilitate risk-taking activities. It is, therefore, the intention of the research to impact on gender power relations more broadly, and in the long-term to facilitate both men's and women's access to equitable relationships with each other and healthy life styles.
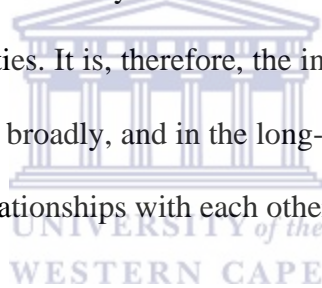
Reservations regarding the study of masculinities are, however, not unfounded, and the debate amongst many feminist academics about the inclusion of the male ideology within the field of feminism continues (Morrell, 2002). Numerous studies, however, have focused only on women to facilitate change, though many of these studies have enjoyed minimal success as they failed to recognize men's agency to contribute to change. It has thus become imperative for us to focus our attention on men in order to facilitate (social) change (Morrell, 1998).

As feminist research is geared towards the creation of social change (Kelly, Burton & Regan, 1994; Maynard, 1994), this research project was carried out with the intention of making recommendations for facilitating change and, thereby, a reduction in male adolescent risk-taking behaviours, especially unsafe risky sexual practices. It has thus become imperative for these young men to recognize their agency in change facilitation by critically exploring their perceptions of male ideology.

Feminist researchers are also believed traditionally to prefer the use of qualitative methods (Kelly, Burton & Regan, 1994). The qualitative/quantitative divide is another continuing debate among many feminist scholars (Maynard & Purvis, 1994). The bulk of this debate has focused on the claim that quantitative research techniques may result in the translating of individuals' experiences into categories predefined by the researcher. Some feminist scholars have argued that quantitative methods may distort women's experiences and result in a silencing of women's own voices (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1988).

Qualitative methods, on the other hand, could be seen to lend themselves better to social constructionist enquiry (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991). Advocates of qualitative methods have argued that individual women's understandings, emotions, and actions in the world must be explored in their own terms. Therefore, it is within this notion that defenders of quantitative methods have been concerned. In their view, by allowing subjectivities and emotions within the research process, qualitative methods would provide "few safeguards against the operation of researcher biases and that abandonment of all aspects of

traditional methodology may carry political and scholarly costs" (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1988: 85). Currently, the divide between quantitative and qualitative methodologies is not viewed so rigidly and more feminist researchers are acknowledging that there is no one feminist methodology or method (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991; Burton & Regan, 1994).

In this study a qualitative data collection technique (focus groups) and qualitative data analysis method (thematic analysis) were employed. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) assert that qualitative methods allow the researcher to research his or her research question in-depth, with openness and detail. Qualitative approaches have also been perceived to be characteristically feminist (Maynard & Purvis, 1994). Some feminists viewed the traditional social science approach as

> reinforcing women's oppression and devaluation, as contributing to the failure to study the situation of women, and to conceptualize their situation in ways consistent with continuing male dominance (Levendal, 2002: 39).

As traditional social science methods were seen as contributing to an exploitive relationship between the researcher and the subject (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991), many feminist scholars have adopted qualitative methods on the basis of the arguments that they:

❖ Offer a more human, less mechanical and hierarchical, relationship between the researcher and 'the researched' (Levendal, 2002)

❖ Provide an opportunity to explore individuals' understanding, emotions and actions in the world on their own terms (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991).

❖ Acknowledge that research can never be objective and value-free.

❖ Recognize the researchers' subjective influence in the research process and the analysis of the data collected. In this respect, qualitative methodology highlights self-reflexivity which allows the researcher to examine her own framework of understanding critically, to become aware of contradictions and tensions, and to bring her experiences and memory of the research process to the research (Lather, 1988).

Participants

A purposive sampling method was used to select appropriate participants to participate in the study (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Purposive sampling is a sampling method used when participants need to be selected to meet a specific criterion (Neuman, 2000). In this study, participants selected had to be young school-going males between the ages of 14 and 16.
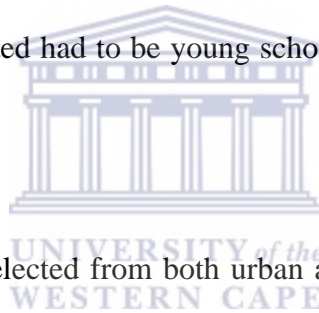
Participants were voluntarily selected from both urban and rural schools in the Western Cape Province. This was done as previous research findings suggest possible differences in risk-taking profiles between urban and rural youths (Nelson Mandela/HSRC Study, 2002; Reddy *et al*., 2003). Rural-urban divides are also believed to be an important axis for studying different masculinities (Lindegger & Durrheim, 2001).

Seven schools in the Western Cape region were visited, and two to three focus group sessions were held with each group. Schools were also purposively selected to represent a spread of the local community, in particular with respect to the historical divides of apartheid. They included one historically 'white' school, three historically African

schools, and three historically 'coloured' schools. Three of the schools visited were in relatively rural or peri-urban settings, while four were in urban areas. Three of them were based in African townships, one in a predominantly Muslim community, one in a predominantly 'coloured' community, one in a relatively 'new' community made up of both 'coloured' and African students, and one was an historically 'white' school in a predominantly 'white', middle-class suburb.

Although the groups covered a number of different topics as part of the goals of the broader study mentioned earlier, for my particular study I focused only on information gained in these sessions relevant to dealing with risk-taking in respect of how it may be linked to the concept of masculinity. During the sessions open conversation was encouraged. To assist the research group in doing this, each group was facilitated by male researchers or male researchers co-facilitating with a female researcher, with appropriate research, intervention and language skills in the languages of choice of participants.

Data Collection and Analysis

We collected data from seven schools in the Western Cape. At most of the schools we had three sessions of between one hour and one and a half hours with each group. We conducted a total of 19 focus group discussions. Each group was shown three music videos at the start of each focus group that highlighted different aspects of masculinity. The music videos served not only as a vignette to generate discussions, but also as an icebreaker to help make the participants feel more relaxed. The discussions were guided by a semi-structured interview schedule that focused on various aspects of masculinity.

The semi-structured questions also allowed for flexibility during the sessions and created an opportunity to follow up on issues highlighted by the participants.

All the sessions were video recorded and, as a back-up measure, we also used audio recorders. Video recordings are seen to be valuable because they provide information not only about what people say, but also how they say things. This often reveals as much about the participants as the content of their words does (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

As with any method there are some limitations. The camera captures only certain information: in our study the camera frequently focused on those who were speaking, thus preventing observation of the rest of the group. The literature also suggests that participants may feel ill at ease in the presence of a camera, and that they may feel fearful of who will be watching the tape, or they may simply be afraid to talk (see Bottorf, 1994; Schurink & Poggenpoel, 1998; Joseph, Griffin & Sullivan, 2000). This was less obvious in our study where most participants were eager and interested to be on camera. Throughout most of the focus groups the participants were very relaxed in their approach, although there was one group where there was some correlation between some of this study's participants and the participants in Brown's (2001) study who were 'jockeying' (Wetherell & Ederley's term, cited in Brown, 2001) for position. All participants were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to leave at any time with no consequences. With the exception of two of the schools where a few of the boys had other obligations, all came back for the other two sessions.

All the transcriptions were transcribed verbatim and then translated into English where necessary. As part of the analysis, the transcripts were read along with the viewing of the video recording to identify any suggestive body language.

The focus groups were believed to be the ideal method for data collection in this study as they allowed space in which participants created meaning amongst themselves rather than individually (Babbie & Mouton, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The aim of a focus group is to get closer to participants' understandings and perspectives on certain issues. This method allows for the exploration of people's opinions, attitudes, beliefs, values, discourses and understandings of things, as being valid in their own right (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996).

Research Procedure

Permission was requested from the Western Cape Education Department for schools in the Western Cape to carry out this study (see Appendix). After receiving permission from the Western Cape Education Department to go ahead with the study, the principals from the seven participating schools were contacted telephonically to determine interest and to obtain telephonic consent. Since we conducted the focus group discussions during school hours, we needed to secure consent from the principals from the participating schools, as well as the consent of the participants to do so. Consequently, a formal letter including all the relevant information regarding the researcher and the research project, as well as the letter from Western Cape Education Department granting us permission to do

this study, was faxed, e-mailed or hand-delivered to participating schools. Dates, times and venues for conducting the research were then arranged with the principal or grade co-ordinator. The principal or grade co-ordinators were requested to select participants that met the selection criteria. They were requested not to select, as far as possible, only groups of friends, relatives, only 'bad' boys or only 'good' boys. It should, however, be noted that at some of the smaller schools it was almost impossible to find groups who did not know one other, even if they were not friends or kin.

Thematic content analysis (TCA)

A thematic content analysis (TCA) was used to analyse the data collected. TCA was thought to be useful because of its many benefits. Banister *et al*. (1994:57) defines thematic analysis as "…a coherent way of organizing or reading some interview in relation to specific research questions".
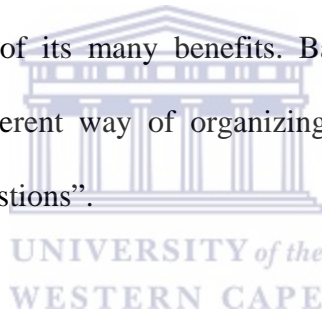
Ryan and Russell Bernard (2000: 780) further claim that:

> … themes are abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs that investigators identify
> before, during, and after data collection.

As with qualitative thematic analysis (QTA), TCA offers one of the more user-friendly methods because it sets out an easy recipe to follow or adapt. The method and content are fairly lucid, and its application to any form of written/spoken discourse is limitless. TCA is extremely user-friendly and enters the realm of 'common sense', i.e., classification into themes is something we all do every day of our lives. Research would thus normally start with some general themes derived from reading the literature, and

would add more themes and sub-themes as it progresses. This combines well with participatory or feminist research approaches where the data/participants/texts are allowed to 'speak', giving voice to particular issues (Ely *et al.*, 1991; Wilbraham, 1995).

According to Ely *et al.* (1991: 156), with a thematic analysis the researcher brings a "public spotlight" on her "decision-making process in establishing findings". Banister *et al.* (1994: 55) continues that in a thematic analysis it is important to be clear that extracts do not "'speak for themselves'… [as] meaning inheres not only in the text, but in our construction and reading of it … [Thus,] analysis is inevitably selective". Thus, the possibility exists that other researchers could discover different themes from the texts used in this research.
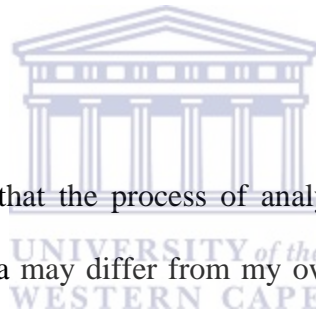
 I was well aware of the fact that the process of analysis is subjective and that other researchers' analysis of the data may differ from my own. I therefore acknowledge that my reading of the data is my own and may have omissions and contradictions that are beyond my experience as an interpreter, and recognize the possibility of silences and absences in the data and their interpretation. On the other hand, as the research project was part of a larger one where senior researchers were also interpreting the data, my analysis was reinforced by considerable overlap between my work and that of the other researchers on the project.

Ethical issues

There were a number of ethical issues that needed to be addressed in this study. Firstly, since the study was conducted with young school-going boys, consent had to be requested from the Western Cape Department of Education, as well as from principals of each school and from parents of participating learners. Secondly, participants were recruited on a voluntary basis and on the basis of informed consent, so particular attention was paid to ensuring that learners were fully informed of this. Thirdly, the participants were assured of confidentially and anonymity. Participants thus participated on the basis of informed consent and were assured that they were able to leave the research process at any point if they became uncomfortable. Care was also taken to ensure that the content of the video- and audio-taped interviews, and the interview transcriptions remained confidential.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability in the traditional sense is not applicable for the following reasons:

a) I applied thematic content analysis in this study, and

b) the analysis relied heavily on my personal interpretation and coding of the data collected, while I remained conscious of the influences of my own subjectivity in the analysis process (Banister, 1994).

However, the validity of this study, as in any other study, was very important. "Validity is concerned with the rigor and authenticity with which data is [*sic*] produced and interpreted. This means that the researcher has to be continuously aware of the way in which she is located in the construction of the research findings" (Moos, 2003: 43). To

safeguard against misinterpretation, being self-reflexive throughout the research process was imperative, as it is argued to be a key aspect of ensuring validity in qualitative research (Lather, 1988). Reflexivity is the way in which a researcher constantly reflects on his/her own subjective engagement with the information presented by the participants in the study (Shefer, 1998). I thus had to remain aware of my own influences in the construction of the research findings.

Self-reflexivity

As mentioned before, this study formed part of a broader study, namely 'The construction of masculinities and risk-taking in relation to HIV/AIDS'. Having been part of the Women's and Gender Studies Department for more than six years, I had been exposed to various gender-related issues. In my third year I first started learning more about masculinity studies and this sparked my interest. My relation to this subject presented me with some challenges but with even more opportunities to learn and grow.

As a feminist I had some reservations linking masculinity construction to feminism, i.e., where does it fit within feminism? Even more importantly, why should it be studied within the feminist paradigm? A key concern here related to the assumption that all feminist research should be empowering to the participants, and as this project focused on young men, it meant empowering men and not women. Throughout the research process I thus had to guard against my preconceived notions and understanding regarding masculinities, especially the dominant, sexist, cultural/traditional masculinity type that

annoys most feminists. Staying aware of this was especially important to me during the analysis process in order to deliver bias-free research findings as far as possible.

As the project progressed I learned that even though the project did set out to empower the male participants, it ultimately had the possibility of positively affecting women, too, as it brought to the fore the complexities of traditional masculinity and highlighted the alternatives to the dominant/hegemonic, oppressive masculinity type.

In the following chapter I will be highlighting and discussing some key findings of this research project with a focus on the link between male adolescent risk-taking and the construction of masculinities.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

Throughout the last few years there has been much talk of the 'masculinity crisis' or 'male identity crisis' that has been ascribed to men's increased feelings of disempowerment caused by women's empowerment. Implementation of gender equality has meant a reversal of traditional gender roles, i.e., men are no longer viewed as the primary breadwinner/provider, but rather this responsibility is now shared with women. It is argued that this has left men feeling robbed of their purpose, namely being the head of their household (Morrell, 2002). Men thus had to explore other ways of asserting their masculinity and this sometimes meant participating in risky activities as discussed in chapters 2 and 3. Coupled with the phase of adolescence, in which risk-taking appears to be powerfully associated with the achievement of masculinity, male adolescents are arguably particularly at risk of a range of risky practices and their consequences.

This chapter presents the key themes that emerged in the analysis of the data that speak to the way in which participants relate to risk-taking behaviours, and how this intersects with their subjective and group meanings of masculinity. The key areas addressed were: firstly, an exploration of traditional gender roles, where the focus will be on what it meant to the participants to be a 'real man'; and secondly, as the focus of this study is on gaining new insights into young male risk-taking activities and how these activities

intersect with how young men think about and construct their masculinity. I will then move on to explore three key risky activities discussed by the participants, namely *substance use, violence* and *sexuality* (respectively), while focusing on the gendered nature of each of these. Given that the construction of a masculine identity takes place in opposition to that of the feminine identity, some exploration will also focus on the participants' constructions of girls and women. From here I will be looking at some of the contradictory notions expressed by the participants. I will conclude the chapter with a focus on, and exploration of, alternative masculinities.

Traditional gender roles

Being a real man

Participants across the cultural lines identified with a range of behaviours associated with being a young man that strongly reflected traditional gender roles. One such sentiment that came across quite strongly was that men needed to be the head of their households; this meant that they had to go out to work – 'real' work – which involved working with their hands, but also to serve as proof of what they did,

Extract 1

Respondent A:	You have to work for your money.
Facilitator:	(Referring to the artist in the music video) But he is also working. That is his job.
Respondent A:	He has to work with his hands; that's a man's job.
Respondent A:	No, but not everyone can do that. Everybody cannot do that type of work.
Respondent A:	He has to sweat for his money.
Respondent A:	*Nah, broe*, you don't understand. He can dance the whole day, and then he sweats. Then that is his job.
Respondent A:	*Daai is moeg sweet*. He must work; he must work with his hands.
Respondent A:	If I wanted to work as a man then I would want to see what I worked on. Or I would want to see; I can't just see on the TV, okay, there,

that is what I made. That's not like a real job. I want to be able to see, I made that, I sweated on that.

(See Appendix for definitions used in extracts)

This tied in strongly with the divide between men's work and women's work, i.e., the traditional gendered division of labour. A strong sentiment here was the belief that men are responsible for financially supporting their families, and women are responsible for nurturing and care, i.e., emotionally supporting the family. Although there was a strong promotion by some participants of the traditional gendered division of labour, there was also a contradictory recognition that this no longer is the case in most families. I will take a closer look at that contradiction later in this chapter when discussing traditional masculinities. In the following quote, a more progressive discourse that men should take responsibility for childcare, too, is argued, but also undermined by other participants who shift this back to the traditional notion that men must be responsible for the financial care, to ensure that women can continue their traditional role of nurturing.

Extract 2

Respondent A:	If I make a baby then it is my responsibility to look after that child.
Facilitator:	You said that the man must take more responsibility. In what way does the man take responsibility?
Respondent A:	[He] Make sure that there is money and stuff like that. See if she needs anything to take care of the child.
Respondent A:	When he does [this he fulfils] his duty towards his wife and his family and his home.

With regard to doing chores around the house, the traditional understandings again held sway. Even though some argued that there were no set rules for who was responsible for what, when it came to household chores, this was seen as a women's domain and men

were viewed as responsible only for doing the manly jobs, such as taking out the trash or cutting the grass, 'doing the hard/difficult stuff'.

Extract 3

Respondent A: A man has to do hard jobs like maybe go and get something here or there. I think that is mostly what a man does, and to clean the yard and stuff.
Respondent A: Yes, hard jobs like really sweat ...

Aside from being the head of their households and assuming the responsibility of providing for their families financially, being a 'real man' also meant possessing material goods, and at these participants' age this meant wearing fancy clothes in order to be seen as 'cool', being '*die ou*' or being 'fresh', as they described it.

Extract 4

Respondent A: He wears cool clothes.
Facilitator: So you admire that about him?
Respondent A: Yes (Group agrees). He makes me also want such stuff.
Respondent B: He does not want to wear a fake label.
Facilitator: Is that important to guys?
Respondent B: Generally, guys do not want to be taken for granted.

Tying in with the traditional understanding of being a man was the need to protect their family and the women in their lives. In some of the groups there were some clear contradictions with regard to this, as this protection at times also included the need to beat their partners in order to prove their authority/masculinity.

Extract 5

Respondent D: I still maintain that a woman needs to be punished if she engages herself in any form of drinking and smoking habit.
Facilitator: (A different opinion from others): Do you mean that she must be beaten?
Respondent D: Yes, she must be beaten. Hitting a girl will make her understand you better.
Respondent D: We do not beat these girls for the fun of it but they sometimes invite it, especially [from] those guys whose temper cannot be measured.

Traditional and cultural understandings were also drawn on by some groups to account for some male behaviours, for example, the practice of *lobola* which some believed entitled men to expect their women to do household chores and take care of the family,

Extract 6

Respondent B:	She is obliged to do everything because I have paid *lobola*.
Respondent B:	Helping each other has nothing to do with *lobola* but with love.
Respondent B:	So if you take *lobola* as a priority, it means you do not love your partner.
Respondent B:	No, I do love her but *lobola* equates chores.
Respondent B:	That is totally not a sign of love, but abuse.
Respondent B:	You remind me of men who usually complain about soaked nappies because of the unpleasant smell.
Respondent B:	I will never wash nappies.
Facilitator:	What else can't you do?
Respondent B:	I do not wash dishes and also do not cook.
Facilitator:	What exactly do you do at home?
Respondent B:	I make up my bed. I can help around the house with other chores, but not nappies.
Facilitator:	Why don't you want to wash nappies?
Respondent B:	I married her so that she can wash nappies.
Facilitator:	Did you marry her to wash nappies?
Respondent B:	No, but it is one of her duties.

Throughout group discussions participants were asked what it meant to be a 'real man' and even though there was a clear lack of clarity with regard to this, there were some strong sentiments and a clear understanding about those who were not 'real men'. These were predominantly gay men, whose overtly feminine behaviour was particularly unacceptable to 'real' straight men.

Extract 7

Respondent B:	Oh, you are referring to a storybegger?
Facilitator:	What is a storybegger?
Respondent B:	It is when a guy transports all favourite township gossip between girls and boys.
Facilitator:	Do you mean all storybeggers are associated with girlfriends' relationships?
Respondent B:	You end up being a *moffie*.
Facilitator:	What is a *moffie*?
Respondent B:	It is someone who wants to be a girl and imitates their behaviour.
Respondent B:	If you are a boy and start behaving like a girl, you will be considered a *moffie* and guys will expel you from their company.

When asked for distinguishing features that differentiate between a straight man and a

gay man, participants had this to say,

Extract 8

Respondent E:	He's (referring to a young man at their school) like that (shows his pinkie).
Respondent E:	He is thin.
Respondent E:	And he's like stretched.
Facilitator:	And is that a bad thing?
Respondent E:	Yeah.
Respondent E:	And he's like nerdy, you know like …
Respondent E:	And when he walks, he's like (walks up straight and slowly).
Respondent E:	Ah, [he] walks like a real girl.
Facilitator F:	So how do men walk? How do boys walk?
Respondent E:	Normally just like (walks in the same way as he did before except his hands are in his pockets this time). You walk like you walk, whatever.
Respondent E:	Like a gay guy walks around (swings his hand) like that, like puts on a voice and stuff, but straight people like us, we don't like go 'look, I'm straight and look how I walk properly' and look, you know.
Respondent E:	Okay I'm not saying like all gays do that, like some gays you can't even tell that they're gay, they keep it among themselves, they don't parade around with it. I don't mind if they're like that, but mean if they walk around going like 'hello doll', and that little kiss thingy …

Even though the derogatory term *moffie* was used to describe homosexual men, what was even more striking was that the same term was used to refer to those men who were physically abusive towards women.

Extract 9

Respondent A: A man who hits a women, I would say is a *moffie*, but a women can still maybe beat a man, but a man who beats a women … it isn't right. Just think, a women is soft, not all the time, but …

Likewise the term 'jock', was used as a derogatory term to refer to those boys who were the sportsmen and academic achievers.

Extract 10

Respondent E: Well, the jocks consider themselves the man.
Respondent E: (Speaks in a deep voice) I scored a try over the weekend (group laughs)
Facilitator: What are jocks, though?
Respondent E: They look like rugby players.
Respondent E: Jocks are those guys that play like with rugby balls in the morning. You'll see them like pass the ball.
Facilitator: So they play rugby?
Respondent E: Yeah, they play rugby, they play rugby after school and they watch rugby, they sleep and they dream about rugby …
Facilitator: So do you play rugby?
Respondent E: Yeah, I play rugby, but I am not like a jock; I like don't do everything, I like go to practice, do what I have to do there and then play for the school, make this school proud. I am not like, I don't dream about rugby [or] play here in the mornings …
Respondent E: All the jocks are like, like against smoking, none of them are like party … I mean, like a proper jock, they don't even swear; they're nothing but academic.

This brings to the fore the contradiction between 'jocks/rugby players' and players with a different background.

Extract 11

Respondent C: Like the two of us, we play rugby and everyone on the rugby team smokes, but we don't. So they asked us why we don't smoke; so we

told them that smoking doesn't interest us; we just don't want to smoke because smoking isn't cool. So they said 'no man, you don't understand; smoking is cool'. So I just said 'yeah, man, just don't tell me to smoke.'

Traditional notions of masculinity were closely tied to the articulation of different roles for young women and girls. Traditionally speaking, young women were expected to be the primary caregivers, i.e., they should stay at home and take care of their families and, in some communities, this also meant curtailing certain behaviours (acceptable, even idealized, for boys/men), such as smoking, drinking or using any other drugs. Women were not seen as having a valid reason to experiment with substances, unlike men, as elaborated in the following two quotes below.

Extract 12

Respondent B:	(Another different opinion from the group) I cannot engage in a relationship with a girl who drinks and smokes.
Facilitator:	Oh, you do not like someone who smokes *dagga*?
Respondent B:	No, it is better if I am the one (the man) who smokes.
Facilitator:	Please explain in detail, what gives you the right, as compared to her, to smoke and drink?
Respondent B:	Who will do the household chores if we are both forever drunk, and because of her bad looking nails through smoking, her food won't look appetizing. When she is drunk she will go on nagging me and I will lose control and hit her.

Extract 13

Facilitator:	Oh, you do not like someone (a girl) who smokes *dagga*?
Respondent D:	No, it is better if I am the one (the man) who smokes.
Respondent D:	Guys only smoke to soothe their nerves, especially when one has five girlfriends.
Respondent D:	Girls smoke for fun.

Traditional notions that women are supposed to be subservient to their husbands or male partners were strongly adhered to by some participants.

Extract 14

Respondent B :   Men are always considered as the head of the household, while women are subordinates to men. Therefore, a woman is not allowed to equate her husband when it comes to household decision-making.

Even though there was some recognition of the movement away from traditional notions of gender roles, this was still frowned upon when it came to women making the first move in traditional heterosexual relations.

Extract 15

Facilitator: What if here at school, you are being approached by one of the girls and she tells you she has a crush on you?
Respondent B: It would be extremely difficult.
Facilitator: Why?
Respondent B: You will be frightened because that is strange behaviour.
Respondent B: Since it is not a norm for girls to propose [to] boys, then you need to give it a deep thought.
Respondent B: Most of the girls who do that are the ones who are considered naughty.
Facilitator: Why?
Respondent B: They want money, not a relationship.
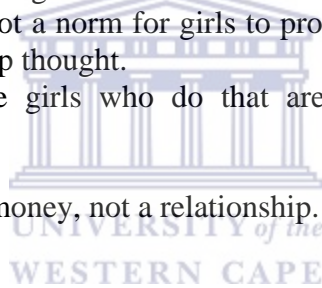
Women's desire for money was not seen as proper/acceptable behaviour. Girls who displayed such tendencies were seen to be obsessed with money, and would choose their partner for his perceived wealth.

Extract 16

Facilitator: What about guys? What do you they want?
Respondent B: Guys need to be loved, but there are those who just want sex from girls.
Facilitator: Don't girls need to be loved, too?
Respondent B: Most of them want money.
Facilitator: How do you know?
Respondent B: That is what is happening in our townships. They sometimes say that you cannot drive a car on two wheels. It must have four wheels. That

	means that they will get a rich boyfriend. In most cases they go for the foreign guys (*makwiri-kwiri*) because they believe that they have a lot of money.
Respondent B:	I do not know, but girls choose not to get involved with poor guys. Sometimes you will find that the guy can even extend maintenance to the girlfriend's family.
Respondent B:	Most girls are prostitutes.
Facilitator:	Do you mean that most women in South Africa are prostitutes?
Respondent B:	It is true, especially girls of our age group, because they are after the working-class guys.
Facilitator:	Maybe the problem is not with the girls, but unemployment and poverty.
Respondent B:	I still maintain that girls are after money.

Achieving masculinity is also associated with proving oneself through taking risks, such as the use of alcohol, cigarettes and, for some, even experimentation with drugs such as *dagga*, as elaborated in the next section.

Risky behaviours

Substance use

Substances were reported to be a common feature of young men's lives, although they generated contradictory discourses on what these meant for them. Thus, while it was acceptable and even 'cool' to be smoking and drinking, there was also a strong expression of awareness of the risks of abuse of such substances, highlighting the contradictory pressures that young men are exposed to. They clearly saw the pressure to engage in substances as related to peer pressure, media representations, role models in their family, and boredom as illustrated in extracts below.

Extract 17

Respondent C: What actually attracts them is, say now we are sitting here and a group of girls passes us, and you smoke a couple of cigarettes, and you are dressed in cool clothes, and you just look cool with the cigarette. Now, I am going to say that I also want to be like that, so I am also going to try, so I would say that they (media) show you a nice strong guy with nicely built body and stuff, then he stands there with a cigarette.

Extract 18

Facilitator: Why do you smoke *dagga*?
Respondent B: It's because of peer-pressure.
Facilitator: What caused you to smoke?

Although some participants indicated that the use of substances made them feel good about themselves ("You just feel good about yourself and you are not scared"), there was also considerable ambivalence expressed about the impact of drinking on safe sex practices, indicating an understanding that it might also lead to unprotected sex, which could, in turn, lead to unwanted pregnancies and STIs.

Extract 19

Respondent B :   Yes, liquor is a problem, and if you are under the influence, you can easily engage in sexual acts, which will lead to impregnating girls. We are still not man enough to create families; we can only do that when we have completed our studies.

Sexuality and risk-taking

As evident from the last quote, sexual activity was also understood as being potentially risky. While the impetus to be sexually active (the male sexual drive discourse) also emerged as a key aspect of masculinity, there is clearly some ambivalence about sex (evident in the quote below). As reflected in many other local studies (see Chapter 3),

there was a strong belief that men 'naturally' desire and need sex, frequently in urgent ways.

Extract 20

Respondent D:	How do you feel after having sex?
Respondent D:	It feels good.
Respondent D:	It's not true; after having sex you lose energy and get weary.
Respondent D:	Those are people who feel guilty about their behaviour.
Respondent D:	Then it means it is better to abstain.
Respondent D:	But the problem with abstinence is that you might go crazy, if you are a man.
Respondent D:	It is not proven that you can go crazy because I saw a guy on Zola –7 (television show) who was 25 years old, and he was still a virgin.
Respondent D:	But I think it is not wise to wait that long because you will really battle when you start.

Even with this recognition of their natural need for sex, sex was often also seen as a dangerous and risky practice, as illustrated above ("… after having sex you lose energy and get weary"), and this would then open them up to women's manipulations, i.e., women would entrap them and only exchange sex for gifts and money. On the other hand, failure to comply, i.e., not have sex, would result in the danger that women would leave them for a 'quick fix' with someone else, and they would be ridiculed or ostracized by their peers.

Extract 21

Respondent B:	I still maintain that girls are after money.
Interviewer:	What about guys? What do you they want?
Respondent B:	Guys need to be loved but there are those who just want sex from girls.
Interviewer:	Don't girls need to be loved too?
Respondent B:	Most of them want money.
Interviewer:	Supposing you love the girl and she wants money, how do you deal with that?
Respondent B:	You must educate her about a good relationship and then you do not have to rush into sex, although the friends might still criticize her.
Respondent B:	I agree with you, but still, if you do not make love to her she can still leave you for a quick fix with another guy.

In spite of their adherence in many ways to the male sexual drive discourse, there was also a strong awareness of the more material dangers involved in taking sexual risks, those of unwanted pregnancies and STIs/HIV:

Extract 22

Respondent D:	Nowadays, it (sex) is not safe because someone can leave you looking like a squeezed dry orange.
Facilitator:	Why like an orange?
Respondent D:	She will destroy your good looks by infecting you with the HIV virus, and that is why you will look like an orange.
Respondent D:	In other instances, even if they do not bring HIV, she will approach you knowing that she is pregnant and you will be responsible for the child's maintenance.

While this is one example of awareness of HIV, given the country's current levels of HIV/AIDS infections, the responses of the participants towards HIV/AIDS were cause for concern, because in terms of sexual risk, their greatest or most referred to negative consequence was impregnating a girl, and then having to be responsible for a baby. Unlike the topic of violence, the AIDS epidemic did not appear to be an immediate issue for many of the young men in the groups. While they made some references to HIV infection, and expressed an awareness of the risks of unprotected sex, they also demonstrated many myths, stereotypes and misconceptions regarding the virus. Thus, condoms were important as protection, but they were also seen as unsafe, and girls would not use them ("unpeeled bananas", see below). Also, it was perceived that it was women who infected men, while learners from the rural areas believed that the use of *muti* would protect them against infection.

Extract 23

Respondent D:	I do make love, but I have never used a condom before.
Facilitator:	Why did you not use a condom?
Respondent D:	(From the group, someone said): Maybe he wants to start a family.

Facilitator:	But, I think that is a risky behaviour; you can contract an HIV virus. Love-making without a condom is a risky behaviour.
Respondent A:	In most relationships, girls prefer not to use condoms, since they associate condom use with eating a lollypop with a cover on.
Facilitator:	But the condom is going to cover the penis, so why is it girls who complain?
Respondent A:	They are right; you cannot eat a banana with a peel.

Violence

Central to many young men's talk was the fact and possibility of violence, which played itself out in very different ways across class, cultural and language groups. For boys growing up on the Cape Flats, gangsterism was a defining feature of their social context, with graphic accounts of the pervasiveness of gang-related violence, which was described as being the result of economic need, peer pressure, boredom, and as an escape from bullying and low self-esteem.

Extract 24

Respondent A:	He (referring to someone he once knew) was also like that. He was either in sub A or in sub B. He always walked around with his big brother. His big brother was a gangster and he also wanted to be a gangster. A little later on he was supposed to go and shoot someone, but then he got shot in the leg. After that he cooled down for a bit when he came home from the hospital; then he joined the neighbourhood watch. He probably then started to show them all of the spots where the gangsters hung out and stuff. One of the gangsters then probably found him so they chopped him up. He was also in my class, but then they chopped him up.
Facilitator:	Really?
Respondent A:	Yeah, chopped up; everything was cut off: arms, legs, everything; his eyes was taken out, everything. Then they left him in the field.

While it was seen as an unavoidable feature of life, the young participants in the focus groups distanced themselves from such activity and were outspoken about the negative outcomes of such involvement. For example:

Extract 25

Facilitator: Now why do you think some people still would want to join a gang?
Respondent A: Maybe some of them gets bullied at school by the bigger children; then they build up all of that [...] then maybe they see that a gang is cool, then maybe they join the gang. Now the gang tells them that they have to do something; then they do the stuff and then later, when they want to leave, then it is already too late.

Extract 26

Respondent A: Most of the times the reasons why children join gangs is because their mom and dad is unemployed, or maybe their father is a drunk or they don't get enough money, everything that they want. Like maybe he wants a pair of *takkies,* the ones that all the grand (admired) people wear. They wear grand clothes; now why should he suffer? Gangs offer them the opportunity to wear grand clothes. So why should he suffer? Though it is giving on the condition that you do what they want, when they want, 'cause if you don't, then they take everything back. Or they do something to your mother; all kinds of things that you don't want them to. And if you want to leave … they tell you that even though you leave, you will still be a gangster.

For young men in informal urban areas, violence was also a common feature of everyday life, although the focus was somewhat more on interpersonal conflicts, either in domestic and heterosexual relations, where violence was seen as an acceptable method of demonstrating power, or to prove one's bravery.

Extract 27

Respondent D: Sometimes you do not plan to fight or revenge, but when a person draws a knife you will be left with no option but to fight back to defend yourself. Maybe because of your fright and anger, then you end up killing this person and regret it later.

On the other hand, young men from middle-class urban environments seemed to associate violence with being 'cool'. They drew on popular media depictions and fantasies of fighting and toughness, although they were strongly critical of any form of domestic violence.

Extract 28

Facilitator:	What do you think of people who beat on women?
Respondent E:	Men who beat on women are pussies.
Facilitator:	Okay, what if a woman hits you, how would you react?
Respondent E:	I leave them.
Respondent E:	Yeah, I just leave them.

While some participants emphasised a rejection of gender-based violence in the home, with respect to sexual violence against women, a discourse of blame towards rape survivors emerged in a number of groups. For Muslim participants this was mostly argued in relation to a rape survivor's dress, viewed as a rejection of the Muslim faith in which it is clearly stated how men and women are supposed to dress. Also, for other participants, coercive sexuality and rape were constructed as relating to young women's provocative behaviour and dress, and as representative of their going against tradition and their faith. There were, however, some voices that strongly disagreed with the traditional discourse on rape, and who had clearly been exposed to more progressive views on the dynamics of gender-based violence:

Extract 29

Respondent C:	I think I don't agree with this guy because ... because some other people might rape the women because some people see that kind of video and they see what happen in that videos and they get like ... the feeling that he can also do this stuff. He is influenced by the video. That's why the people choose to rape.
Respondent C:	No, just because a women dresses like that does not mean the men has the right to rape her just because she dresses like that ... Look here. If you look at my religion ... for a women to dress like that it is inappropriate ... but that doesn't give any other man the right just to go and rape a women just because she dresses like that.
Respondent C:	Women these days, they dress themselves in like short skirts and boots and whatever comes out (suggesting their breasts). They want to be attractive ... all the women from today ... and when you walk past, you like, you and like something.
Respondent C:	The Koran says that a woman should cover her whole body and a man from his knees up.

Respondent C:	Because God gave them that body.
Respondent C:	... because like women attract men, like ... when they have, have on that short skirts and sweater above their navel.
Respondent C:	Well, some women like to wear; it's fashionable clothing.
Respondent C:	Some women only wear it because they want attention.
Respondent C:	*Ja*, and some women don't like it when men rape them, but they're like calling the men to come and rape them.
Facilitator:	Hang on, hang on. All women don't like it when men rape them. Do they?
Respondent C:	But listen here nobody likes to be raped.

The quotes above again bring to the fore the 'untamable' male sex drive discourse. Women have to cover themselves so as not to put themselves in danger of some men's uncontrollable sexual desire.

Reasons for engaging in risk-taking activities

There was a range of factors considered as contributing to engaging in risky behaviours. As already mentioned, peer pressure was regarded as a major influence, especially in gangsterism and abuse of substances. Coupled to this was the undeniable influence parents had on their children's decision to engage in risky behaviour, as parents were also seen as role models and, in some cases, as examples of what to avoid. Although they were able to provide reasons why many young men their age engaged in risky behaviour, many of the young men in the groups distanced themselves from such influences, and asserted their own ability to resist such pressures.

Extract 30

Facilitator:	Others claim to smoke due to peer pressure; what is your reason?
Respondent B:	I am not different from the rest since friends influenced me. I stopped smoking *dagga* only a few months ago.

Extract 31

Respondent B:	The problem is that it is difficult to isolate yourself from the group.
Respondent B:	When you have addicted parents who spend all their money on liquor and have no self-control, it becomes difficult for children to cope with the situation. Therefore, they resort to risky behaviours, and if parents can change their bad habits, they can be good mentors, and the crime rate will be reduced.

Popular reasons for engaging in risky-behaviours were given. Poverty and poor living conditions, for example, were seen to play a role, as well as bewitchment and the use of *muti*.

Extract 32

Respondent D:	They (criminals) don't value their lives.
Facilitator:	So it means that you are aware that you live once; that is why you do not engage in criminal activities?
Respondent D:	Unless, if you are forced by living conditions at home or being bewitched by jealous people to make you a destructive person in life.

There was also much talk about the impact the media had on their lives, especially regarding consumerism and a desire for material goods, as well as their persuasiveness in making them want to experience things advertised, including the use of substances, and engaging in violent behaviours.

Extract 33

|	
Respondent A:	Some people, they think that those people's lives are really cool, and they think that it is reality, they must also be like 50cent; he's cool. He has a gun in his hand, he gets away with everything, but his life isn't really like that. That only happens in the video that he made. But many children want to follow in his footsteps, and then they join gangs and stuff. They think that that is reality, and it should be like that.

However, they also recognized positive messages brought across by the media, including educational programmes (*Yizo-Yizo* and *Soul City*), which seemed to have made an impact.

Extract 34

Respondent B: Nowadays, there are films that educate the youth about deviant behaviour and its consequences (e.g., *Yizo-Yizo*). There are scary things shown in that film to enlighten us about the measures we can use to prevent or avoid these types of situations …

Contradictory notions of gender relations

Throughout the sessions alternative and, at times, contradictory constructions of gender roles became apparent. Thus, there was recognition that currently, contrary to traditional expectations, it was often women who had jobs, and that men might, in fact, be the ones who stayed at home. Based on this perspective, men would share household work and participate in child care.
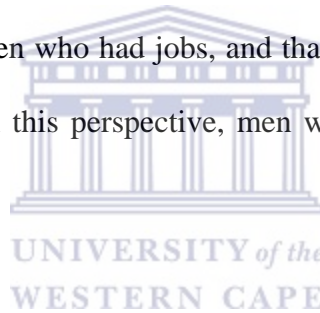
Extract 35

Respondent A: … I also want to raise a point that nowadays you will find women playing soccer, and there are those who work deep in the mines as we speak, so there should be no restrictions.

Extract 36

Respondent A: I think that a man must bring his side ... Whatever he can contribute, where he can help in the house, he should help in the house because just as it is his wife's house, it is also his house. Because he also lives in the house, he also sleeps in the house, he also lives there so wherever he can help, he should help, like cleaning and stuff, like.

More than this, there was a strong recognition that society now supported the breakaway from traditional gendered relations, and even favoured women more in the public sphere where this sphere used to be dominated by men.

Extract 37

Respondent A: Today things are the other way around. Women in the old days, it always was the man who were the [*ou*] man of the house who had to do everything. But today it is again the women that has to. For example, in companies a man may apply for a job and a women may go after the same job. But the job was, might have been meant for a man, but just because of the new laws the woman now gets the job. Because it is now the women's chance, like they say?

Extract 39

Respondent A: These days it is the same, everyone's chores are everyone's work. A woman does the man's work and the man does the women's work. If you go to many companies you will see more women working in the factories where they now perhaps work with iron and making stuff like that. Then you see men doing the lighter jobs.

However, this then gave rise to the perception that women have more rights than men, or that women may abuse their access to equality, rights and resources. For example, the argument arose that young girls could be sexually provocative, but then would 'cry wolf' and get away with accusing men of sexual harassment.

Extract 40

Respondent A: A woman has more rights then a man. Say now the man works. His wife knows just how to get him. But the day that he gets her back, then she run to the police station, 'he did this and that to me'. Now she goes and complains, but she doesn't say what she did. Because they are only women, women get everything right; women know just how to get you.

Respondent A: There are also some incidences, say at school, where say now a girl touches you the whole day, but if you just touch them once, then it's straight, expelled, misconduct, go home.

Facilitator: So what stops you from going to the office and saying, 'look here, the chicks are touching me'?

Respondent A: They don't believe you.

Respondent A: If you tell them 'they touched me', then ...

Respondent A: They're going to think that you're just making it up.

Respondent A: That's why I am saying that women have more rights then men.

Respondent A: They get away with a lot more.

This was then linked to a strong depiction of young women as being dangerous, manipulative and devious, being emotionally abusive and dressing provocatively to 'entice' young men. Thus, they could not be trusted, as they might drug a man to steal his money, con him into thinking he had made her pregnant, or infect him with HIV/AIDS.

Extract 41

Respondent B: Another issue that causes family violence is when a man, while having money, does not want to maintain his family. The wife will end up stealing the money for the relief of the family. Then her husband will beat her. The same thing can happen to a co-habiting couple when a guy publicly talks about his possessions to his partner. She may be tempted to drug you with the love potion, which might kill you, and she will gain possession of your property, and she can freely spend everything with anybody of her choice.

Extract 42

Respondent A: There are some women who *somma* like fight with men, and then if the man hurts her, then she wants to run to the police station.
Respondent A: Sometimes women also abuse the men.
Respondent A: Maybe they don't do it physically, but emotionally.
Respondent A: Women treat their husbands badly and give them a love potion, which can be dangerous.

Summary

A study conducted by UNAIDS (2001) found that men and boys use substances that are injected at higher rates than women and girls do. In another study funded by them in Brasilia, they found that many [young] men believed that by using alcohol and other substances, these not only helped to prove their manhood, but they also assisted them with fitting in with their peers. Young Brazilian people interviewed in this study said they sometimes smoked *dagga*/marijuana or drank before going to parties, as they believed it gave them the 'courage' to find a partner (UNAIDS, 2000). In another study done in the USA, 31% of young men said they are always or sometimes high on alcohol or drugs

during sex While the links between the use of 'party drugs', such as Ecstasy, and sexual risk is unclear, such drugs, without doubt, can impair judgement in ways that make sexual risk-taking more likely (UNAIDS, 2000).

Throughout discussions with participants of our study, though, the young men took great care in distancing themselves from risky practices, especially with regard to criminal and violent behaviour, maintaining that it was others who engaged in these practices, and not them. When it came to substance use, talk around this was somewhat confusing. As indicated with the studies above, some participants admitted to the use of substances, though many agreed that substance use was risky (see chapter 5, "makes you wary and you might engage in sexual intercourse without protection and impregnate a girl"). There was also some indication from some participants that they would sometimes do things, and engage in risky activities, to impress girls, although there was also some resistance to some girls' behaviour. These included girls' perceived need for money and gifts, and their need to exchange this for sex (transactional sex).

Because of some girls' preference to exchange sex for gifts of money, some boys found themselves in a difficult place, especially when bearing in mind their own need for sex. Girls thus held the power in that regard and in some others, given the current gender sensitivity. Therefore, in order to prove their authority, boys/men sometimes would beat girls/women.

Participant gave three key reasons for engaging in risk-taking activities, namely a) media, b) peer pressure and c) parental example.

a) Media

The media were seen to contribute to their behaviours or their choice to engage in risky practices in both a negative and a positive way. They made them want to experience some of the products/lifestyles, such as alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, overt sexual experimentation, and violent and criminal behaviour (including gangsterism). However, the media also contributed to educating them about the dangers when using these products and/or indulging in these activities.

b) Peer pressure

Peer pressure also seemed to play a deciding factor in their choice of participation in risky practices, for at this age, fitting in and being seen as 'cool' was particularly important. Deviation from this set norm was not seen as 'cool'.
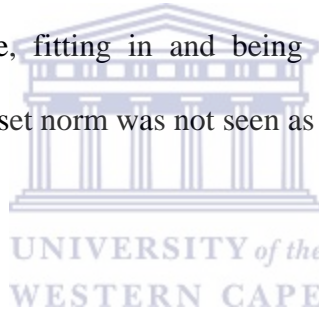
c) Family example

Research suggests that when fathers, mothers and other male family members offer a positive role, boys develop a more flexible vision of manhood, and are more respectful in their relationships with women. As a result, all members of the family play an important role in raising boys. Relatives, teachers and other adults may assist by teaching boys about their sexuality. This is believed to be where lifelong difficulties for men in talking about sex, and learning the facts rather than believing the many myths that surround the subject, may find their hold. Being able to talk about concerns about sexuality, and seeking support are important first steps for young men and women to protect themselves against unsafe sexual practices. Yet many youngsters, especially men, grow up believing

that they should not depend on others, worry about their health or seek help when they face problems. One result is that boys often pretend that they know a lot about sex, whereas they are frequently uninformed or misinformed. These attitudes have broad implications for the spread of HIV.

Children learn through example: boys who see their fathers and other men being violent towards women, or treating women as sex objects, stand a greater chance of accepting such behaviours as 'normal male behaviour'. In a study conducted in Germany, a UNAIDS-funded project (2001) found, for example, that young men who were disrespectful in relationships with young women had often witnessed similar relationships in their homes. It may be in this context that they also learnt behaviours, such as substance use or rejection of condoms. It was found that young men with traditional views of manhood were more likely to have been involved in violence and delinquency, substance use and unsafe sexual practices than boys with less stereotypical views about what 'real men' can and should do. Constant work towards finding alternatives to this traditional view of masculinity has thus become imperative.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

For many years numerous studies have focused on adolescents and their vulnerability to various risk-taking practices. Aimed at gaining a better understanding and insight into young men's perceptions and understandings of being a man, this study also set out to explore how the construction of masculinity is linked to risk-taking and feelings of invincibility in some men/boys.

Although a relatively new field of study within South African academia, some theorists in critical men's studies, such as Connell (2000) internationally and Morrell (2001) locally, have theorised about the concept of masculinity, and have applied it towards developing a deeper understanding of boys and men in order to assist in the development of gender equity and HIV/AIDS prevention programmes. The latter is of particular importance, as it has been found that of all groups, young men are the most likely to be involved in activities associated with HIV risk, including drug injecting and unsafe sexual practices.

Given the strong association between risk-taking and masculinity (given hegemonic notions of masculinity as being associated with sexuality, violence, and generally taking risks, being 'macho' and rebellious), adolescent males may be particularly vulnerable to multiple risk-taking practices. Forming part of a larger study that focused on male adolescents in the Western Cape, this study hoped to gain a greater understanding of how

young men construct their masculinities, and how this intersects with risk-taking behaviours.

The following chapter presents a summary of the study conducted and reflects critically on the findings. It also highlights limitations of the study and the entire body of work covered here (including the literature reviewed), and makes recommendations for future research.

Reflections on the findings

The following key findings were highlighted in Chapter 5:

a) Being a real man

Participants across the cultural lines identified with a range of behaviours associated with being a young man that strongly reflected traditional gender roles or a traditional gendered division of labour. A strong sentiment here was the belief that men are responsible for financially supporting their families, i.e., doing hard, sweaty jobs with their hands, and women are responsible for nurturing and caring. Men were also considered by many to be the head of the household, while women are subordinate to men. Therefore, women are not allowed to be equal to their husbands when it came to household decision-making, nor were they allowed to partake in certain behaviours considered acceptable – even idealized – for boys/men, such as smoking, drinking or using any narcotic drugs, or dressing 'provocatively'. Traditional notions that women are supposed to be subservient to their husbands or male partners were strongly adhered to by some participants. Although many of the participants advocated the traditional gendered

division of labour, there was also a contradictory recognition that this no longer was the case in most families. Some recognized that many women these days were the primary breadwinners in their households. Some participants viewed this as the reason why some men beat their wives because the traditional understanding of being a man was the need to provide and protect their family and the women in their lives, though as times have changed and women were now providing for their families financially, some men (had to) beat the women in their lives to prove their superiority/authority.

Traditional and cultural understandings of the practice of *lobola*, drawn upon by some groups to account for some male behaviours, also tied in strongly with this sentiment of the gendered division of labour. Some believed *lobola* entitled men to expect certain things from their women, i.e., doing the household chores and taking care of the family.

Being a man was also tied in closely to the clothes one wears and how one behaved socially. Any homosexual tendencies were frowned upon. An interesting observation here, reflected by much other local and international literature, was the derogatory labelling of homosexual men, i.e., the term '*moffie'*. Interestingly, this term was also used by some groups to refer to men who beat women, further highlighting the negative stigma of the label '*moffie'*.

b) Risky behaviours

Achieving masculinity is also associated with proving oneself through taking risks, such as the use of alcohol, cigarettes and, for some, even experimentation with drugs such as

dagga. In the next section I will elaborate more on some of these risky activities by focusing on specific risks as indicated/highlighted throughout this study.

1) Substance use

Substances seemed to be a common feature of young men's lives, although there was some confusion as to what this meant for them. While it was acceptable and even 'cool' to be smoking and drinking, there was also a strong expression of awareness of the risks of abuse of such substances, highlighting the contradictory pressures that young men are exposed to. Smoking, drinking and experimenting with drugs such as *dagga* were also regarded as acceptable behaviour for young men, but definitely not for women, as women were not seen to have a valid reason to experiment with substances, unlike men.

2) Sexuality and risk-taking

Although the participants were aware of the risks of unsafe sexual practices, especially with regard to impregnating girls, there was still a recognition of their natural need for sex. Sex was often spoken of and seen as a dangerous and risky practice, as it would open them up to women's manipulations because women were seen to be after only one thing, namely money. Some participants then saw themselves as being trapped by this, because a failure to comply and have sex with girls, even if that meant buying gifts, could result in these women leaving them for a "quick fix" with someone else. As a result the boys/men would be ridiculed or ostracized by their peers.

In spite of their adherence in many ways to the male sexual drive discourse, there was also a strong awareness of the more material dangers involved in taking sexual risks, namely those of unwanted pregnancies and STIs/HIV. While this is one example of awareness of HIV, given the country's current levels of HIV/AIDS infections, the responses of the participants towards HIV/AIDS were cause for concern when it came to sexual risk. Unlike the topic of violence, the AIDS epidemic did not appear to be an immediate issue for many of the young men in the groups. While they made some references to HIV infection, and expressed an awareness of the risks of unprotected sex, they also demonstrated many myths, stereotypes and misconceptions regarding the virus. Thus, condoms were considered important as protection, but they were also seen as unsafe, and girls would not use them ("unpeeled bananas"). With regard to the spread of HIV, women were seen as the primary carriers of HIV, and the ones who then infected men. Learners from the rural areas, though, believed that the use of *muti* would protect them against infection.

c) <u>Violence</u>

Violence played itself out in very different ways across class, cultural and language groups. For boys growing up on the Cape Flats, gangsterism was a defining feature of their social context, with graphic accounts of the pervasiveness of gang-related violence, which was described as the result of economic need, peer pressure, boredom, and as an escape from bullying and low self-esteem.

For young men in informal urban areas, violence was also a common feature of everyday life, although the focus was somewhat more on interpersonal conflicts, usually in

domestic and heterosexual relations, where violence was seen as an acceptable method of demonstrating power and proving one's bravery.

On the other hand, young men from middle-class urban environments seemed to associate violence with being 'cool'; they drew on popular media depictions and fantasies of fighting and toughness, although they were strongly critical of any form of domestic violence.

While some participants emphasised a rejection of gender-based violence in the home (as mentioned before), with respect to sexual violence against women, a discourse on blame towards rape survivors emerged in a number of groups. For Muslim participants this was mostly argued in relation to a rape survivor's dress, viewed as a rejection of the Muslim faith in which it is clearly stated how men and women are supposed to dress. Also, for other participants, coercive sexuality and rape were constructed as being related to young women's provocative behaviour and dress, and as representative of their going against tradition and their faith. There were, however, some voices that strongly disagreed with the traditional discourse on rape, who had clearly been exposed to more progressive views on the dynamics of gender-based violence.

Reasons for engaging in risk-taking activities

There was a range of factors considered as contributing to engaging in risky behaviours. Participants clearly saw peer pressure as a major influence, especially in gangsterism and abuse of substances. Coupled to this was the undeniable influence parents had on their children's decision to engage in risky behaviour, as parents were also seen as role

models, and in some cases examples of what to do and what to avoid. Although they were able to provide reasons why many young men their age engaged in risky behaviour, many of the young men in the groups distanced themselves from such influences, and asserted their own ability to resist such pressures.

There was also a strong recognition of the influence that popular media had in their lives. Participants recognized both negative (enticing them to experiment with risky behaviours) and positive messages brought across by the media, including educational programmes (*Yizo-Yizo* and *Soul City*), which seemed to have made an impact in their lives.

d) <u>Contradictory notions of gender relations</u>

Throughout sessions alternative and, at times, contradictory constructions of gender roles became apparent. As mentioned before, there was a strong recognition that society now supported the breakaway from traditional gendered relations and even favoured women more in the public sphere, "Because it is now the women's chance, like they say". However, this gave rise to the perception of women having more rights than men, or that women may abuse their access to equality, rights and resources. For example, the argument was made that young girls could be sexually provocative, but then 'cry wolf' and get away with accusing men of sexual harassment. This was also then linked to a strong depiction of young women as being dangerous, manipulative and devious, being emotionally abusive and dressing provocatively to 'entice' young men.

Contributions of the study

The study highlights the complexities of traditional notions of masculinity by pointing out the problematics with it with regard to risky practices, i.e., substance abuse, violent behaviour and unprotected sexual activity. It thus also highlights the need for alternatives to the traditional dominant/hegemonic masculinity type, and in so doing assists in the fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Limitations of the study

Limitations of the study related not only to the methodology, but also to some gaps identified in the review of the literature provided in the first chapters. In chapter 2 I looked at various theories around adolescent risk-taking, while focusing, among others, on their increased vulnerability to HIV infection. The chapter highlighted the fact that of all age groups adolescents as a whole were at greater risk of HIV infections. It also made evident the need for greater exploration of cultural and gendered pressures, in particular on young boys and men, with respect to their identities and roles as boys/men during this period. My theoretical understanding of adolescents was greatly shaped by Westernised research and theory, and could thus fail to take into consideration the diverse cultural background and understanding of this country's adolescents. Further research is needed to rectify this.

Chapter 3 explored national and international theories on the construction of masculinities and how it intersects with male adolescent risk-taking, while focusing on various issues such as a) the construction of masculinities, where I looked at various

types of masculinities, i.e., the *Dominant/Hegemonic Masculinity type*, the *Complicit Masculinity type,* the *Submissive Masculinity type* and finally, the *Oppositional/Protest Masculinity type*,   b) adolescent and social construction of sexuality, c) gender construction, d) masculinity and sexual practices and e) the construction of masculinity and risk-taking, respectively. As mentioned before, the study of masculinities is still a relatively new field of study in South Africa, thus leaving me to rely more heavily on Western literature. As with the literature on adolescents in this country, I considered the limited resources on this topic, from a South African resource perspective, to be a major limitation. By leaning on Western literature, there was the potential of failing to take into account South Africa's diverse cultural background, and thereby possibly failing to take into account the effects of different cultural understandings on/in the construction of masculinities.

Regarding weaknesses in the methodology of the study, bearing in mind the key aim of this study, i.e., to document how some young men perceived and understood the construction of their masculinities and how this may have impacted on their possible participation in varies types of risky behaviour. Chapter 4 thus motivated my choice/method of data collection (focus groups) and analysis (qualitative thematic analysis), but it also highlighted some the following possible limitations:

Firstly, only 15 − 16 year old adolescents took part in this study, even though the period of adolescence ranges from age 13 to 25. As older adolescents engage in more risky activities than younger adolescents, future studies may benefit by focusing on a broader

spectrum of adolescents, which may then give us a broader overview of adolescents in various stages of their risk-taking.

Secondly, only seven schools took part in the study: two were historically black schools, three were historically coloured schools and two were historically white schools. From each of these schools eight to ten participants were voluntarily recruited to take part in the study. This had the potential to be a limitation with regard to viewing the participating 15 – 16 year old adolescents as representative of all adolescent boys in this age group, across geographical borders in the whole Western Cape. It should be noted that as the study progressed and different opinions were raised within the various groups, the diverse nature of some adolescents was highlighted.

Thirdly, by applying a qualitative methodology in the study, it meant that we depended on the participants' honesty in answering the questions posed them. This always has the potential to be a major limitation in any study where this method is applied. By making sure the participants were comfortable and willing to participate, we hoped that this would assist in this regard.

Finally, bearing in mind that the study focused on gathering perceptions from adolescent boys across geographical borders within the Western Cape, language and translation played an important role in this study. Limitations here relate to the loss of some meanings during translation of the data. With the assistance of facilitators who conducted the focus groups in the language of choice of the participants we hoped to limit this.

Given the qualitative methodological approach adopted in this study, I have acknowledged from the start the significance of my subjectivity and its possible effects on the process of the data analysis. My understanding of the participants, and my own values and perceptions of the issues dealt with in this study, were central to my own construction of the analytical interpretation.

Recommendations for further research

As mentioned before, this study formed part of a broader study, focusing on the construction of masculinity and risk-taking among adolescent boys in relation to HIV/AIDS. My focus, however, was an exploration of how masculinity construction and risk-taking intersect. By reviewing the literature and findings in this field, it is clear that there is a definite relationship between the two. Cultural and traditional understandings of what it is to be a man had an effect on how these young men responded to risk-taking in their daily lives. What was, however, disconcerting was their understanding of the construction of masculinity and its impact on sexual risk. Young men would often refer to women as initiating and wanting unprotected sex ("unpeeled bananas"). Future research could benefit from cross-gender research when it comes to HIV/AIDS prevention. Tied into this was the lack of importance given to HIV/AIDS. Unlike with the other topics discussed, i.e., gangsterism, violence and substance use, the AIDS epidemic did not appear to be an immediate concern.

A second recommendation for future South African researchers is to explore the link between masculinity and risk-taking with older adolescents, given the findings that they partake in greater risky activities than do their younger counterparts.

Thirdly, as indicated before, the lack of South African-based research was of great concern to me. All research, including Westernised research, can play a great part in developing theories, though more localized research that incorporates the diverse nature of our country's people could be more beneficial to future research. Thus, a call for more South African-based research has now become imperative.

Conclusions

At many places in the discussions, participants were at pains to distance themselves from the traditional constructions of masculinity and being a real man, and to assert that it was 'others' who were smoking and taking drugs, engaging in unsafe sex and/or violent or abusive relationships, or were active in gangsterism. Rather, the participants were intent on constructing themselves as able to resist influences. Thus, they presented images of responsible manhood; of loving, gentle, caring and trusting relationships; of making up one's own mind, of taking responsibility for one's actions, having principles and making informed choices; drew on examples of parents and religious beliefs; described male abusers in derogatory terms, such as 'pussies' and '*moffies*'. Having said this, though, it is important to note that even though there was a strong need to simply 'be yourself/ be your own man', this was a contradiction within itself. Thus, even though they wanted to be individuals, there as a recognition that being different was not always 'cool', as they

would then open themselves up to be ridiculed or labelled and being called derogatory names. What was clear, though, after talks with these young men, was the realization that they did not really know what it meant to be a man. It seemed easier for them rather to identify what it meant *not* to be a real man. What was clear about these young men was that even though manhood was something they strived towards, it was something yet to be achieved.

This study focused on various risk-taking activities that young male adolescents engage in, but more importantly, it brought to light how this intersects with the construction of their masculinity. Current practices of traditional/hegemonic masculinity and male sexuality have been proved to be particularly problematic, especially with regard to the country's current rates of HIV infection. Alternatives to hegemonic masculinities have now become imperative to combat this epidemic. The study highlighted how in the area of male sexuality, there is still pressure on young boys/men to prove themselves through active (hetero)sexuality, and to take risks, but contradictions regarding increased understanding and 'buy-in' to discourses of gender equality and alternative versions of masculinity hold a potential space for transformation.

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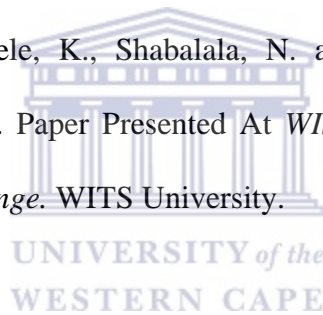
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