How Do Certain South African Women Construct Masculinity for Their Sons? An Analysis of Motherly Discourse Regarding Gendered Expectations

A minithesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Magister Philosophiae in the Faculty of Arts, University of the Western Cape

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I

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Keywords

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II

Declaration

I declare that <u>How Do Certain South African Women Construct Masculinity for Their Sons? An Analysis of Motherly Discourse Regarding Gendered Expectations</u> is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

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Signed...

Abstract

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Rosemary Dixon

Mphil minithesis, Department of Women and Gender Studies, University of the Western Cape

The study consists of a discourse analysis of ten conversations with a group of mothers whose sons attend a private primary school in Observatory, Cape Town. The purpose was to ascertain what sorts of discourses these particular women would utilise when discussing the notion of masculinity for their boys. I carried out in-depth conversations with each of the study participants, with the intention of elucidating themes and patterns surrounding the participants' constructions of gender. While the interviewees' discourses cannot be said to be representative of South African women in general, they do provide an insight into 'ordinary women's' personal ideologies of gender and masculinity. Based upon theories of social constructionism and feminism, the research hopes to contribute to the ongoing process of transforming gendered power relations in South Africa.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Boys become men and, in that process of becoming, the adults who care for them wield great influence. The subject positions in which boys are placed, their identities and their consciousness are all constructed by language. Thus, the ways in which young boys are spoken to, and about, by those closest to them inspire their self-knowledge. As the ownership of a male body is inextricably tied to masculinity in Western culture, the modes in which young boys are constituted hinge on ideologies of masculinity. Therefore, notions of gender and masculinity harboured by a boy's parents, and by the society in which the child moves, are crucial to the process of becoming a man.

I have a six year old daughter. As I have grown with her over the years, I have frequently had occasion to observe the behaviour of her young friends. In my dealings with my daughter's contemporaries, I have often wondered what it is that 'other' mothers 'do' to imbue their children with gender. I have watched, and been confused by, boyhood behaviours that have seemed so 'male', so 'adult' and, at the same time, so awkward and 'othering' that the idea of this study was instantly appealing to me. Another inspiration for this study grew from my readings in social constructionism, and as I progressively engaged with postmodern theory and research, I became ever more conscious of the paucity of material exploring 'ordinary' women's perceptions of gender and masculinity.

The design of the research grew through my ever more passionate interest in theory. As my engagement with postmodern feminist theoretical debate has deepened, so has my belief that theory must not be confined to the domain of the intellectual elite. We all carry with us theoretical maps, created in everyday life which guide us in our beliefs and actions. Thus, I freely employ the concepts of 'ideology' and 'theory' throughout the study, as it was the participants' personal 'ideologies' and 'theories' of gender and masculinity I was seeking in the research. Perhaps I am not using these terms as many would define them, but it is my contention that we 'live' theory through our commonplace interactions, and we profess ideology in discourse. Participants' notions of gender and masculinity represent and express, then, "a specific, situated world view" (Wekker, 1997: 330). Thus, when the study participants explained to me their 'theories' of gender as it applied to their sons, as well as to the rest of the male population, they were professing their personal 'ideologies'. To be sure, their theories and ideologies are constructed from all the overt and, perhaps more importantly, covert information they have absorbed about gender, as are mine. By discursively analysing the participants' discourse, though, I am attempting to identify 'knowledges'. Thus I argue, as does Seller (1997: 230), that "the way to develop knowledge is through comparing experiences and beliefs with those who share at least some of our meanings and values". Therefore, it is crucial to remember in this study that, while I turn a critical eye toward the interviewees' constructions of gender, and particularly masculinity, I do not believe the women are passive assimilators of gendered social expectations. They are, rather, active constructors of lived gendered relations.

Analysing women's constructions of masculinity through a filter of feminist sensibilities is the key to this study, as the participants' discourses *could* be utilised in support of the very gender ideologies that I wish to deconstruct. Instead, I highlight them with the objective of detecting inconsistencies and contradictions which, if focused upon, can point the way to clearer understandings of what it is about gender that is so entrenched within our psyches and our societies. The research necessarily entails a profound esteem for the study participants and for the telling of their lived experiences. Though the study was not an attempt to 'change the minds' of the participants, perhaps the long conversations surrounding the complexities of gender will generate further thought and examination of the subject on their parts. As in any effective university classroom, one's 'personal ideologies' are challenged often simply by the fact that something one has taken for granted for one's entire life has been placed under scrutiny. The conversations we created together placed masculinity on the examination table and for many of the participants this was the first time they had participated in such an exercise. This study places gender, then, and the participants' discourse, under feminist scrutiny, in the hope of contributing toward the transformation of gendered power relations.

The next chapter comprises a review of the literature that was relevant to this study in terms of pre-research design and theoretical underpinnings, gender, mothers and sons, masculinity and social constructionism. Chapter three introduces the methodological frameworks within which I operated during the study as well as the logistics of the research itself. Chapter four includes an analysis of the discourses chosen from the interviews along with a discussion of the ramifications of, and meanings associated with,

the discourses by the study participants. The final chapter consists of my reflections on the process as well as thoughts on further research that could spring from this study.

Masculinity is not doomed to remain synonymous with domination. Through diligent feminist political action and research, change has taken, and will continue to take, place. Thus, the ways in which we think of, and discursively construct, both masculinity and femininity must be critically examined both in the classroom and 'on the ground' in order to encourage gender transformation within our communities. As Kimmel (2000) said in his keynote speech at the Wellesley centre for Women's Research's Sixth Annual Gender Equity Conference, "feminism has offered a blueprint for a new boyhood and masculinity based on a passion for justice, a love of equality, and expression of a fuller emotional palette... Now that's a vision of boyhood worth fighting for".
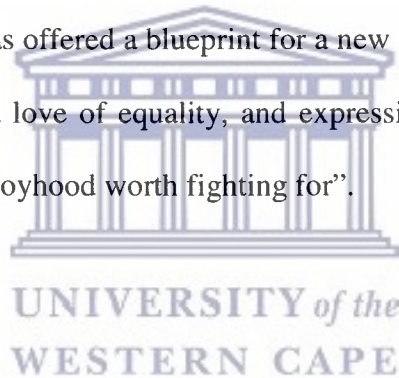
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

As gender plays a role in all aspects of social interaction, the research reviewed here is interdisciplinary in nature. While various psychological and sociological theories of gender development inform my background research (Freud, 1925; Chodorow, 1978, 1994; Dinnerstein, 1987; Frosch, 1987; Bly, 1990), they do not apply precisely enough within a discursive social constructionist paradigm to warrant the application of any one in particular in the analysis section of the study. The following, then, along with a discussion of my background research, is a review of the literature regarding gender, its social construction, and masculinities.

What is Gender?

As far as we know, the notion of gender does not exist amongst any species except our own. It is rather, "…a human invention, like language, kinship, religion, and technology; like them, gender organizes human social life in culturally patterned ways" (Lorber, 1994: 6). Gender is described by some as the worldly manifestation of biological attributes (Clatterbaugh, 1990; Sternberg, 1993), but according to others "gender is socially defined masculinity and femininity" (Geis, 1993: 10),

Most of us take gender for granted; thus it has not historically been readily apparent and, until relatively recently, it has not been seriously investigated. I believe that an exploration of the gendered nature of being is of considerable value in painting an informed picture of human social relations. Lorber describes the unconscious societal role gender plays:

> Gender is so pervasive that in our society we assume it is bred into our genes. Most people find it hard to believe that gender is constantly created and re-created out of human interaction, out of social life, and is the texture and order of that social life (1994: 13).

It is essential to discuss here the distinction between 'sex' and 'gender' (Rubin, 1975; Friedman, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987; Nakano Glenn, 1999; Haslanger, 2000). Indeed, Friedman (1990: 2) calls "the conceptual clarification" of this distinction, "one of the most significant insights of feminism and feminist theory in the past 15 years". The meanings of gender, of course, are not unitary, but subjective and variable, and do not exist without context (Thorne, 1990).

That sex "…refers to what are seen as 'real' physical, biological, and genetic differences between male and female bodies" (Shefer, 1997: 82), is a widely accepted notion. This notion can be problematic, however, as it presumes sex to be an inherent and stable category (Butler, 1990; Shefer, 1997; Wallach Scott, 1999). Sex is viewed as a given, natural state in which the body is situated; one is either one sex or the other, and one's gender follows from this inherent quality. If sex is perceived in this manner, the implication follows that gender arises out of this biological imperative. The difficulty with utilising the term 'sex' to mean what is biological is, therefore, the implication that

human action and human response are based upon one's inborn attributes (Sternberg, 1993; Jacklin & Reynolds, 1993; Wallach Scott, 1999). I agree with West and Zimmerman's (1987: 127) assertion that "sex is a determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males". On the other hand, some authors such as Maccoby (1988) believe that the terms 'sex' and 'gender' can and should be used interchangeably, as "biological and social aspects of sex may interact with each other and it is difficult to distinguish between the two" (in Golombok & Fivush, 1994: 3). Braidotti (1997) agrees with this argument from a political rather than sociological perspective, as she contends that the sex/gender differentiation is distinctly North American and not particularly useful in other feminist theoretical contexts.

While I recognise that the notion of sex itself is not fixed in meaning, I do not use the two terms interchangeably, I rather employ the term 'gender' in its multiplicity of interpretations. In one sense, it implies the ways in which we understand, categorise, relate to, and internalise perceived differences in male and female behaviour (Harris, 1995: 1). West and Zimmerman (1987: 125), however, conceive of gender as a verb. It is something "we do". They describe gender as follows: "*Gender*, in contrast [to sex], is the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category" (West & Zimmerman 1987: 127) (original emphasis).

Therefore, in addition to conceptualising gender as the way humans conceive of and judge masculinity and femininity for themselves, I employ the term to signify gender as

one of the most salient of guides for us in our interactions with one another. That is to say, gender is not only how we understand our world, it is always attendant in how we present ourselves to others as well as how others perceive and respond to us.

Gender can be described as an institution, and it pervades all societal institutions, while these same institutions are founded upon a gendered, classed and racialised hierarchy (MacKinnon, 1989; Lorber, 1994; Cameron, 1997). West and Zimmerman (1987: 146) argue that "…doing gender also renders the social arrangements based on sex category accountable as normal and natural, that is, legitimate ways of organising social life". As institutions are standardised to reflect gendered inequalities, unequal social relations appear to be moral, correct, and not subject to scrutiny. "The social reproduction of gender in individuals reproduces the gendered societal structure; as individuals act out gender norms and expectations in face-to-face, they are constructing gendered systems of power" (Lorber, 1994: 6). Gender is produced and reproduced through interaction, representation and thought. It is "used to structure distinct domains of social experience" (West & Zimmerman, 1987: 128). Gender, then, can also be seen as a formula for creating an institutionalised social power structure and, in this equation, gendered individuals are accorded differential and unequal status according to their perceived sex (Shefer, 1997).

Morrell makes a crucial statement when describing the effects of institutionalised notions of gender and, particularly, masculinities:

> …the way institutions inscribe what being a boy or a man is obviously has implications
> for the sorts of behaviour choices and emotional and psychological resources that men
> have to draw on and, importantly, their capacity to make different choices (1998b: 9).

We are all prey to societal institutions, and shaped by such in numerous dimensions (Lorber, 1994; Feree, Lorber, & Hess, 1999; Morrell, 1998a; Connell, 1995; Ratele, 2001). Though we are constructed by these institutions, we are also engaged in the process of (re)constructing them. Ratele (2001: 245) writes of the role of gender in this process, "Masculinity… constructs the social reality of institutions and the identities of women". Thus, institutions such as the family, the education system, the church, and the media have a profound impact upon our self-knowledge, and the ways in which we construct gender in our everyday lives (McDowell & Pringle, 1992; Lorber, 1994). In terms of gender, then, masculinity 'belongs' to men and boys, but clearly, society is relational, and women and girls are constructed as embodying masculinity's opposite. Accordingly, the mothers in this study construct their own subjectivities against a backdrop of, and in conjunction with, the institutionalisation of their sons' masculinities.
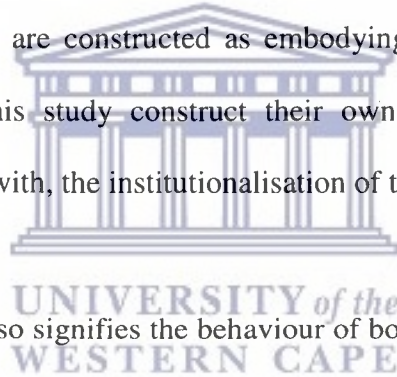
Gender, in terms of this study, also signifies the behaviour of boys and girls and men and women in social interaction. It cannot be seen as a monolithic or rigid category but rather as a way of acting, thinking, behaving and theorising – in other words it is a personal and collective ideology. Gender is both internalised and externalised by human beings, yet is also a 'verb' in the realisation that we perform it (Butler, 1990) and, it is a cycle, in the sense that "beliefs cause behaviours *and* behaviours cause beliefs" (Geis, 1993: 10) (original emphasis).

Geis (1993: 9) terms gender a "self fulfilling prophecy". Fundamental to an understanding of this is the notion that "conscious and unconscious gender beliefs do not match" (Geis, 1993: 11). Gender, therefore, consists of concepts of male-ness and

female-ness, which are not necessarily uppermost in one's consciousness. They are, rather, naturalised, taken-for-granted, culturally collective, historical ideologies and assumptions about the ways boys and girls and men and women are supposed to *be* in social relations. Thus, we continuously construct, and have our notions of gender constructed for us.
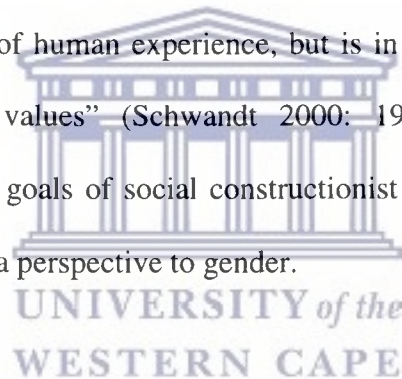
Social Construction Theory

> Construction theory does not have a stake in the answer, but it is committed to asking the questions and to challenging assumptions which impair our ability to even imagine these questions (Vance, 1989: 15).

Social construction theory, as applied to this study, takes into account, and indeed welcomes, the contradictions involved in being human. According to Potter (1996: 12) this view purports that, "…the worlds in which we all live are not just there, not just natural objective phenomena, but are constructed by a whole range of different social arrangements and practices". The various positionings people create between one another and within our institutions inevitably occasion incongruities and inconsistencies which social constructionism seeks to explore.

Social constructionist theory delves deeply to scrutinise accepted concepts of knowledge and truth. Botella (1995: 6) writes, "Social constructionism places knowledge neither within individual minds or outside of them, but between people. In other words, according to social constructionism, knowledge is generated by people interacting and collectively negotiating a shared set of meanings". Social constructionists have as a

premise that no knowledge is truly objective, meaning that there is no knowledge that is 'out there', untethered to human social creation. Thus it can be argued that the concept of perspective-less knowledge is faulty, as "knowledge is derived from looking at the world from *some* perspective" (Bozalek,1997: 8) (my emphasis). Implicit, then, in the account of knowledge within a social constructionist framework is the notion that knowledge is woven together with values (Gergen & Gergen, 2000). Gergen (1997) contends that the social constructionist view of knowledge can free us from the oppressive effects of entrenched cultural understandings. Therefore, "a general assumption of social constructionism is that knowledge is not disinterested, apolitical, and exclusive of affective and embodied aspects of human experience, but is in some sense, ideological, political and permeated with values" (Schwandt 2000: 198). Accordingly, social transformation is integral to the goals of social constructionist theory and research and particularly when applying such a perspective to gender.

Key to social construction theory, as with other postmodern frameworks, is the centrality of language and dialogue in the construction of subjectivities through discourse. We learn how to *be* through interaction with the people and institutions that create our environment (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Lorber, 1994; Gergen, 1997). Our world is created by language, and social meaning is discursively given to actions, objects and events. Language, in its infinite variation, plays a fundamental role in the actual construction of the self and the perception of others (Budwig, 1995; Shotter, 1997; Schwandt, 2000). Thus, "language offers more than a tool for the researcher as a way to 'underlying inner life'; ...through language speakers come to construct and deploy ever changing subjectivities" (Budwig, 1995: 4).

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In keeping with the contradictory nature of identity as theorised by social constructionism, "this identity or subjectivity as it is called, is not always rational, is not a single unified self, and is partly unconscious" (Shefer, 1997: 95). Therefore, "gendered subjectivity is constructed through individual's experience of a variety of subject positions which are created in discourse and constructed in language" (Simpson 1997: 202). For the purposes of this study we must maintain the concept of multiple subjectivities or identities, rather than the notion of a singular, unitary, consistent sense of self. "Men and women actively construct their gender identities, reproducing and reinforcing societal gender divisions, and sometimes challenging and changing traditional patterns" (Holmes, 1997: 264). I argue here that the women interviewed in this study, apart from constructing their own identities, place their sons in varied subject positions as they construct the boys through dialogue.
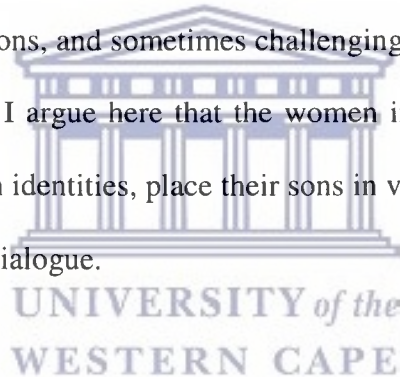
As we navigate through the world, our conceptions are created by interactions and social meanings (Budwig, 1995; Shotter, 1997). We create personal and collective ideologies of power, hierarchy, "race"[1], gender, class, sexuality and age (Gill, 1995). These perspectives are integrated, corroborated and reinforced by the hegemonic discourses we take for granted, precisely because they are hegemonic (Connell, 1995; Lorber, 1994; Segal, 1990; Morrell, 1998a, 2001).

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[1] I utilise the term guardedly, as the existence of 'race' is intensely debated. The professor who introduced me to gender studies in the U.S. relates a story in which one of her students claimed in exasperation, "I don't know if there is such a thing as "race", but I **do** know that there is such a thing as racism!"

Social Construction of Gender

The socially constructed nature of gender leads one in various directions when attempting to research and understand its many meanings. Vance (1989: 16) argues for social constructionism from the perspective that it calls "attention to the paradox between the historically variable ways in which culture and society construct seemingly stable reality and experience". As gender is thought by so many to be an integral part of 'human nature', it is indeed a complex task to describe it as a creation of human interaction. Though gender is commonly said to be based upon sexualised physical differences between boys and girls and men and women, we do not ordinarily find behavioural rules or social and cultural expectations placed upon us due to other bodily variations between people (Rubin, 1975; Shefer, 1997).

The notion of gender as determined by one's genetic blueprint is widespread, and traditional science has made a major contribution to such biological determinism (Cameron, 1997; Vance, 1989, 1995; Connell, 1999; Wallach Scott, 1999). Fausto-Sterling interrogates research many of us would conclude to be 'true':

> Although based in evidence, scientific writing can be seen as a particular kind of cultural interpretation – the enculturated scientist interprets nature. In the process he or she also uses that interpretation to reinforce old or new social beliefs. Thus, scientific work contributes to the construction of masculinity, and masculine constructs are amongst the building blocks for particular kinds of scientific knowledge (1992: 248) .

As science has traditionally been seen as the domain of the 'experts', "the ease with which these theories had become accepted suggested that science was conducted within

and mediated by powerful beliefs about gender, and in turn provided ideological support for current social relations" (Vance, 1995: 38).

Burman (1995: 49) effectively understates her case when she writes, "...cultural practices marking and constructing gender go way beyond the pink and the blue...". These practices clearly involve a complicated set of issues that reach deeply into what many of us would claim as essential to our identities. "Gender and sexuality have been the very last domains to have their natural, biologised status called into question. For all of us, essentialism was the first way of thinking about [gender and] sexuality and still remains the hegemonic one in the culture" (Vance, 1989: 14). Research into the many cultural variations in gendered behaviours has made it seem ever more "unlikely that they were inevitable or caused by sexuality or reproductive capability (Vance, 1995: 38). Nakano Glenn (1999: 4) explains that "...social constructionism arose as an alternative to biological and essentialist conceptions that rendered gender and race static and ahistorical...". In addition, as efforts to transform society developed from the recognition of the contextual and constructed nature of power relations, they also called into question prevailing ideological frameworks for examining the 'facts' about sex and gender (Vance, 1989, 1995; Nakano Glenn, 1999).

The basic premise of this study then, is that gender is, amongst other definitions, embedded in and causal of, social relations. Friedman (1990: 2) asserts that "...the fact that these meanings are not constant or fixed in time, implies that gender cannot be 'natural/biological' and must therefore be social and constructed in relation to particular social formations". The issue here is in exploring its meaning to the study participants.

Notions of masculinity and femininity are not consistent and are not transhistorical, so the mothers' discourses are accordingly acknowledged as being framed within their institutional, cultural and historical contexts.

A Critical Evaluation of Social Construction

Social constructionism cannot be reduced to the debate between nature and nurture (Vance, 1995). Rather than dichotomising the relationship between the socially constructed nature of being and the biologised nature of being, we must "recognise that it is not possible to assign fixed universal percentages of variation to the effects of biology and culture, because their effects vary over time and place" (Sternberg, 1993: 5). Social constructionist research is not about observing human social interaction and ascribing relative weight to its causes. It is rather, a *deconstruction* of and examination of "...the behaviour or processes which both nature and nurture camps have reified, and which they want to 'explain'" (Vance, 1995: 47). While I do not discount the physical world, the body, and the systems created by societal institutions, and the fact that they are experienced as real, I, rather, gain access to the meanings that the study participants associate with these through utilisation of social construction theory.

The notion that we do construct our "worlds" garners reproach from some theorists and, in the following passage Vance defends one common criticism of social construction theory:

> To explain how reality is constructed does not imply that it is not real for the persons living it - or trivial, unimportant, or ephemeral, though it is also true that the insight of construction, when absorbed by the natives (that is, us) has the potential to subvert the natural status of the sexual system and cause us to question and rethink our experience of essential identity (1989: 16).

It is tempting to make the assertion that if knowledge, social relations and identity are socially constructed, they can be easily deconstructed, and critics of social construction theory claim that if subjectivity is not essential to one's nature, it can be deliberately adapted. Vance (1989: 17), however, reminds us that gender "...is constructed at the level of culture and history through complex interactions which we are now trying to understand. [This] does not mean that individuals have an open-ended ability to construct themselves, or to reconstruct themselves multiple times..." Furthermore, this is a simplistic misreading of social construction, and it can be refuted by the example of national identity and religion (Vance, 1989: 17). Clearly, these are constructed and created by one's place in the world. They are not based upon a natural or bioligised state. While many of us feel our nationality or religion to be an essential part of our identity, we would not assert that, had we been born in a different country, these would be identical to that which we now claim.

Another problematic issue in social constructionism can be found in the political, transformative nature of the theory. As we begin to understand "woman" in terms of subjectivities and complexities, the defense of *women* as a group subjected to an oppressive gender system becomes more difficult.[2] Feminism has evolved in such a manner that previously universalising claims of 'women' as a unitary subject are known

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[2] Sexual difference theorists however, point out the strategic possibilities in choosing to speak 'as a woman' while discursively recognising that "the subject woman is not a monolithic essence defined once and for all, but rather the site of multiple, complex, and potentially contradictory

to be unfounded (de la Rey, 1997; Williams Crenshaw, 1994; Hill Collins, 1990; Tee, 1995). The intersection of "raced", classed, gendered, and sexualised subjectivities can pose obstacles to the articulation of feminist demands for social and political power, so we must recognise and strategically tackle our multiple, competing and overlapping positions as women seek social justice. Feminist social constructionist theory and research works to expose and explore these contradictions, while at the same time seeking transformation of the current gender system. Social constructionist theories of masculinity are key to such a transformation as unequal power relations are entrenched within dominant gender ideologies.

Masculinities

Literature on the social construction of masculinities is clearly significant and provides a theoretical grounding for the study. The varying definitions and perspectives serve to deconstruct the stereotype of the "typical man" that we can all call upon if necessary. Berger *et al* (1995: 2) call masculinity "... the asymmetrical pendant to the more critically investigated femininity, [it] is a vexed term, variously inflected, multiply defined, not limited to straightforward descriptions of maleness". Human social behaviour is mandated by gendered expectations, but masculinity as a subject, is both elusive and illusory (Connell, 1999; Lorber, 1994; Clatterbaugh, 1990). My interest in 'it', however, is in exploring the relationship between such expectations and how they are commonly experienced as societal oppression and constraints.

experiences…" (Braidotti, 1997: 27)

The research into masculinities has been accelerating over the last two decades as men's studies becomes more widespread in academic institutions (Brod, 1987; Clatterbaugh, 1990; Nakano Glenn, 1999). Essentialist theories perceive masculinity to be innate (Bly, 1990; Kenrick & Trost, 1993) but it is generally accepted that racial, cultural, class and sexual dynamics confound any attempts to set masculine identity firmly in one place (Connell, 1995, 1996, 1999; Epstein, 1998; Kimmel, 1987, 2000; Morrell, 1998a, 2001; Ratele, 1998, 2001; Harris, 1995; Berger *et al*, 1995; Clatterbaugh, 1990). Men's perceptions of their own masculinity are crucial to a greater understanding of the issues, (Herek, 1987) yet women's perceptions of masculinity are equally salient (Hanmer, 1990; Arcana, 1983). As an example of this, Shire (1994: 148) writes, "... the discourse of women shapes the masculinities of boys as they move in and out of gendered domains". Theories regarding social constructionism and gender provide the most useful analyses for the discursive analytic research on which this study is based (Berger *et al,* 1999; Burman, 1995; Bozalek, 1997; Connell, 1995; Fausto-Sterling, 1992; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1990; Morrell, 1998a, 1998b, 2001; Lorber, 1994, 1999; Nakano Glenn, 1999; Wallach Scott, 1999; Shefer, 1997; Vance, 1989, 1995).

Many of the current theoretical trends in men's studies explore the widespread linkages between men, violence and power. Woven through these categories are men's experiences of being classed, racialised, sexualised subjects. All of these together reproduce, transform and resist dominant meanings of manhood. It is engaging to read the perspectives put forward by contemporary theorists working in the field, as all attempt to describe and deconstruct masculinity, yet, at the same time, all subscribe to the notion that it is not monolithic (Brod, 1987; Brod & Kaufman, 1994; Edley &

Wetherell, 1995; Horrocks, 1994; Berger *et al,* 1995; Morrell, 1998a; Morrell, 2001; Clatterbaugh, 1990). There appear to be various 'camps' into which people place themselves when issues of masculinity are debated. Some feminists feel threatened, (Thompson, 1997; Hanmer, 1990), some 'real men' feel themselves in crisis, (Bly, 1990; Horrocks, 1994), and many more academics, globally as well as here in South Africa, diligently attempt to make sense of masculinity in terms of social relations (Berger *et al,* 1995; Burman, 1995; Connell, 1995; Ratele, 2001; Shefer, 1997; Rowland & Thomas *et al*, 1996; Lorber, 1994; Danuta Walters, 1999; Morrell, 1998, 2001). The July 1997 Durban colloquium, "Masculinities in Southern Africa" raised some of the theoretical issues in a local context. This exploration on a local and regional level should not stop with the 1997 colloquium, and I hope that this study makes a contribution to the discussion within this country.
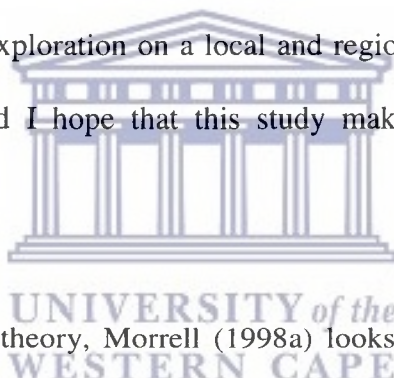
In accordance with postmodern theory, Morrell (1998a) looks at masculinities as they relate to the history of South Africa, but his assertions here are applicable to all qualitative masculinity research. He reminds us that "the dominance of men in the public record has obscured the fact that little is known about masculinity. Men have generally been ´treated in essentialist terms. The socially constructed nature of masculinity is widely acknowledged and it is this insight that needs to be applied..." (1998a: 605). Horrocks (1994: 5) also takes a social constructionist perspective when he asserts that, "It makes sense to see masculinity as heterogeneous, contextually sensitive, interrelational". In keeping with this thought, the interviewees' discourses regarding their sons' masculinities are crucial to a more lucid understanding of constructed patterns within male identities. The "heterogeneity" described by Horrocks is illustrated by the

contemporary awareness that 'masculinity' must be theorised in the plural. Epstein (1998: 49) reminds us, with inescapable logic, that "not only are there many different masculinities, but individual men are not uncomplicatedly one kind of man all the time. As with other identities, masculinities are shifting, fluid, in process. Who a person is, or the way s/he feels, will vary according to her or his immediate context".

Mothering and Sons

Discursive work on mothering and masculinities has primarily focused upon feminist constructions. A special feature in volume six of *Feminism and Psychology* (1996), for example, contains essays by academic feminists regarding their perceptions of raising their own sons. The feature attempts to address the issues and contradictions involved in both being feminist *and* raising sons. The contributors' experiences with pregnancy and child-rearing are simultaneously complicated and enriched by their feminist convictions. The issues they write about range from meta-theoretical dilemmas to seemingly insignificant dealings with mundane gender constructions. One of the most salient observations in this group of essays is from Sayers (1996: 123) when she writes that, "feminism and mothering sons have, between them, made me increasingly conscious of the importance socially accorded to man and masculinity". This is in keeping with my stance that 'theory' is often made 'on the ground'. Thiele describes her vision of the future for both her son and daughter and the meanings of those hopes in a world of uneven gendered power relations:

> With Anna, my goals seemed simple, I wanted to rear an independent, self confident and generous person. Having the same goals for Ewan is less simple. For Anna I see these traits as the way to defend against the pressures brought to bear by her being female in a world that privileges men...For Ewan the same trait, certainly the first two, are already markers of male prerogative (1996: 101).

Ganguly (1996: 104) writes of the gendered dress in which we commonly place infants in order that their identity be determined correctly. Contradictorily perhaps for a feminist, yet predictably for a mother who wants her child to 'fit in', she asserts that, while she would have little trouble dressing a girl in pants, she would "baulk at the thought of dressing [her son] in dresses". So, though they are feminists who are well aware of, and indeed devote their careers to studying, gendered constructions, the women are still under pressure to signify gender for their children, while at the same time concerning themselves with the meanings of male and female identities in social relations. McLaren (1996: 124) describes her dilemmas in raising her son as "...worry about ramming feminist, anti-oppressive ideas down my son's throat and not doing it enough". Thomas (1996: 114) writes of "resisting the myth of essential masculinity". When she speaks of her notion that the gender of her twins was not particularly salient for her she draws upon a discourse of individualism to describe them. While she has seen her many friends construct an "emergence of essential masculinity" in their own children, she has resisted that in her son. Instead, she maintains that his seemingly male choices are constructed as naturally masculine when they are, instead, reactions to the lessons he has absorbed about masculinity. Rowland (1996: 108) worries about such lessons when she writes that "the greatest fear I had was that my sons would somehow be taken from me into the world of patriarchal privilege and violence". Another contradiction, then, for many feminists is the notion of giving birth to 'the oppressor'.

Arcana (1983) devoted a book to just these issues when she interviewed mothers about their perceptions of boys and masculinity in the early 1980s. Arcana's central question (1983: 55) is: "what can it mean to a woman in this society [1980s middle class North

America], to push a boy out of her body – and then watch him grow into a man?" She writes (1983: 96) of motherhood as an institution designed by men which has gone a "long way in toward negating and denying our [mothers'] actual *experience*" (original emphasis). In Arcana's interviews, she detected an undercurrent that was also present in my study. She writes, (1983: 279) that "we have come to consciousness when and while raising male children, but many of us have not made the connection between our male children and the problem of male supremacy". While Arcana's interviews were taken from 'ordinary' people, as are mine, the period and culture in which her subjects are located differs greatly from this study, as does the focus. She clearly used a qualitative method to gather her data and, while perhaps not utilising the term "discourse analysis" she did track themes amongst her research participants. Her early 1980s liberal feminist sensibilities, however, led her into essentialising women and femininity at the same time that she was attempting to deconstruct men and masculinity. Therefore, it is my hope that this study will update and extend the debate here, to include 'everyday' constructions of masculinities in a South African context.

Power and Violence

Clearly, there is no objective masculinity, and "the experience of different men, their actual power and privilege in the world, is based on a range of social positions and relations" (Kaufman, 1994: 152). Consequently, all social interaction is complicated by the intersections of race, class and sexuality, but men commonly wield more power than women or children in society. Connell (1995: 42) goes so far as to claim that "in some formulations, masculinity is virtually equated with the exercise of power in its most

naked forms". Kaufman (1994: 52) asserts that power has become equated with "dominance and control" and is inconsequential if not held over another. Thus, it is not difficult to see a correlation here with issues of violence. Kaufman adds:

> ...because masculinities denote relations of power among men, and not just men against women, a man who has little social power in the dominant society, whose masculinity is not of a hegemonic variety, who is the victim of tremendous social oppression, might also wield tremendous power in his own milieu and neighborhood vis-a'-vis women of his own class or social grouping or other males...(1994: 152)

If power and masculinity are unconsciously equated, as Connell (1995) contends, and we, however involuntarily, immediately accord a gender identity to each person with whom we come into contact, men are always granted more power in social interchange than are women. Status generally comes along with power. In terms of masculinity, then, women and those not appearing to be members of hegemonic masculine groups "defer to those of higher status, who then exploit this deference to exert greater control over social interaction" (Glick & Fiske, 1999: 373). Men, dealing with "feelings of emasculation or the actual loss of status and power" (Morrell, 2001: 33) may utilise violence in their efforts to regain or retain what they perceive to be concomitant with masculinity and, therefore, their rightful 'place' in society.

Connell (1995: 83) claims that massive structures of inequality inevitably lead to violence. He asserts that men have available a diverse armory that is deployed toward the goal of sustaining masculinity, and that "patriarchal definitions of femininity (dependence, fearfulness) amount to a kind of cultural disarmament that may be quite as effective as the physical kind" (Connell, 1995: 83). Violence against women and violence between men may originate from disparate sources but maintenance of, or

struggle for, domination is most commonly its goal, and there is no more powerful symbol of violence than the gun. Cock (2001: 43) describes guns as a defining feature of South African manhood. She claims that, due to the legacy of armed struggle springing from both government and revolutionary activity, "violence is regarded as a legitimate solution to conflict and a crucial means of both obtaining and defending power". The notion that violence is fundamental to masculinity must be replaced with something new. Ratele (2001: 250) asserts quite rightly that "it is now critical to go further and analyse how violence has become integral to the idea of what it is to be a real man and what the effects of such a construction are". I add to this argument the contention that, along with analysing the "effects of such a construction", it is crucial to actively work to *deconstruct* the links between violence and masculinities.
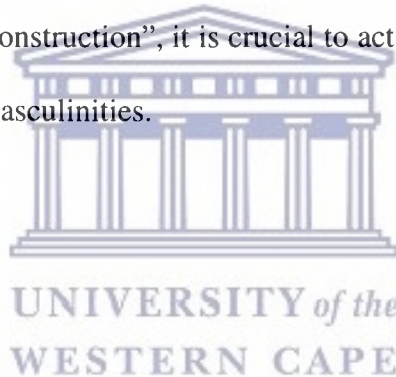
Gender Studies

In accordance with Ratele's assertion, then, there is no longer room for legitimate debate about whether or not it is time for gender studies to include men (Brod & Kaufman, 1994; Brod, 1987). Until the term 'gender' is understood widely to apply to both sexes, women will be seen as 'having it' and men will continue to be seen as the standard against which all others are judged (Berger et al, 1995). This is not to say that women do not embody qualities that are stereotypically masculine (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1995), it is, rather, a notion or a piece of collectively shared understanding, that when we speak of gender, we are speaking of women (Kimmel, 2000). The necessity of the incorporation of masculinity into what has historically been termed 'women's studies' is highlighted by Oyegun:

> The danger of excluding men from our analyses and interventions is that we isolate women thereby retaining them in a victim/problem mode. This leaves us with an imbalance in our understanding of the factors that produce gender in men and women and, consequently, of the relations based on them (1998: 13).

While I am in agreement with Oyegun, I harbour concern regarding men's studies, as the field can be seen as suspect from a feminist perspective, particularly if feminists do not take a prominent role in the research. Though it is widely recognised that masculinity is a social construction ripe for interrogation and transformation (Morrell,1998a, 2001; Connell, 1995, 1996, 1999), Hanmer (1990) argues that it would be prudent to make sure that an institutionalised men's studies does not shift critical attention away from the conditions of women and turn the focus to the 'plight' of men. Men's studies may be valued for portraying masculinity as something other than an abstract representation of a universalised human condition (Brod, 1987), but feminist studies has for decades pursued the objective of de-marginalising women's experiences of oppression and the study of masculinities must not be permitted to expropriate that focus. It must rather, continue to be viewed and contextualised within the framework of gendered power relations. Morrell (1998b: 7), states firmly that "men are involved in gender transformation whether they like it or not because the gender terrain in South Africa is changing". The crux of masculinity studies, then, should not only be the exposure of, but the transformation of, such gendered power relations.

In an early discussion of the direction of men's studies, Brod (1987) declares the goal of the (then) relatively new field to be "the emasculation of patriarchal ideology's masquerading as knowledge". It appears that much of the new masculinity research concerns itself with masculinity primarily for the purpose of describing various 'types',

and, thus, runs the risk of betraying the feminist origins of men's studies. A similar contention was voiced by Brod as follows:

> If men's studies is to advance significantly the search for gender justice, arguments addressed only to men's interests or to their altruism, though essential and valid as far as they go, are ultimately insufficient. Arguments must be advanced that more directly and broadly address the more sweeping goals of feminist transformation (1987: 56).

Masculinity must be researched first and foremost in terms of gender hierarchy. If the academic and political focus is removed from issues of power and gender equity, masculinity studies run the risk of becoming a recapitulation of "traditionally male biased scholarship" (Brod, 1987: 40). As a creation, "the concept of masculinity is, of course, …being constructed most clearly as a difference from femininity" (Edley & Wetherell,1997: 208). What this difference signifies is crucial. To hold gendered power relations continuously up to scrutiny must be the goal of both women's and men's studies, under the umbrella of gender (and/or transgender) studies.

Gendered Development

While the study participants did not discursively place their notions of gendered development into any particular framework, they did present themselves as somewhat influenced by theories that have been absorbed into general society. The development of the child into a gendered being is a process shaped by many variables and theories abound regarding just how much significance should be lent to biological and/or social factors (Bly, 1990; Chodorow, 1978, 1994; Dinnerstein, 1987; Freud, 1925; Golombok & Fivush, 1994). With a grounding in research on masculinities, theories of gender

development provide a background from which to explore the study participants' discursive constructions of their sons (Brod, 1987; Epstein, 1998; Harding, 1998; Horrocks, 1994; Kimmel, 1987; Messner, 1987; Morrell, 1998a, Ratele, 1998; Segal, 1990).

Historically, the study of gender development has been undertaken primarily by sociologists and those in the field of psychology. Sigmund Freud is credited with laying the foundations, early last century, of many of the modern interpretations of the psyches of men and women. He created, through his theories of the unconscious, the notion of stages through which children must pass as they learn to differentiate themselves from their primary caretakers, and to see themselves as actors in the world (Freud, 1925). According to psychoanalytic theory, boys grow up in such a way that they must separate themselves from their first love (their mothers), and identify with the powerful one in the family, (their fathers). However, feminist interpretations question the notion of the child's sense of male and female power, and Freudian theory has been enlarged upon and questioned by both followers and detractors of Freud (Dinnerstein, 1976; Chodorow, 1978, 1989, 1994; Frosch, 1987; Horney; 1926, Livingstone, 1996; Connell, 1995). Young boys commonly experience their mothers as quite powerful and may experience a fundamental sense of "lack compared to their own mother, sister, and girls or women in general" (Livingstone, 1996: 112). It is this difficulty in the development of a "masculine identification" which Chodorow (1989) claims as key. "A boy, in his attempt to gain an elusive masculine identification, often comes to define this masculinity largely in negative terms, as that which is not feminine or involved with women" (Chodorow, 1989: 51). This is fraught with conflict for the child and creates the personality that will be

exhibited later in life. According to feminist versions of Freudian theory, then, boys' early rejection of the very person who is most central to their existence paves the way for misogynist patterns in adult masculinity.

An obvious problem with Freudian theory is its inherent assumption that the boy is always raised by both a mother and father and that, the two parents follow dominant assumptions regarding their work and familial roles (Segal, 1990). Furthermore, the 'family' is not an uncontested notion (Bozalek, 1997), and though one of the most basic of social institutions, it manifests various dynamics (Bly, 1990, Chodorow, 1978, Dinnerstein, 1976; Golombok and Fivush, 1994). Regardless of the family structure however, (single parent, lesbian or homosexual, extended etc.) parenting plays a significant role in early gender development (Golombok & Fivush, 1994). The notion of the nuclear family as 'normal' has been refuted by many (Bozalek, 1997; Golombok & Fivush, 1994). Though it is purported to be the seat of male personality development in psychoanalytic and object relations theories, masculinity is still constructed, regardless of the family type in which a boy is raised (Bozalek, 1997; Burman, 1995; Connell,1995; Golombok & Fivush, 1994; Morrell, 1998a; Segal, 1990).

One post-Freudian theory of masculinity that has gained in popularity is "object relations theory" which developed as psychotherapists in the 1960s and 1970s began to recognise that the bulk of their patients suffering from conflict due to gender identity were men, not women (Segal, 1990). Indeed, Chodorow (1989: 32) claims that "…feminine identity is more easily and surely attainable than masculine identity". According to this theory, then, infant boys first identify with their mothers and then must completely reverse that

primary identification and learn to recognise themselves in their fathers. This led to a re-evaluation of previously entrenched psychological assumptions. (Segal, 1990). Edley and Wetherell (1995: 47) write, "Masculinity is now thought in this account to involve a less stable and more complex psychological process than femininity". Masculinity, according to this theory, appears to be very fragile in terms of identity. It must be constantly proven, it can be questioned on many levels, and it is not tangible (Messner, 1987; Connell, 1995; Dworkin & Messner, 1999; Bhabha, 1995).

Object relations theory was embraced by some feminist psychoanalysts in an attempt to explain the power of the mother in a boy's life. Accordingly, one of the purposes of this study was to explore what power the participants felt they had regarding their sons gendered development. Psychoanalytical theorists perceive the position of mothers in relation to their sons' masculinity as problematic (Freud, 1925; Bly, 1990; Chodorow, 1978). Some argue that the mother's perceptions of masculinity will colour her interactions with her male child. Chodorow, for example writes:

> ...mothers have very different conscious and unconscious expectations of their male and female children, and consequently build relationships with sons which differ from those with daughters. Baby boys may not yet know they are male, but their mothers know, and this knowledge will structure responses to sons in complex ways (1978: 49).

If mothers are integral to boys' earliest social relations it is clear that research such as this study into masculinity discourses is relevant. Smith (1995) asserts that one reason that women play an active role in constructing traditional notions of masculinity for their sons is the preponderance of Freudian theory in popular culture. Silverstein and Rashbaum (1994) write of the influence popular psychology and child care books have had on mothers' perceptions of masculinity as it pertains to their sons. Clearly, here they are

referring to middle class women who are constructed to turn to such tools when searching for help in child-rearing, but it is significant that Freudian images of masculinity development have been popularised to such a degree that they have become predominant and easily recognisable to most of us. Women are warned through various social means of the dangers of 'keeping their sons tied to their apron strings', and they are "pressured to disconnect in their relationship with sons particularly as boys move toward adolescence" (Rowland & Thomas,1996: 95). Boys are trained, according to Chodorow (1989: 36) to "conform to masculine ideals and to reject identification with anything that seems feminine". I argue that their mothers are similarly trained, or constructed, to help their sons conform.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed has been useful in the framing of the study as well as illuminating the debates which contribute to postmodern and social constructionist theories of gender. While I do not apply a particular feminist or gender theory to the analysis of the discourses, the reviewed works informed my research plan greatly; from the design of the questions and the methodology chosen, through to the analysis and discussion of the participants' discursive strategies. Perceiving the mother/son relationship as gendered opens up many possibilities, both political and intellectual, especially when gender is viewed as a hierarchy in which males typically enjoy more power than females. Thus, the dynamics involved in women's discursive constructions are complex, to say the least. While the social construction of gender frames this study, and the bulk of the research explores men's constructions of self, there is a dearth of work that invites the voices of

'ordinary mothers' into the debate, and their contributions are crucial to boys' self-constructions of masculinity (Chodorow, 1978, 1989, 1994; O'Reilly, 2001). As the participants' beliefs regarding the nature/nurture debate and their understandings about masculinity's links to violence and power inform their child-rearing, a deeper understanding of the discourses generated in the study will, I hope, contribute to the growing field of research on gendered development.

CHAPTER 3

THE STUDY

Introduction

The intention of the study was to ask some basic questions regarding gender and masculinity, with the aim of analysing recorded conversations with ten mothers from the Gaia Waldorf School. As language is one form of discourse and an important site in which gender is produced and reproduced, it was believed that the interviewees' talk would provide much data regarding maternal masculinity constructions. What follows is a presentation of the questions posed by the research, the methodological framework in which it is located, and a reflexive analysis of the process.
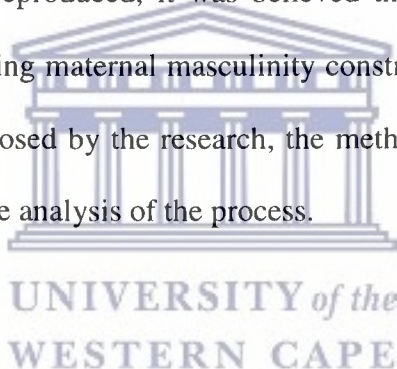
Aims and Objectives

The study aimed to highlight a specific group of mothers' constructions of masculinity for their sons through an analysis of their discourses of gender in unstructured interviews. The objective was to visit these mothers' assumptions about masculinity as it applies to men and to boys, and particularly to their sons. The questions I sought to answer were framed as follows:

* How would the mothers reproduce and resist traditional notions of gender and masculinity and what use would they make of dominant ideologies of gender in society?

* How would the mothers construct their influence on the development of their sons' masculinities and what role, if any, would they see for themselves in the creation, nurturance and disciplining of their sons' masculine identities?

- How would the mothers perceive their own gendered expectations for their sons as opposed to societal expectations of men?

- Where would the study participants stand in their ideologies of gender and masculinity from within the debate about whether masculinity and femininity are based in biology or culture?

- What are the common themes amongst the participants regarding masculinity and child-rearing?

- How would the women's concerns, beliefs and experiences contrast with academic gender and masculinity research?

- What discourses would these mothers employ when discussing their sons' masculinity?

Looking at study participants' discourses about masculinity from a feminist perspective is the key to this study. The standpoint is fundamentally feminist, and the goals are in search of a practical understanding of gender. While it became abundantly clear during the study and the analysis that masculinity cannot be precisely defined to the satisfaction of all, the 'ideologies' that women bring to their worlds as they construct masculinity for their sons are too important to leave out of gender research.

Feminist Methodological Frameworks

> Feminist method starts with the very radical act of taking women seriously, believing what we say about ourselves and our experience is important and valid…(Hurtado,1996: 125)

There is no one type of research or methodology that can exclusively claim the term "feminist", yet the principles to which I subscribe when undertaking research are directly related to my feminist convictions. The ongoing debates concerning qualitative research, objectivity and truth, and what constitutes validity have made researching and writing

about gender relations controversial topics indeed, and it is necessary to provide some background to these debates in order to frame this study.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative methods, while not implicitly feminist, can be useful for privileging women's own interpretations of the structures that make up their lives. "Advocates of qualitative methods have argued that individual women's understandings, emotions, and actions in the world must be explored in those women's own terms" (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991: 85). Clearly, an attempt to analyse the discourse of this group of participants regarding their sons does not fall easily into predetermined categories and the women themselves created the boundaries of the conversations by what they chose to discuss and not to discuss. Their discourses are creations of their own social histories and, as such, cannot be quantified.
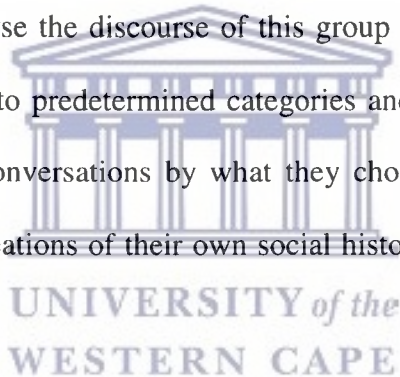
Feminist methodologies problematise the notion of objectivity, as, traditionally, much research has claimed to be produced from a neutral standpoint or perspective. Maynard (1994: 19) argues that "...understanding women's lives from a committed feminist exploration of their experiences of oppression produces more complete and less distorted knowledge" than that produced from a position claimed to be disengaged. Stanley describes the debate:

> Subjectivity is constructed as the failure to do objectivity, to *be* objective as a kind of person, not scientific in status. Both are artifacts within the sexual political system, and need deconstructing by looking closely and analytically at the constitutive social and institutional practices concerned, in the settings by which these are generated (1990: 120) (original emphasis).

No universal feminist standpoint can be maintained; instead it is a mix of subjectivities that create one's perspective. Objectivity is, therefore, a suspect term as the research cannot be interpreted without the interpreter utilising his or her own socially constructed sensibilities. Maynard and Purvis (1994: 7) recognise the fact that data analysis and interpretation are not performed in a vacuum: "...reaching conclusions is a social process and interpretation is a political, contested and unstable activity. Feminists have to accept that there is no technique of analysis or methodological logic that can neutralize the social nature of interpretation".

Feminist methodologies generally seek to 'dis-commodify' and to not objectify research participants. Haslanger (1993: 113) writes of objectivity in the sense that it "is contextually grounded in the role of collaborator in objectification". It is, therefore, essential that the participants themselves not be lost in the data. Feminist qualitative research attempts to ensure that the researched do not become mere commodities utilised in the creation of a product. Faran (1990: 91) describes the difficulties she encountered while attempting to compile statistics from in-depth interviews. She attempts to analyse just how a subjective human experience is recreated as statistical data. Her basic standpoint is that "all knowledge is socially interpreted and created". As an experienced researcher she knew that "data collection is, effectively, data construction"(Faran, 1990: 91) With these points in mind, the intention of this study was to consider the mothers' discourses without objectifying the women themselves.

Language

The language that the participants use is what is available to them through the hegemony of dominant discourses and, in this sense, it both reflects, resists and creates gendered power relations. The women's accounts of gender and masculinity are contradictory and ambiguous. Billig (1988) terms these contradictions "ideological dilemmas" and Burman and Parker (1993: 5), describe them as "those contrasting public and collective ideas that people negotiate when they weigh up, refer to and then discount alternative accounts". Dominant ideologies strongly intrude into many of the conversations, yet they are evasive and difficult to grasp. These dominant ideologies represent the 'norm' of gender and masculinity and for these mothers, as for most of us, it is often difficult to discern that which is purported to be the 'normal' in a given culture or society.

The interviews created a space for us to discuss issues of great import to the participants' daily lives – issues of child raising, gender relations, and the future they hope to create for themselves, their children, and their communities. Such an emphasis does not discount other aspects of their lives; rather it allowed for a period of focus and reflection on issues that often get lost in the complicated existences that women lead. Holland and Ramazanoglu (1994: 129) maintain, "Women's accounts of what their lives are like have forced reconceptualisations of social relationships and the nature of power; experience challenges the validity of 'objective' masculinist knowledge". As women's discourses regarding gender and masculinity for their sons emerged, the fact that their ideologies are embedded in social structures and relations became ever more clear. It would be fraudulent for myself as the researcher to claim that my own perspective is not just as constructed and fixed in these same social relations. As Acker, Barry and Esseveld write:

...the assumption that the researcher must and can strive to be a neutral observer standing outside the social realities being studied is made by many who use quantitative and qualitative methods in a natural science model. This assumption is challenged by the feminist critique of social science that documents the male bias of theory and research which has previously been taken as a neutral account of human society (1991: 136).

This research then, is based upon the notion that language creates subjectivity, rather than reflecting objectivity. This critique of objectivity is based on the notion that we are all social beings and that it is not possible to disengage oneself from the history of one's social relations. DeVault asserts:

The feminist sociologist, in her formulation, must refuse to put aside her experience and, indeed, must make her bodily existence and activity a "starting point" for inquiry. From this beginning the inquiry points toward an analysis of the social context for experience, the relations of ruling that organize daily life and connect all members of a society in systematic interactions (1999: 39).

To take one's own experience as a starting point, as I did in the formulation of this project, can create an affinity with, and commitment to the research which can sustain one during the inevitable times of disillusion and adversity that coexist with the study itself. Marshall (1994: 120) describes her difficulties in completing her PhD, "Self-doubt about my intellectual abilities and the fear that my interpretation of the data does not really do justice to the interviewees' views obstructs my writing". These issues, faced by most researchers, can be softened by having a stake in the process of the research itself, rather than just the product.

Reliability and Validity

In conventional social science research the issues of reliability and validity are paramount. According to Scheurich (1997), "the essential meaning of validity came to

be, as Lincoln and Guba (1985: 81) correctly surmised, the warrant of trustworthiness". Holland and Ramazonoglu (1994: 337) argue that the prevalent understanding of the words is an androcentric one. Reliability implies that all research 'subjects' can be depended upon to answer identically questions that are devised to ensure just this. Wolcott (1994: 82) asserts that "validity does not seem a useful criterion for guiding or assessing qualitative research". Scheurich's claim that "validity... becomes an historically embedded social construction by a 'community of scientists' who decide that certain outstanding examples of research will guide further work by the community in considering what is and is not trustworthy" highlights the inappropriateness of these notions within a social constructionist paradigm. Scheurich (1994) offers a postmodern approach to the issues while Wolcott (1994) uses the example of an extremely personal story to question the legitimacy of reliability and validity.
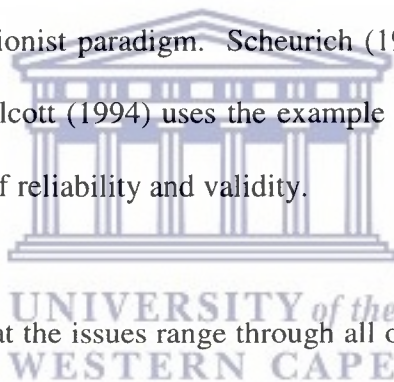
Such work illustrates the fact that the issues range through all of social science research, and do not rest solely on the shoulders of feminist researchers. If reliability and validity are claims to truth, perhaps feminist researchers working within a qualitative framework must reject the terms. As the purpose of the study was to create an account of, and to analyse how, this particular group of mothers construct gender and masculinity for their sons, the notion of truth as disembodied from social reality is not relevant. The boundaries of masculinity cannot be objectively determined and it is the women's lived historical and social experiences that produce their accounts of their gendered relations with their sons. Thus, subjectivities and sensibilities are not measurable and do not contain anything that could be labelled as absolute truth.

Feminism is not apolitical. Numerous theories of women's subordination, both within academia and without, have been developed but no matter which theory one subscribes to, feminism seeks to gain justice and empowerment for all women. With this in mind, feminist research must not harm women, and indeed, should attempt to eradicate oppression in women's lives. Though this research may not appear to be particularly political at first glance, a greater understanding of, and a step toward the transformation of, gendered power relations is at the heart of the study. Maintaining a focus at all times upon a feminist method allowed the research to progress with women's constructed realities at the forefront.

Research Participants

Eighteen women were contacted telephonically for the study. As they are very busy and it was clear that the interview would take some time, a group of ten mothers finally agreed to participate. They were given the list of eleven questions after interview appointments had been arranged. All the women were offered the opportunity for the interview to be conducted in their home language but all declined, stating that English was fine for these purposes.

A questionnaire was then conceived that would elicit biographical information from the participants. This cannot be said, however, to be a group that is representative of mothers in Cape Town, or in South Africa. The women were all aged between thirty-five and forty-five at the time of the study. They have a total of eighteen children between them, with thirteen in attendance at Gaia Waldorf School in Oude Molen Village. Gaia school

is privately run on school fees and donations. A significant percentage of children in attendance receive bursaries, but economic wherewithal was not considered in these interviews and the researcher does not have information regarding which parents pay school fees and which are on scholarship. The children in attendance ranged in age from five to nine, though some of the mothers discussed older sons who do not attend Gaia. All participants live in the Western Cape. Six out of the ten women identify as "white", and four as "black". Seven of the mothers are originally from this country, two hold dual Zimbabwean/South African citizenship, and one spent her early years in Namibia. Five of the mothers are married, though one is separated from her spouse. The other five consider themselves to be single parents. None of the women discursively signalled their (hetero)sexuality[3], though one spoke of lesbian sexual experiences she'd had.

Methods and Procedure

The study participants and I shared approximately ninety minutes together in each one-on-one interview. As I was interested in the interviewees' discursive constructions of gender and masculinity, the questions were designed to maintain a flow of conversation around these issues. I followed the lead of Edley and Wetherell (1997: 207) and "…at all times the aim of the interview[s] was to create an informal atmosphere in which, to a

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[3] I include this as I am cognizant of the institutionalisation of heterosexuality and the fact that it is an un-named, normative, taken-for-granted in the discourses. This is discussed in more depth in Chapter 3.

large extent, the participants themselves directed the flow of conversation". The interviews took place at the location of each participant's choice, either at Gaia School, in the participant's home or in my home. Each interviewee completed an "informed consent form" outlining the research and their place within it (see appendix A). I came to each interview prepared with a set of guiding questions with which to frame the discussions (see appendix B). The questions were revised after the first three interviews to reflect advice offered by the participants (see appendix C). These questions were distributed to participating mothers prior to our interviews so as to allow time for a certain level of reflection. After the interviews were transcribed, they were returned to the mothers for analysis and feedback. It was important that no one felt they were misrepresented by what they saw on the printed page. The feedback I received was generally encouraging, with the women feeling that their thoughts on masculinity came across as they had intended. It was agreed upon before each interview that the participants' identities would be protected as far as possible so the names used in this study are fictitious.

Discourse Analysis

As each transcript was completed, I read it through while listening to the corresponding cassette tape. As I checked for typographical errors and possible transcriptionist misreadings in the text, I began to sense the complexity of what I had undertaken. The contrast between conversing with an acquaintance regarding a subject we both found to be lively and interesting, and analysing the content of those conversations was great. I scrutinised the transcripts for many days searching for themes amongst the women's talk.

As topics emerged, I lifted them from the longer transcripts and created a new document which consisted of quotes and excerpted conversational exchanges. As the themes became more clear, my analysis was guided by my original questions regarding the women's constructions of their own and their sons' gendered subjectivities.

Working through the discourses was akin to trying very hard to get "inside someone's head". I read and re-read each interview numerous times, until I developed what felt like a relationship with the words. It was not a linear process, however. Some readings would produce a muddier picture than I'd previously had of the same text. There were also many moments where my sense of the women as 'people', and the text as 'discourse', became indistinct. As a researcher, I attempted to listen to the tapes relatively dispassionately, but as I engaged with the written words, I found myself remembering the interviewees and the emotions that the conversations had elicited within me. I was, in a sense, often 'lost' in the conversations by virtue of the fact that I found the talk and the time spent with the women so interesting. From the texts, however, I was finally able to detect the themes that comprise the discourses in the next chapter.

My intent in utilising discourse analysis as my primary research tool was to explore the meanings given to masculinity by the women I interviewed. Mothers' constructions of their sons' masculinities are not rigid. They are, rather, influenced by the institutions of society as well as by the ways in which the women perceive such institutions. As gender is an illusory notion, analysing women's constructions is a means of investigating lived experiences and ideologies, while at the same time recognising the fluidity of maternal subjectivities. Indeed, the research questions themselves contributed to some shifts in the

mothers' thinking about their sons. The purpose of the study was not to quantify or classify masculinity or gender, but to investigate and share mothers' constructions of their sons as masculine beings.

Constructions of masculinity take shape in the mothers' verbal communication. Even the most basic of conversations between human beings are grounded in implicit assumptions. The task of the research was to attempt to make these assumptions *explicit*, therefore offering an opportunity to discern how gender is reproduced and resisted in discourse. Clearly, language is open to interpretation, and labelling the narratives in this study does not set the meaning in stone. Instead it highlights the instability of subjectivity – that of the researcher and that of the participants as well as that of the reader of this thesis. Thus, as we (researcher, participants and reader) each bring to this work specific backgrounds and assumptions unmatched by any other, we relate to it with differing sensibilities. Rather than focusing upon the linguistic structure of the women's talk, I am more interested here in the meaningful content of the discourses. In my attempt to discover what gender and masculinity mean to this group of mothers, I am highlighting the substance of the women's talk, or how they construct what they believe to be 'common knowledge'. This is not knowledge in the traditional sense of the word; it is not objective or measurable, it is rather a knowledge situated in this particular place, in this particular time (Friedman, 1990; Bozalek, 1997; Nakano Glenn, 1999; Schwandt, 2000). It is knowledge that the participants have created through their experiences and interactions.

Discourses create what is lived as reality. Gender discourses are not "simply imposed, but are lived out by their subjects as 'true' for them" (Burman *et al*, 1997: 3). They also

are not created unaffected by or separate from other discourses. "Race", class and sexuality are inherent in gendered discourses. It is not necessarily possible or desirable to tease one from the other. Myriad subjectivities are entwined within identity, and this is reflected in language. We create discourses just as they create us, but the discourses that are dominant in one's culture, society or community powerfully influence one's belief system. Burman *et al* (1997) illustrate an example of this power with the fact that in apartheid South Africa the dominant psychological discourses of the time were employed to persuade subjects of the 'truth' of racial difference.

Discourses are formed by, and create, assumptions upon which we draw to make our internalised belief systems seem reasonable and true (Gill, 1995). "Certain ways of thinking about everyday life, work, relationships and aspirations have become hegemonic in the sense that they dominate our lives" (Burman *et al*, 1997: 5). An elementary example would be the commonly accepted notion that women who shave their legs are more feminine than those who don't. To some, this is a discourse of oppression, to others it is perceived as true, and to still others it is false. Indeed, shaved legs are inherently value-less. They do not mean anything until a system of meaning, or a discourse, is attached. Most probably, whether or not a woman shaves her legs does not dominate her consciousness, but the assumptions that underlie her decision to do so, or to refrain from doing so, are packed with "raced", gendered, classed, sexualised and national discourses.

Gill (1995: 165) writes of discourse analysis: "Feminists have been able to use discourse analysis to explore a range of questions concerning the reproduction of gender power relations". Banister, Burman and Parker (1991: 94) claim that discourse analysis is a

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method of "privileging the 'ordinary' understanding people produce about the world". My intention here was to let the mothers' concepts, explanations and interpretations of gender for their sons guide my analysis, rather than attempting to measure their thinking by any preconceived definitions of masculinity. (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1991)

This research is an attempt at recognising and analysing the power ideologies inherent in attitudes regarding gender and masculinity. MacKinnon (1989) argues that gender is both a hierarchy and an ideology. As such, Wetherell and Potter (1992) remind us that discourse analysis is appropriate in addressing the ways in which power and ideology work in everyday talk. According to Maguire, (1987: 43) knowledge is commonly a prerequisite to power, and "ordinary people are rarely considered knowledgeable, in the scientific sense, or capable of knowing about their own reality" .
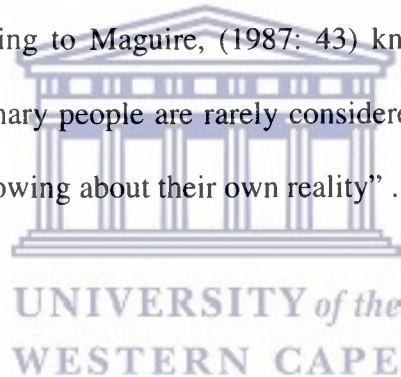
Self-Reflexivity and Ethical Issues

Social constructionism demands a degree of self-reflexivity when performing research. The researcher cannot help but affect the study in the sense that she is bringing to it her own set of perceptions regarding the subject and the participants. Gergen reminds us that a key element to social constructionist research is just such reflexivity:

> …it is essential to set in motion processes of reflexive deliberation, processes which call attention to the historically and culturally situated character of the taken-for-granted world, which reflect on their potentials for suppression, and which open a space for other voices in the dialogues of the culture (1997: 11).

While the research itself contains as a guiding principle the attempt to illuminate that which is taken for granted in society, the researcher must also probe what assumptions she brings to her choice of study and her analysis.

In the conceptualisation stages of this study, I was very aware of the issues that Sunde and Bozalek (1993: 30) bring to the fore when they write that "differences such as race, class, ethnicity, sexuality and age locate women differently". I was hesitant to claim a familiarity that does not exist, and to claim the right and the ability to faithfully represent women who were so distant from myself in terms of culture, "race" and experience. However, interviewing women within the Gaia school community seemed legitimate as the mothers and I share much in terms of our choices for our children's primary school education. During the research I remained, and still do remain, cognizant of the following questions: Is the fact that we are mothers who have chosen to send our children to a Waldorf school enough to level the other aspects of our identities? Do our differences create a gulf too wide to cross? Can we meet and feel a commonality in certain contexts, and recognise and address our differences in others? As Bonnin *et al* (1993: 3) contend, "Difference is not an absolute: it is constructed in a variety of ways according to what is perceived as important in a particular context".

The group of mothers from Gaia school was selected because I felt it was perhaps one of the only 'legitimate' avenues I could find to conduct participant research here in South Africa. As a "white" North American woman, I am inexperienced with the nuances of life in South Africa and, initially, this fact left me convinced that such situatedness created no space for me to conscientiously interview South African women at all. As the

months progressed, however, I felt sufficiently enough a part of the Gaia community to begin research there. Clearly, researchers do not always conduct research within communities to which they belong, but the circumstances of my 'foreignness' being what they are, it seemed appropriate to have some sort of connection with research participants and the fact that we are all mothers of primary school age children created a connection that I had not anticipated.

Although there are clearly differences in "race", class and culture amongst the women themselves and between me and the women, I felt that the connection we had through Gaia school was an 'in'; a safe and valid space from which to conduct research. The issue of differences amongst women has been pivotal in feminist theory, activism and research for many years now. How much more would an African American mother have had in common with the African mothers interviewed than had I? How much 'mutual understanding' does "race" bring, when the people communicating hail from different countries, cultures, and indeed hemispheres? These questions are not truly answerable or measurable. I am different from these women on many levels. I am in South Africa for a limited period of time and have not lived through apartheid. Living in the country with the knowledge that one's time here is temporary creates different experiences to those who are settled. I do not have a son, but have thought much about the ramifications of gender for my daughter.

The issue of "race" may seem veiled in this study and I was concerned, and continue to be concerned, about the ethics of presenting racialised discourses, as I am a reluctant member of a 'group' that has consistently marginalised and oppressed others. I had

imagined that the participants' discourse would focus upon apartheid, therefore they would centre upon "race". However, this was not the case. They did not present "race" discursively as a pressing issue in this context, and I was wary of inserting too much of my own racialised sensitivities into the dialogue and analysis. As I've indicated elsewhere, in another study, I would have been very interested to speak with them of the meanings for their sons of being a "white" or "black" child/man in South Africa, but this was not the direction in which the conversations flowed. Perhaps the dynamics of racialised power differentials created a space in which race could not be comfortably be discussed. Perhaps, "race" is not the participants' primary subjectivity when conversing about their children. I can only make the assumption that the interviewees thought "race" was not an appropriate issue to discuss with an 'outsider'.
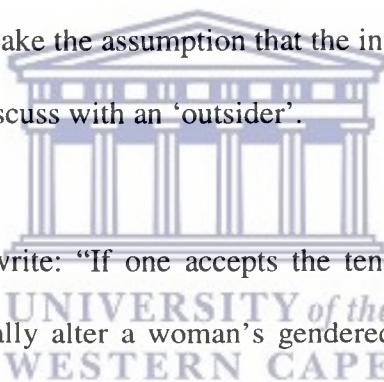
Sunde and Bozalek (1993: 32) write: "If one accepts the tenet that racism (and other forms of oppression) fundamentally alter a woman's gendered identity, how could we research and write about anyone's experience other than that of white, middle-class women of the same sexual orientation, religion etc?" It is evident here that "race", class, and gender issues take on new dimensions when the researcher is also from outside the country of the participants. There is a diversity of shared cultural knowledge amongst the South African women to which I am not privileged. Their lives intersect on many planes that mine does not touch. The ways in which I have experienced my gendered and "raced" life are different from the ways in which the research participants have experienced theirs. This is not to say that all "white", middle class mothers from the United States experience "race", class and gender identically; it is just to point out the complexities involved and the probability of vastly differing assumptions myself and the

mothers may have brought to the research. Quoting Stanley and Wise (1992) , Sunde and Bozalek (1993: 35) interpret my sense of the controversies in interviewing this group of South African women: "…women do share certain kinds of socially constructed attributes and are subjugated to and by men; and to be convinced that this is a legitimate object of enquiry is neither outmoded not unsophisticated. It is and remains crucially and fundamentally important".

I continually questioned my place within this study as I was at the same time a researcher, a student, and a mother with a child attending the same school that the participants' sons attend. My own varying subjectivities sometimes sat uncomfortably upon my shoulders. The fact that the participants in the study were women with whom I was acquainted turned out to be fraught with contradictions for the research. Therefore, it was sometimes difficult for me to define my relationship with the women. It shifted between seeing them at school while fetching their children in the afternoons, to when we would be together in the interviews, to when we would attend meetings regarding school issues. Sometimes, a mother would stop me outside of the school to ask about my research. In retrospect though, the Gaia school community mothers who took part in the study created a very supportive environment for me as both a parent, a researcher, and a person who is not South African. As I travelled through my relationships with the participants I got a sense that they were not only comfortable with the research process and questions, but actually very enthusiastic to address the issues surrounding gender and masculinity and their children.

I did find it quite difficult when I began my attempt at recognising discourses amongst the many pages of text that were generated from the taped interviews. It was a complex exercise for me to reconcile the thought of representing these women's discourses in an academic paper, with the thought of who these women are as members of the Gaia school community. As a feminist researcher, I am aware of the fact that women have commonly been misrepresented through traditional research, and I was perhaps too knowledgeable about the lives of the study participants to accept the notion that the research was just about the discourses they commonly employed, rather than about themselves as women and mothers. As themes emerged, however, it became clear to me that it is no disservice to them to analyse their gendered discourse in the name of illuminating and transforming gendered power relations. I do not presume in this study to represent the participants as people; rather, I am depicting and interpreting the discourses they generated in a particular place and time around gender and masculinity.
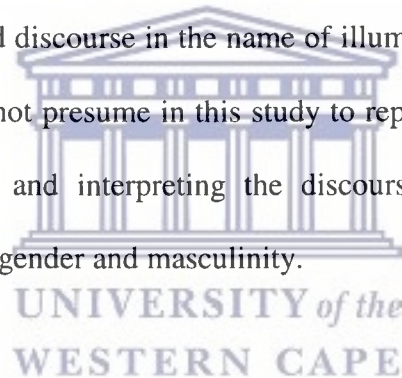
As I have indicated elsewhere, gender is a socially constructed category and as such, it pervades every aspect of our lives. It is reproduced through discourse in myriad ways every day. It is not correct to think that those that study gender do not engage in its reproduction. I have attempted to keep this fact uppermost in my mind as I have read and re-read the transcripts in order to see how I, as the researcher, reproduced and resisted dominant gender ideologies in my conversations with the mothers.

One unexpected twist came in the form of the mothers' reactions to the tone of the questions themselves. The questions were intended to be very general and to facilitate conversation about their sons' masculinity. An issue here was my concern that the

women would feel a sense of comfort in these conversations, yet I deliberately did not include questions to which one could answer a simple "yes" or "no". The questions seemed to advance, however, amongst some of the mothers, a feeling that they had not thought of things they *should have* been thinking about regarding their sons. Though this was clearly not intended, the women generally expressed gratitude for presenting the opportunity for them to think in terms that were somewhat new regarding their children. The conversations about masculinity inadvertently led to much maternal reflection upon their daughters' and their own femininity as well.

Several of the women came with notes they had worked on prior to our meeting. They generally seemed quite pleased to have an uninterrupted period of time to discuss their children. The questions were thought-provoking and these mothers are conscientised in the sense that they are already on a journey of careful consideration regarding child-rearing. The interviews were very pleasant, and the participants appeared relaxed, with the conversation flowing enthusiastically. The women came to the interviews openly and apparently with much sincerity and it was with much gratitude that the interviewer conducted the sessions.

CHAPTER 4

DISCOURSES OF GENDER AND MASCULINITY

...people are simultaneously the products *and* the producers of discourse. We are both constrained and enabled by language; the 'truth' here is paradoxical" (Edley & Wetherell 1997: 206).

Introduction

The many meanings given to gender and masculinity manifest in the discourses of the participants interviewed. As Gill argues: "Knowledge constructs rather than reflects reality" (Gill, 1995: 169). In order that the mothers' realities be recognised as socially constructed, I highlight here the discourses utilised by the 'ordinary' people who engage in their own constructing. As a rule, the women constructed gender as it applies to 'men in general', very differently to its application to their own partners and children. As I tease out threads from the mothers' talk, it would not be correct to assume that these discourses stand alone nor would it be accurate to think that the study participants would say the same thing had the interviews been conducted in another context. Though the discourses have been placed into broad categories, the reader will find that they are fluid and do not always neatly fit into the framework that I have created.

The themes that I have drawn are a consequence of my own raced and gendered "practical ideologies" (Gill, 1995: 5). I do not see this as a weakness, however. It is, rather, a fitting demonstration of one of the basic tenets of the study; that of the

seamlessness of subjectivities. Each discourse informs the others and they are invariably woven together. They overlap, compete, and connect while at the same time contradicting and supporting each other. In this sense, the participants' discourses reflect the postmodern conviction that human subjectivity is not unitary or constant, but rather multiple and fragmented.

In this study, I am looking at what Edley and Wetherell (1997: 206) describe as "…not only the ways in which men [and women] are positioned by a ready made or historically given set of discourses or interpretative repertoires, but also the ways in which these cultural resources are manipulated and exploited…". In the women's talk, then, shared patterns of meaning serve to highlight commonalities in the ways in which these particular mothers construct gender and masculinity (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). I am also cognizant of the previously mentioned "ideological dilemmas" – which, for our purposes, applies to the ways in which common ideologies of gender, both conformist and resistant, are created in the conversations (Billig, 1988). These "dilemmas" become apparent when conflicting and contradictory discourses are utilised by the participants to explain their notions of gender and masculinity.

I analyse here discourses which I have chosen from the many pages of text generated from the interviews. I particularly look at the participants' constructions of gender, masculinity, their own sons, and the ways in which sexuality underpins all of the assumptions the women make regarding gender.

Constructions of Gender

While I do not claim that 'men' necessarily embody masculinity, the study participants consistently conflated the two. Although in postmodern terms it is quite acceptable to speak of masculinity without men (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1995; Halberstam, 1998), the study participants do not construct it in this manner. This is significant because the majority of contemporary academic research into masculinity does construct it as an elusive process created within one's multiple identities and subjectivities. While this is useful for communication within a postmodern paradigm, it is not germane to these particular mothers' constructions. They rather construct masculinity as something that their boys 'have', an internal characteristic of being.
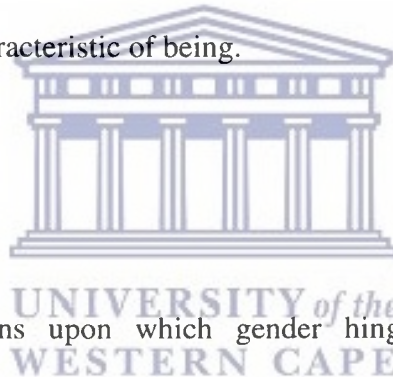
Binary definitions

As with the binary oppositions upon which gender hinges in Western culture, (woman/man, passive/assertive, emotional/rational) (Bozalek, 1997: 8), I found there to be a binary coming into play involving the discourses generated around the notion of 'men'. The women in the study seemed to recognise two basic 'types'. There is the 'old' stereotypical unfeeling, aggressive man versus the 'new' sensitive, accessible and relatively passive man. This concurs with Edley and Wetherell's (1997: 204) finding that, "cultural ideals tend to become confused with types of personality and seen in a categorical and privatised way…"

A consistent discourse then, as can be seen in the following, was one of a diametrically opposed difference between masculinity and femininity. Yet, many of the women discussed both a "masculine and feminine side" to themselves and their sons.

Natalie[4]:   That is where the masculine side comes out [because] he gets angry! It can
            actually be verbally or physically abusive.

Natalie constructs anger as masculine, thereby placing the emotion out of legitimate reach for women and girls. Rather than examining other sources of her son's anger, Natalie attributes it to his gender, thus naturalising anger and aggression in men. Carmen, in a similar way, constructs "nurturing" and caring as being feminine qualities that she could draw upon when the situation warranted. She, by omission, paints the boys as uncaring or not "nurturing", even in the event of an injury. She speaks of how, as a child, she was "one of the boys" until called upon to exhibit caring behaviour.

Carmen: I mean...[5] then at the time when I was a little girl I also found my nurturing
            side came out when one of the boys would hurt themselves. **I was one of them,**
            but when one of them got hurt... I was a girl...I would first go see what I could
            do and so on...So... I was sort of able to balance both right up
            into my adulthood.

Int: So you can see two sides to yourself?

Carmen: I can see... I can see two sides... ja...

Alyson, like Natalie, perceives aggression as a masculine trait. In this excerpt, however, she resists the notion that it is inherently male, and constructs it as a creation of American cultural images that boys internalise.

Alyson: the boys... the boys for me... in the American culture... they latch on to the
            fighting aspect... /hmm/[6]... You know the army that /aggression/... Ja...
            aggression...violence... ja...That army stuff... **Men**[7] in camouflage...

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[4] Participants names have been changed
[5] ...denotes unfinished sentence or a pause of less than two seconds
[6] /dialogue/ denotes interjections from the other speaker

and stuff like that you know... /hmm/... which appeals to two things in them.
I think it appeals to their... their love of... of... of beating around in the
bush basically /hmm/... You know what I mean. They dig that... /ja/... And
uhm... it... it appeals to their aggressive side as well.

While Alyson constructs a masculinity here that is derived from external influences, she simultaneously creates the ideology that people are defined by opposite male and female internal characteristics. Men's apparent love of "beating around in the bush" paints a picture of a wild, aggressive masculinity in opposition to women's more civilised femininity. Alyson's focus on the influence of American culture also serves to construct a source of blame for boys' aggressive behaviour.

This notion of different 'sides' sets up binaries that readily transfer from within the person to greater society. The women here, and elsewhere in our interviews, construct both masculinity and femininity and men and women as opposites. In this sense, Alyson, Natalie and Carmen are utilising a hegemonic discourse of difference to describe and construct their sons and all men, while, contradictorily, excluding their sons from the notion of 'men in general'.

The nature/nurture debate

Along with these internal constructions came very clear positions on difference based upon women's various understandings of the nature/nurture debate. The participants created a dominant discourse of inherent differences between children based upon their biological sex, but often challenged this notion simultaneously as is evidenced by the following selections:

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[7] **bold text** denotes an emphasis in speech

Natalie:	Men and women will **never** come to an understanding… /hmm/ because they are… just on completely different planets. I actually realise that, yes we are on quite different planets…because the way I see it… the boys are far more phaff… /unclear/… They are very difficult. They are **far more difficult** than the girls. I mean girls generally are quite quiet and…and gentle…
Natalie:	It's very different… Ja… I find it very different to… because of… the same thing with my pre-conceptions of how a boy is raised and… and… have changed…since I had a boy myself. So, I'm not sure if girls' physical side is squashed or if they're… they're just naturally not inclined not to do it… /hmm/…Because you get some tomboys… You get girls like **very** physical… And then… then… The majority of girls are **not as physical** as what boys are… And I think maybe there is a difference… in them… regardless of what society… or what parents are asking…

"An integral part of the broader discourse of difference is the notion that men and women are 'foreign', 'alien' and 'other' to each other. This 'otherness' emerges in a lack of communication, understanding and empathy with each other" (Shefer, 1999: 263). This is demonstrated by Natalie, in the sense that she has apparently internalised the popular notion of a 'natural misunderstanding' between men and women encapsulated in the current success of psychologist John Gray's (1992) *Men are From Mars and Women are From Venus*. This concept, recently popularised by the mass media, reinforces the discourse of difference, so prevalent amongst the research participants. Gray constructs himself as an 'expert' in male/female relationships and his writings have apparently made an impact, at least upon one of the mothers interviewed. In this discourse, the construction of boys as difficult and girls as gentle, as well as clinging to the notion of the essential nature of gender, bolsters the idea that there is a hopeless chasm between girls and boys as children, one that inevitably carries over into adulthood. Contradictorily, Natalie wonders if girls' "physical side is squashed". The possibility is still open for her that expectations of girls and boys may play a role in their gendered development.

Alyson, like Natalie, found that having a son produced questions in her mind about the differences between girls and boys. Her construction of herself as feminist was disrupted by the birth of her son and, subsequently, that of her niece. The babies 'proved' to her that her formerly 'cynical' feminist leanings were misguided, thus equating her scepticism about intrinsic differences between men and women with a feminist perspective. She constructs mothering as requiring qualities that men do not have or need because there is a natural "balance" between the sexes.

Alyson: I feel **strongly** that there is a difference between male and female.

Int: An inherent difference?

Alyson: Inherently different… ja… absolutely… /uhm/hmm/…Which I never did, I was a **raging feminist**. /Uhm-hmm/ Really… quite… quite a hardcore cynic /uhm/… And uhm, when I had a child that changed completely… totally… totally. And my sister had a daughter and who was a year… younger… than my son…and the difference was **so obvious**. And **then** I started understanding the balance between the relationship of male and female. What, how, it is meant to be. You know, and how there is a place for… I hate the term role-playing… you know. /ja/… Sort of role-playing, there is place for different kind of… uhm… sensibilities, and uhm… sensitivities. (2)… It makes sense to me that the woman being the bearer of the child, is uhm… has to have… has to be aware of detail… I think there is **some** essence because I **feel** the difference between male and female. So if you're going to give them different terms, there is a female essence and a male essence. I don't know… you know /hmm/… I've…I've had…very uhm… uhm… I'm… ja… not into getting caught up in intellectual stuff… you know what I mean… /hmm/…The…the…whatever we call it, I say there is a difference between a boy and a girl…

In supporting dominant notions of masculinity and femininity, essentialist thinking reinforces the dichotomous terms so prevalent in the interviews. Veronica and Maria highlight this in the following excerpts.

Veronica: I think… I think it's hormonal. Basically, it's just as simple as that. They*[boys]* are made differently… how do you say…what… what is a::a[8] man? You know is it having a penis? Is it… (2)[9] (laughs)… ja… What is it And yet I do think there are very clear differences. /hmm/… Uhm

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[8] :: denotes a drawn out word
[9]) parentheses denote a pause and number (2) denotes length of pause.

psyche differences...

Maria: Boys are... They just... **wilder**... They more exuberant! They race
around... they get messy. [They unclear]...They don't even think about
their actions. It's for the moment. An::d the only difference I would see
is that a girl is more reminding herself, constantly looking and reminding her...
yes.. you must do that...You shouldn't be doing that. Whatever.. ja....
/uhm/... Big huge difference

The validation of these discourses is based upon the mothers' 'experience' of boys and girls. While there was a marginalised discourse of external influence upon masculinity, more dominant was a sense of resignation and acceptance of 'masculine' qualities.

Both Veronica and Alyson perceive an 'essential nature' from which masculinity springs while Clara experiences this 'nature' in the children's behaviour. The "cycle of gender" repeats itself(Geis, 1993: 10). Society constructs boys as more active, less well behaved, less sensitive than girls. These 'traits' are normalised and indeed encouraged.

Clara: Yes, you can spoil the girl too but the girl...will always listen... because I got
both these... /boys and girls/... I got boys and girls, so you see the difference...
boys don't listen...

The women hold tenacious views on what masculinity should be for their sons, and, by implication, what femininity and mothering should be for themselves and their daughters. At the same time they commonly expressed that they had not thought of these things before in relation to their children. This is an indicator of what Lorber (1994) describes as the taken for granted nature of gender. While it is clear that each mother is aware of her son(s) as masculine, the examination of gendered aspects of their boys' identity had not previously warranted investigation.

Constructions of Masculinity

While many of the participants in this study profess unorthodox or resistant constructions of gender, their discourses often belie this. A negative stereotype of masculinity, for example, was dominant in many of the conversations. The women's discourse was generally cynical in tone regarding 'men as a group', and the notion of masculinity itself. As stated elsewhere, they do not separate the two. The contradictions here are many as in the following excerpts concerning 'bad' and 'good' men.

A "bad man"

In the next excerpt, Veronica constructs masculinity as entailing disrespect toward women. She tells of an incident in which a man described another woman in a vulgar way. It is taken as evidence that the majority of men "still think this way" as if, in reality, men did in the past think and speak like this, but now this had changed:

Veronica: The other side is of it, I was horrified that young men still think.... A man P knows... uhm.. ja...young man... younger than us... P asked how his girlfriend was, and he said, "She has two tits and a cunt!" /Huh!?/ and exactly!... /Wow!/ Men still **think that way**! And that to me is truly...truly... shocking...

The "shock" that Veronica registers indicates a sense of lack of complicity in this sort of construction, and a fear that men, 'somewhere out there' are thinking of women primarily in terms of their sexuality. This is interesting in a context such as we have in this time period where media representations of both women and men often construct women as valueless in terms other than their sexuality, and men as controllers of that sexuality. Veronica is surprised to hear of a man actually behaving in one of the ways in which modern men are constructed to behave in the institutionalised media.

Natalie expresses similarly negative views about men and speaks as if it must be proven that "good" men exist. She constructs herself as one of the few women who can see past the stereotypical notions of masculinity held by South African women as a group.

Johanna, similarly, perceives "scorn" for men as a feeling shared between women in this country.

Natalie: Because my perception of men hasn't changed… /ja/… It's very difficult… I mean because all the women…Most of the women that I know, are very negative about men… and in the way that they perceive men. And uhm… I find myself having to defend them now! Or not defend them… But to say, "But… (2)…There **are** men like that! But at the same time I have met wonderful men… /ja/…So there **are** wonderful men!

Johanna: Often South African women don't like… And I think we've got a lot of reason for it… We just like [to] **scorn** men! In a light hearted way…

Natalie and Johanna construct a troublesome family dynamic here, in the sense that they feel very negative toward 'men in general' and feel concern about passing this negativity on to their sons.

Natalie: because of this whole negative male thing that I had all along in my whole life… (2)… And… it sort of… it just made that I make it like a quite sly humourous comments about a man… or men. I think.. that… that's… That always happens… /hmm/… And I find that I can't…I can't do that because I'm affecting my son…/Sure!/… You know… uhm…because I'm always prepared to have a joke about a man… you know, the only thing they are good for is changing a light bulb… /yeah/…And if…. if he's not going to understand that… it…it… It can start becoming very personal with him /ja/…So, I had to uhm… I had to reassess my whole…view on… on men… males…on masculinity… /uhr-huh/…And.. and I'm still in the process of doing it… I'm still sort of… trying to weave my way through this… what I was brought up with it… and what I'm beginning to believe.

Johanna: I don't think it's because I don't have a taste so much for the average man. I don't think as much about that today. Because P. and I really have a very respectful relationship. I mean, I got what I always wanted. I wanted someone who is not the average male /uhr-huh/… And I got it… So… so I'm comfortable… /ja/… And through all… through all the years of difficulties, it was just never P…. You know it was never… Of course, I project straight on to him. But he was never… J. never… he… I don't think that J. got that from me… that it's not that cool to be a boy… You   know… you know I really think it's… something that he's come up with…

Natalie here expresses a willingness to change her attitude toward men, facilitated by life with her son. She worries about damaging him emotionally if he hears her make "humorous comments about men". Deconstructing the personal ideology of having a

"whole negative male thing" her "whole life", reveals a discursive strategy that allows Natalie the freedom to explore her own constructed negative stereotypes regarding men, while protecting her son from her use of such stereotypes. At the same time, however, it does not seem possible to separate her son from the collective notion of "men" so this notion must be changed rather than recognising negative qualities in her son. Johanna, on the other hand, constructs her partner and her son as other than "average", allowing her to maintain her negative stereotype while excusing these particular males from it. It is as if they want to say, to paraphrase Edley and Wetherell, (1997: 209) "My son will be a man, but not *that type* of man". (own emphasis)

It became clear that the interviewees hold a fear that their sons will turn out to be what Edley and Wetherell (1997: 204) term a "retributive man… he is tough, competitive and emotionally inarticulate". In the construction of 'men as a group' both historical and cultural discourses came into play. Many of the participants' constructions serve to place "men" as not being acceptable to the participants as partners or fathers, while their own immediate family members remain constructed outside of this group. Johanna expresses this in a mixture of memory and personal ideology:

Johanna: I had a very Afrikaans upbringing… My idea of a man was somebody…
             Afrikaans certainly…who would sit there in the afternoon and drink and watch
             television and had a big pot-belly… /ja/… The woman would provide the beer.
             /ja/… So much so, that before I got married, we made a contract that we would
             not have television… /laughs/

Though, in fact, this participant did not have a dominant male figure in her childhood family life, her image of men is such that the stereotype has been substituted for experience. This ideology leads her to construct "men as a group" as being 'naturally'

drawn to television and beer. In this instance we see that some of the hegemonic images of masculinity do not create powerful active images of men in society. They rather promote distance and escape. Clearly, when Johanna pictures a 'man' she pictures a white Afrikaner. Stereotypical masculinity for her, then, is raced, and synonymous with Afrikaner culture.

Johanna: It's like they're hopeless hey… And it's not without reason because it's actually the truth… /uhr-huh/… All they… You know, all they… historically all men wanted to do was… provide the money and get served… /ja/… So the pictures that we grew up with us as children… are horrific… They really are!

Johanna here reproduces the stereotype while constructing a picture of men as "hopeless". While she frames this historically, in her next sentence the implication is clear that she believes that "it's actually the truth". If men just "wanted to get served", then it must have been the women who were the servants. This discourse is contradicted in other sections of Johanna's interview by her distinct feminist sensibilities, along with a determination to share the daily work of child-rearing with her partner. One gets a sense of the power of these stereotypes when it becomes clear that most of the participants construct a personal resistance to the stereotypes but still rely on them when trying to put their notions of masculinity into words.

In the next excerpt, Thandi brings to the discussion her lived experience when constructing and being constructed by this stereotype of masculinity:

Int: Do women want to over-power them?

Thandi: No… No… We don't want to over power them… No… **No**… that is not our culture… /ja/… That is really not [unclear]… You as the woman, you have to obey the rules…

Int: Uh-huh! Did you say that the women have to obey men? Is that what you're saying?

Thandi: Yes… the woman has to… has to obey men…

Int:	Uhm-hmm… How do you feel about that?
Thandi:	Uh::mm… Our parents, it was good for them… /uhm-hmm/… But as the time changes… It is so difficult. /ja/… It is so difficult… It is not nice…. But sometimes… somehow… we are really [unclear] as it is… /ja/… You have to obey…/
Int:	Because you are an independent… educated… woman… /hmm/… who has a husband….
Thandi:	Who has at least a little bit of that education…/So it is so difficult… /ja/… Even if you just ask him, "Oh please can you just help me? I'm busy washing my baby here… Won't you please look in my pots… the food is going to be burnt…" But it is so difficult… He will just say, "Why?" /laughs/… You have to prepare your food first… You have to do this… You have to do that.
Int:	Even in your house…
Thandi:	Even in **my** house… I have to go to work… I'll… I must come and wash children… I must prepare food for him… I must… And he come in early and say… and sit down … watch TV…

Thandi describes herself and her partner as "educated". By using the words "even in my house", she implies that men act this way, whether educated or not. She employs a regulatory discourse as she details her daily routine. Rather than construct the circumstances of home life as a negotiation of the division of labour in her marriage, she utilises a cultural discourse that points toward what "women must do". Thandi is one of the few women who does not construct her family as being outside of the 'system'. Though it seems to make her life more difficult, she appears unable to rectify the situation. She shares her personal ideology in these terms:

Thandi:	You see, because you can't trust a man. You can't trust even one… You can't trust one…

A "good man"

While defining masculinity was troublesome for the study participants, defining their perceptions of a "good man" seemed to require less effort. The contradictions are

numerous in light of the previously highlighted negativities. Men are constructed as "good" if they are "responsible" and "sensitive", thus reinforcing the negative discourses. While a good man *is* these things, there seem to be, for the interviewees, very few good men in the world.

In the next excerpt, Alyson constructs her son as a person who can "express" his emotions, which is necessary in order for him to be a "good" man one day. She is here resisting the cultural imperative that men, in order to appear masculine, repress emotion in public spaces.

Int: Exactly, because it comes down to your son /ja/… if you want to take it very small… You have a little boy /exactly/ and he is going to grow into a man /exactly/… And [you] must figure out the best way to help him do that. /ja/…

Alyson: Ja… I do feel that uhm, that he… that boys should be taught to express their emotions as opposed to… /hmm/… That they should be taught that **a man** has the courage to express his emotions /hmm/… you know… /hmm/.. That… that's very important… I feel /hmm/… /ja/… When J. went out of here this morning, he said, "Bye-bye mom, I love you!" It's great! You know… that's… You know what I mean… that warms my heart sure… **But that he can express** that, that is important.

Clara constructs her son's future, along with the attributes of a "good man" in the next excerpt:

Clara: He can marry… really communicate… socialise… o::h… He's going to be a good man…

She then goes on to construct a "good man" in opposition to what she perceives as the bad things that 'men in general' do. She describes violence and sexual objectification as examples of behaviours that "good" men do not engage in:

Clara:	If they want to **push** you in the road, they just **push**... They just do... anything they want... /ja/... But a **good** man, won't do that...When you think of a good man... It's not his business when she wearing what she is wearing... /right/... Don't just... if she wearing a mini-skirt... you think you can go to her and do funny things...

The notion of responsibility plays a major role in the "good man" discourse. 'Men in general' are constructed conversely, then, as irresponsible by the study participants. The participants wish for their sons to be different from the picture they hold of the majority of men, in the sense that they will be responsible sexually, in their communities, and as family members. Marian (speaking of her older son, who is not a student at Gaia), describes her sense of what responsibility means for boys:

| Marian:	The other day he asked me, "Mommy, please can I have R50?" And it was like I don't have this R50. And I could see it was a big thing. So I sat him down and wanted to know, "Why do you need this R50?" He responded, "Because I'm going on my first date, it's very... very important..." (Sighs). So I thought... I took myself back to the old times, "What would my mother say?" She probably would have said, "No! This is nonsense!" And I thought, "Na, I'm giving this time now /that's right/... And I want to teach him to be responsible. And part of being responsible is, uhm... ja, being provided with resources.

In Marian's discourse surrounding her son's "first date", she conflates his "masculine responsibility", implicit in her notion of a "date", with her own accountability to him as his mother. She asserts that she must provide the "resources" for her son to be able to carry out his obligation 'as a man'. Therefore, in this discourse, Marian supports the dominant ideology of young manhood, as well as a discourse of femininity which equates motherhood with sacrifice.

Like Marian, Thandi constructs a need for boys to learn a sense of responsibility, and the teaching of such appears to be incumbent upon the mother. In the next excerpt Thandi conflates notions of culture with manhood and responsibility. She constructs the cities as

wastelands in terms of the learning her sons receive here and she tries to counteract such "rubbish" by creating work for the boys to do. The urban environment creates a pretense of "civilisation", which draws the boys away from their 'true' rural culture.

Thandi: It is like that in our culture let alone now…we are working in cities…and the children they are coming in cities… and there is **nothing** that they are learning here in the cities… /uhr-huh/… Nothing! They learn absolutely rubbish… you see /ja/… They used to… They are pretending to be civilised you know… watching TV's… nothing they can do… Nothing they can do really /ja/… As a result my boys… I say to them… "There are no people here in this TV… There are no sheep… There are no goats… So, you have to do something! You have to do the garden… You have to clean the yard!… You have to wash the car"… It must be the routine… It must be your routine everyday /ja/… Everyday… /ja/… You must be responsible for something or someone… /

By placing such emphasis upon male responsibility, Marian and Thandi are constructing boys as 'naturally' irresponsible. This is a complex contradiction in light of the previously discussed, overarching discourse of negativity surrounding men, the notion that irresponsibility is inherent, and the construction of mothers as responsible for their sons' actions.
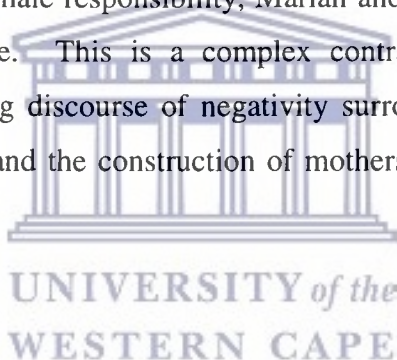
Power

"… feminist theor[ies] share a perception of mainstream masculinity as being (in advanced capitalist countries at least) fundamentally linked to power, organised for domination, and resistant to change…" (Connell, 1995: 42). Therefore, the notions of strength and power as enmeshed with men and masculinity are evident in the conversational constructions created by Carla, Veronica and Carmen. Their discourses highlight some of the contradictions tied up with the mingling of masculinity and strength:

Carla: No… there's no doubt in my mind! I mean /ja/… without us [without women] they would fall apart… /hmm/.. So… There is this thing that men… Well, the people **believe that men** are the strong ones. /ja./… Because they usually…

bring in the money... /hmm/... But that's got nothing to do with
power.../ja/... I think... /ja/... Uhm... When I grew up... Ja... the man was
the powerful, strong... /ja/...type

Veronica: I think it is because he so strong!... That protective thing... /hmm/... that
masculine thing, is so **enormously rooted**...

Carmen: The men would believe that **they** were the strong ones...They were the ones
who did all the hard work... And the women were inside, raising the child...
washing up and cooking...

There are inconsistencies present in constructing men as believing themselves to be "the
strong ones" while constructing women as indispensable, and at the same time relating
from lived experience the notion that men are more "powerful" and strong than women.
The participants discourse is phrased in terms that are dichotomous. *Either* the men are
strong *or* the women are strong. If one is strong, the other must be weak, there does not
seem to be a discursive place for both men *and* women exhibiting strength. The belief
that men are the strong ones is propped up at the same time that it is being dismissed.
Carla, ironically, expresses the belief that "they usually bring in the money", while
being a single mother of two sons. Constructing men in this way, she diminishes the
reality of her own financial support of her two children, and discursively constructs
herself as an anomaly; the rule being that men are the financial strength in most families.
Masculinity then, in this construction, means support of and strength within the family,
with an emphasis upon the nuclear family. Contradictorily, though the previous
discourses appeared to resist the construction of women as dependent and powerless,
they are still clearly situated in such dominant constructions.

Changing masculinity?

The notion of "the new man" is not lost on the study participants. The discourse reflects the concept of dominant societal regulations to which men must adhere. Many of the participants claim that it is more difficult to be a man in this time period than it was in the past. Interestingly, they point to the most prevalent stereotypes of masculinity as burdens for men, yet as the previous discussion suggests, these notions are relied upon by the mothers when describing 'men in general'. It is again clear that what most of the women see as ordinary in society does not and must not apply to their partners or sons.

Natalie:	No… **No**! They're not fighting it! They have them… The ones with the… The process that I'm talking about… are mature guys… /uhm-hmm/.. And they have tried very long and hard to fit into society and have found that they can't. /uhm-hmm/… They… they can't live up to… or live down to society's expectations
Int:	Live **down to**?
Natalie:	**It is** a live down to… /ja./… Because society's… perception of a man… now still after all of these years… Is that they are… the strong, silent… Oh… and… and then the new…. the new man or… or… So of if I look at… They… they… have this sensitivity but…it's not real… because it's a different… It's almost like it's a **pretend** sensitivity…

In the previous excerpt, Natalie expresses cynicism when describing "the new man". She speaks as if "he" is yet another image without substance. The "new man" discourse prescribes sensitivity for men, yet Natalie's construction of men does not include what she perceives as "real" sensitivity.

Maria reflects a discourse, generated predominantly by popular culture, of a "new" masculinity that is not "butch". In this excerpt we see that, in her perception, the "new man" does not need to embody what she constructs as 'old fashioned qualities'. In this discourse, the "new man" trades "strength" for "sensitivity".

Maria: And also just looking at this sensitive man of the nineties… that came out, and seeing that more and more men are not expected to be these **butch**… sole providers… who are wanted for all this strength.

Johanna, on the other hand, utilises a discourse that frames the "average male" as snared by societal expectations. This discourse supports the notion that acting in stereotypically masculine ways is difficult for men, yet they have limited choice in the matter.

Johanna: I mean I looked at males and they are so **trapped**…They really are! You know… if I look at the average male in South Africa, they are trapped! Hey! They're really are… Try being a man…

Alyson's thoughts on the "new man" resonate with those previously expressed by Johanna, when she speaks of male friends who are "lost" in society. It's as if there is a place *within* masculinity in which men should fit, and that the particular social context in which Alyson's friends find themselves does not allow for that. Again, I am critical of the idea of 'man' as generic, but in this exchange Alyson is referring to particular men with whom she is acquainted.
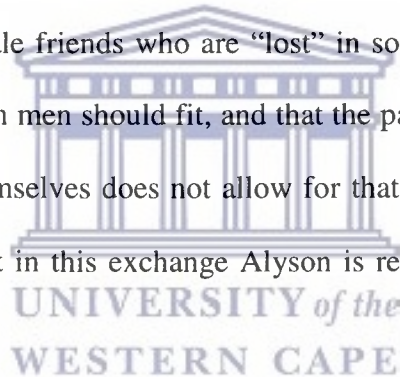
Alyson: But the men I know, who feel uhm… **who feel** lost at the moment… Who feel there is no definition for them. Who feel there is no role for them… There is no place for them… There's no… They can't… they can't find a place. They swing wildly… to and fro you know… from extreme… from this extreme kind of machoness… to…to extreme femininity… You know… they feel a lot… They feel… (2)… as if there's no **place for them**… as men. They can't find their place as men. I feel sorry for… for where they are at the moment… /uhm/…They're [floundering] as far as I can see… /hmm/… (coughs)… and they feel pretty ineffectual to me.

Int: Interesting… Do you think that…. Do you think…and I don't want to put words in your mouth… but it brings something to my mind… about maybe… uhm… maybe they have a sense of masculinity… their masculinity somehow being redefined or something /Yes!/… Or it hasn't been… /

Alyson: Absolutely! They feel like they are in the middle of a process… /uhr-huh/… and that they can't see the light at the end of the tunnel…/

Int: They can't go back through there?

Alyson: Well, the old perceptions of masculinity absolutely, that they were brought up with… was….uhm… they found oppressive… /ja/… And then they realised that it was actually counter-productive in their emotional- intimate lives… /hmm/…And… and… and… that finding themselves being islands…you know… They can't allow people near them because they don't know how.

Alyson and many of the other participants employ an historical discourse to describe what has previously been expected of men, and what is now the dominant expectation. Past and present societal expectations are commonly conflated by the study participants, however, with there being no obvious demarcation between the "old" and the "new" masculinity.

Maternal Constructions

As previously mentioned, when the study participants spoke of their children, they did not appear to be thinking of the boys in anything larger than individual terms. Accordingly, the women seemed somewhat unable to consider generalised notions of masculinity at the same time as describing their conceptual constructions of their sons.

Individualism

I detected a strong theme of individualism running through many of the conversations that constructs the interviewees and their families as 'outside' of the norms of South African society. The category, 'men in general' did not normally encompass the women's partners or sons. In perceiving themselves and their families as falling well outside of the 'mainstream', the study participants construct a 'mundane social system' of which they do not approve and in which they do not wish to take part.

Maria, in this excerpt, constructs what is 'normal' from her perception of the 'system' and places herself outside of this construction. In a sense, she is resisting the stock image of the nuclear family, yet accepting the notion of a "normal family unit".

Maria: to…to talk about society as a whole. I also think that sometimes, because S… and I, we don't have a conventional lifestyle./uhm/…You know our family unit is not like a normal family unit.

Johanna, too, constructs 'normality' and the stereotypical family as something from which she wants to maintain a long distance.

Johanna: Here I was going to be one of **those people**…It was just weird. And I believe I made serious changes to… to my attitude and really **worked** with my partner… /ja/… and towards achieving what I want /ja/… and I knew that I… Johanna, was actually unable to put those societal rules… /hmm/… I really am… I can't… I just **cannot… do it**… I can't be a mommy and a wife… /ja/… Of course I can! But…

Int: Not what that means?

Johanna: Not that that means…. Ja… to sort of /ja/… And I had to create… we had to create a different reality for ourselves. /ja/… It worked…

Johanna's individualist construction allows her to remove herself from what she perceives to be traditional roles for women, while fulfilling much of the daily work of motherhood. The difference here between what "those people" do, and the life she has constructed, may not be in the amount of work she does to care for her children, it may, rather, be in her perception of that work and of her partner's commitment to the daily running of the household. While their family arrangements may appear to be conventional from the perspective of traditional roles – father works full-time, mother cares for children and works part-time, they have constructed it in such a manner that it is not personally experienced as 'normal' in terms of the mainstream. Johanna's

construction of a 'different reality' is the key to her contentment with her parental responsibilities.

"Unique" boys

In keeping with the notion of individualism, I focus the next set of discourses on the participants' constructions of their sons *as boys*, but not as *normal boys*. Both Veronica and Johanna construct their children as unusual in terms of what boys *are*. Contradictorily, they both resist and support dominant ideologies of masculinity as they position their sons within the confines of gendered expectations. They create a discourse around difference and the challenges their sons face, or may face in the future in terms of 'fitting in' with dominant ideals of masculinity, yet at the same time they paint 'boys in general' in conventional terms.
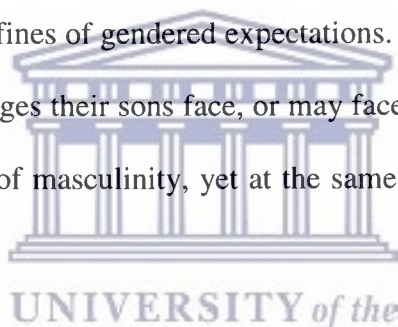
Veronica: Because he has this innate imaginativeness... He is a very **sensitive** uhr... child, but he is still a boy! So I think it's difficult for him (softly)... to be a boy because he gets confronted with these big, rowdy, rough boys. And on the one hand, he has considered that he's supposed to be a boy. He's a boy as well /ja/... and that's an important thing for him /ja/. But on the other hand he has this hu::ge sensitivity and.... Ja.. he goes through a lot of conflict (softly) within himself. I mean he struggles with other boys... You know when there are other boys around who do, do those things! Who do arm wrestle! Who... there that big thing in C.... that wants to participate in that...and he wants also to be strong! He **wants to fit** in with boys...

Veronica here constructs "sensitivity" as a dilemma for her son. While it is a quality she clearly admires in the child, she asserts that his sensitivity creates internal "conflict" between the ways in which he sees other boys behaving and the ways in which he feels. This paints a picture of "other boys" who naturally act without feeling, and of Veronica's son who "struggles" to be like them.

Johanna, in a similar vein, contrasts her son to the 'other' boys but does not portray a struggle within him. She, rather, depicts his "difference", as a road he must travel on his path to adulthood:

Johanna: J. is wonderfully flamboyant, and I suppose he can be feminine if he wanted to… Ja… You know he's just…. He's just not your average boy. You know /hmm/… He can be. He can be… what… what I was going to say is behaviours is what these boys do… But he's very… alternative…We give him boy's toys and all those kind of things. But he plays with them somehow in a way… that's very calm and beautiful… You know it's not… I would think that it's also a little boy's thing to take them apart… /ja/… and put them together and all that kinds of things /ja/… And the pipe of water running… he runs out to see how fast it gets there /uhr-huh/… All those sort of things that I would quickly associate with boys. /ja/… You know it's all of those things as well…/ja/… where [unclear] just does so many other things, so naturally, so beautifully…/ja/… and it's quite easy for him to… Ja he's complex

She describes his play as "calm and beautiful", not what would normally be expected from a boy.

Johanna: But I'm feeling still, he's merely tolerating been a boy… /uhr-huh/… because that happens to be what he is. /ja/… [unclear]… It's not what he wants to be imagine with me with J. wanting to wear dresses and being… and having a dad like P.., who is effeminate, and himself (laughs) being very alternative already at this point. …he's gonna have to be very secure in himself to deal with being different as a teenager and an adult.

Johanna's depiction of her son as "complex" and "alternative" creates a gendered picture of "average" boys as simple and not very complicated.

Gender-free sons?

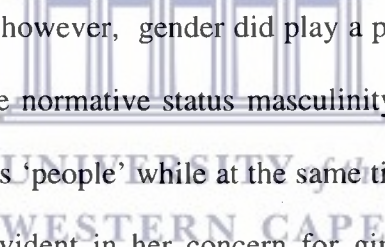Mothers commonly construct their sons as 'just people' or 'individuals' rather than gendered beings. This ties in closely with the previously mentioned sense of individualism so prevalent in the discourses that participants verbalise. I question this construction, as it is surely debatable whether or not there can be 'identity' before 'gender identity' (Butler, 1991 in Ferber, 1999: 21). Most probably, when these children

were born, their sex/gender was the first identifier their mothers experienced in the building of their new relationship, yet their sons' gender is not constructed as an issue discursively for them. While the following discourses seem to deny the notions of the interviewees' sons as gendered, the essentialising of the boys' 'natures' in other discourses belies this.

Marian: when you raise them… it… especially when I look at my youngest son… I'm… I'm not thinking of him as being a boy

Johanna: I know… that draws out a very different type of love that way… that's interesting /ja/… That's so interesting ja… /ja/… But then again… that's got nothing to do with boy and girl… /ja/… It's just…/

Carla: For example, I don't have much expectations for my boys as men, except that they must just be the best person that they can be…

When the women spoke of girls, however, gender did play a part in their constructions. This is perhaps a reflection of the normative status masculinity enjoys in society. The mothers appear to think of sons as 'people' while at the same time thinking of daughters as 'girls'. For Marian, this is evident in her concern for girls' "vulnerability". She constructs girls as being "at the hands of power", as victims of their own femininity. She may be referring here to the rampant violence against women in this country.

Marian: Maybe I'm fortunate that I don't have daughters…but that… that how I look at it /ja/ [that way]… When I see girls and I see how vulnerable they have become… at the hands of this whole masculinity power… then I feel girls should be empowered

Male role models

Within a dominant discourse around the issue of role models for boys, another contradiction was evident because, while the participants' general picture of men was

discursively negative, the mothers overwhelmingly maintain that boys need adult male figures in their lives. The mothers who identified as single seemed to feel this keenly, and voiced concern over what their sons might be missing. At the same time, the mothers saw themselves to be role models, but somehow lacking, in the sense that a boy naturally learns more from watching a man perform tasks or behave in 'manly ways' than from a woman who does the same things. Several of the mothers expressed the notion that a man or father would naturally know how to relate to a boy by virtue of being linked by the same gender. Natalie expresses this in the next excerpt:

Natalie: But also to know how to… uhm… how to handle him sometimes… But… but…but to handle the masculine… uhr…not… not the… Not to handle his behaviour… But to… How to … Because he doesn't have a father… or the right male role model… But how, I think… just help him grow that side /ja/ sort of healthily…/ja/… /Ja/… because he doesn't have a father…

Maria also expresses the concern that her son's development will be impeded by the fact that there is not a father figure in the household. While she believes a child learns best through adult example, she voices worry about whether her example, that of a woman, is adequate:

Maria: One of the biggest obstacles for S… is that he doesn't have a man in his life, permanent at this moment. So he doesn't have any man… as in male role… role model… Ja.. the best way you can raise a good man, is through example. But because I'm a woman… /laughter/…As I say… it makes you think a lot about are you really **equipped to** do /ja/…this job..

These discourses produce an adversarial relationship between mother and son. The women construct subject positions for their sons which portray boys as unable to learn important life lessons from women. The mothers themselves are by implication not competent enough to teach what a boy needs to learn to succeed in adult life. According to Silverstein & Rashbaum (1994), the notion in Western culture of the need for male role

models is an ideology that has been collectively constructed due to the rise and popularity of psychoanalytic theory.

While Natalie and Alyson, in the following excerpts, reflect dominant notions of boys' needs for male role models, Marian qualifies her position on the issue:

Marian: I think… I think boys actually need strong…positive male role models. /uhm/…
People who.. uhm…ja… who entice them with strength and love, and show
Them that not everything is not [sic] about strength and violence. You know, he
hasn't got the kind of uhm… role models that I wish him [to have]…But for me,
what scares me is, his interacting with other black men. Uhm… supposedly
educated black men. Uhm… and I realise how ignorant they are. And I think
that… that's what scares fear in me… That if these men are so ignorant… about
the whole AIDS position...what does it mean for him?

Though Natalie asserts that her son is in need of a male role model, she simultaneously resists the notion:

Natalie: So he has seen us women, doing everything. I mean I've fixed the washing
machine… I have fixed the car if I can… And he has seen me do… I don't
really do the same… unless I do, do the dishes… So… I do…There is a big
crossover in what I do. I do a lot of what the man in the house would do…

It is an enigmatic contradiction, to be sure, that simultaneously bestows power on women and diminishes that power at the same time. While Natalie describes some of the things she does, as a single mother to keep the family running smoothly, she describes them in turns of "crossover". In her discourse, then, certain tasks belong in a masculine domain, and she does them out of necessity rather than ability. Alyson's desire for a male role model for her son imparts a sense of anxiety about whether or not she will be able to "understand" him and about her ability 'as a woman' to "deal with him in an appropriate way":

Alyson: I mean also having been the mother of a male child. He's nine! He's reaching
like… I'm starting to feel that uhm… that I desperately need… (2) male input…

You know…

Int: For J….?

Alyson: For J…. for me… to… to… be able to deal with him… in… in an appropriate
way. /hmm/… You know, to be able to understand him… to perceive his role.
/hmm/… Perceive what masculinity is… what a man is… you know.

The discourses that Natalie and Alyson construct rely on a dominant, yet what one could term a 'silent' ideology that women are inherently inadequate when it comes to raising sons. Contrasted with the earlier discourse of mothers as primarily accountable for men's sense of responsibility, women are placed in an untenable position where they are both responsible for boys becoming 'good men' and unable to teach them to be 'good men'. Johanna's discourse surrounding her partner's house habits is an example of this contradiction:

Johanna: And up to this day, he still throws clothes on the floor. /hmm/… And I just
pick them up and throw them on the other side of the corner where it doesn't
even bother me because… you know, actually in a way, it does bother me…And
the other day I looked at him and said to him, "You know, I blame your
mother…. Not blame her. But it's your mother's fault! It really is…"

Sexuality

Masculinity is intimately tied to (hetero)sexuality (Shefer & Reuters, 1997), and many of the participants spoke about this link. Their sons' sexual development is of concern and is anchored in a discourse that centers around notions of safety, and responsibility. In the next two excerpts, it is clear that the interviewees and I are co-constructing an optimistic sexual future for their sons; one in which they will be safe. While Marian's child in Gaia is six years old, the concern she expresses is about television influencing her older son and about the risks that sexual activity entails.

Int: That's what I was going to ask you, can you talk to him about sexuality?

Marian: I ca::n because we have this whole thing about what's right in watching TV and what's not right. You know…. The whole thing about AIDS… I mean, you need to teach children about it. The realities of what is happening, if you don't tell them… You don't tell them fairy tales anymore. /That's right/So…. So me… I've started to tell him that, "I'm not going to argue with you about sex and not having sex, and things like that. But **if you are going to have** sex, you have to use a condom." **/You have too**!/… Ja… and it's not debatable. And then at times he will say… I don't want to talk about it. Who says I want to have sex anyway!" /hmm/… And then there are times when he will come in and I will say, "As long as you know about having it… at any point in life… you always have to use a condom /hmm/…" Uhm… so for me that is part of the process of… **facing** up to the manhood. Deciding that you are ready to be a man. That's how you take sexual responsibility. You cannot put it in anyone's hands… It can't be in my hands…**It can't be in the other person's hands**.. .

Int: Do you think he knows that? Do you think he… That's a tough one hey…?

Marian: I think… I::I think he knows that… I::I think he realised because there has been so much in the media /hmm/… I think there has been so much in the media, that fortunately I think… with… with the type of schools that I've exposed the children to… /ja/… especially the older one… that… that there… there has been so much social education… Uhm… He sees on TV… you know… [unclear]…And **I do discuss** with him… You know, I'm open about it… Like also… also a friend of mine died of AIDS. /uhr-huh/… Things like that… So I think that if…if the reality is just there for them /ja/… But knowing about sex and sexuality, and what really **happens at that** moment…. What he will think… uhm… he's… has the media really gotten to him… it's possible that people will have AIDS /yes/… You actually have AIDS… I don't know, if I have given T… enough, to own that… that he'll understand that **anybody**.. can be anybody /ja/… It doesn't matter how old you are…/

Marian says she is not going to "argue" about whether or not her son has sex, she is, rather, concerned with the parameters within which he must remain when he does have sex. Condoms are a non-negotiable in this discourse, as corroborated in the next excerpt from Carla:

Carla: I'm not wo:::rried… But I mean, I do find it strange that, that they know so Much /Ja… Ja!/… about [sex] but maybe it's good with AIDS being around.

Int: Well, this is the thing. Sex… sex is… I mean I suppose… Sex is, especially in this country… it would mean a major responsibility hey?… I mean the very… Whenever they have sex, they **will have to use condoms**… /ja/… **because they have to!** /ja/…

Carla: But, I think… because the kind of… When they go to the library… It's mainly at the library you will have all these condoms. /oh/ So, they have… **pockets** full

Int:	The boys do… /ja/… the nine year old boys… /ja/…
Carla:	And then they come and they play with [the condoms] in the ba::th… and they blow them up and whatever… So, it's… (sighs)/
Int:	So they don't know how to use it yet….
Carla:	It's not really a funny thing for them… /ja/… And I think growing up in this age, I think it's going to be like automatic… /ja/ to use condoms if you have sex… /ja/… When they… when they're big enough…
Int:	Ja… To them it will be a part of sex?
Carla:	Yes.. /ja/… Hopefully… When to me, it was definitely not a part of… well.. /ja/…But now-a-days, you know, there's no option… /right/… /right/… Which I think it's very good that they… so **aware that there's condoms everywhere** /Ja.. ja/… so that the two [sex and condoms] will be connected… /ja/… So that you don't even **go there**, if you don't have condoms… /right/… /right/… When I was young… those were there so that you don't fall pregnant… /ja/…ja/..

The condom discourse we constructed together belies our 'common knowledge' about young people and condom use. Though we are aware of the fact that, "in many parts of Southern Africa…condom use with casual partners is low, despite the fact that people are generally well-informed about the causes of HIV and how to prevent its transmission" (Campbell *et al*, 1998: 50), we carefully construct these particular boys' future sexual behaviour in denial of this reality.

While we create a discourse of responsibility toward the boys' sexual health and sexual partners, we, at the same time, speak of the influences surrounding them in terms of women/girls and sexuality. This is contradictory, as the children are constructed, in one sense, as sexually responsible individuals and in another, as little boys who naturally giggle at the thought of anything pertaining to girls and sexuality. In the next excerpts, we find Carmen discussing her sons' sexualised behaviour and attributing it to larger

social influences. In the conversations, we tie the boys' growing sexual awareness, with an implicit 'boys will be boys' discourse. I argue that this discourse supports a normalisation of men's violence against women. Such behaviour can be seen along something of a continuum. Pre-adolescent boys will commonly attempt to grab the bra straps or breasts of girls their own age, sexual harassment in the work place takes forms both subtle and overt, and images of women in submissive postures are plastered on billboards and in magazines throughout the Western world, while women are raped and murdered by the thousands. It is surely not difficult to visualise a connection between naturalised discourses of boyhood and the many varying degrees of violence against women.

Carmen: I think peer pressure… well the **boys at school**… are terrible! /hmm/… Yes, they are terrible…. /ja/… They have this macho image… And they speak about the… you know the girls… uhm… **actually in a sexual way** /ja/… So… uhm and quite derogatory as well… /ja/… So, we had…/ Uhm because he came home last week or something and… uhm… My breasts are getting bigger because I am pregnant… /sure/… And I got nothing… I hide nothing from him then I went to the loo… I never lock the door… /hmm/… So everybody who wants to come do something, will just do it and so on… And then he looked at me and he laughed, "Oh, mommy, you are looking like a chick because your breasts are so big!"

Int: A chick?!

Carmen: A chick /oh!/… I said, "That is a term not to be used… Where did you come on that by the way?" He said, "Oh, the boys at school was discussing it? They said that women with big breasts are called chicks." And then I said. "Well, excuse me. Do I look like a chick in this bathroom!" (laughs)…

Heterosexual frameworks

Marian, Carla, and Carmen, and indeed most of the mothers, remain tied to an overarching heterosexual ideal when constructing their sons in terms of sexuality. This

was a prevalent, yet underlying discourse. Because heterosexuality appears to remain unexamined by all the participants but one in terms of their sons, the children in the study are growing up surrounded by the assumption that they will enter into heterosexual adult relationships. Holland, Ramazonoglu and Thomson argue that heterosexuality is actually *synonymous* with masculinity:

> We are arguing that heterosexuality is not a balanced (or even unbalanced) institutionalization of masculinity-and-femininity, it is masculinity. We take young people's accounts to support our claim that first heterosex is a double construction: the young woman is under pressure first to consent to the constitution of adult heterosexuality as the construction of masculinity, and then to fit herself to this construction. Within this construction of masculinity, young women must find ways of existing and making sense of themselves and their 'otherness'. Sexual intercourse with men becomes something for them to manage as best they can (1996: 145).

As an institution, an experience, and a set of competing constructions, then, heterosexuality requires careful scrutiny when exploring gendered discourse. The study participants did voice some thoughts regarding homosexuality but these were normally in response to a scenario I'd set regarding a boy who prefers to wear dresses. The reader will remember that the mother of one child in the study did speak at length about her son's clothing preference, so, for her, it was not a hypothetical situation. Following then, are some of Johanna's thoughts about her son and homosexuality:

Int: But do you think him wearing dresses has anything to do with his masculinity?

Johanna: No… no I don't… Fact… In fact I think by letting him wear dresses, he's playing around with… with the whole being… you know… /hmm/… I think by letting him wear dresses now… he might well… ja… he might well… I think any… any child who turn out gay… /sure/… He might well, not turn out gay because he had the opportunity to… to…to that… You know what I mean /ja/… All through his life he will have that /ja/… In fact if that is what he wants… /ja/… And I mean if he does turn out gay… then… then quite frankly I'll be happy and glad… that I didn't squash it… /ja/… I want him to do it as a little boy… Really I mean that.. you know… I really believe that if one is gay, it comes from… from birth /hmm/… Or it comes from a very… very… very young age. /ja/…So I'll be glad that I didn't push him into something that he is not /ja/

Johanna : The only influence I want to have over J.'s masculinity is… when he's

beginning to grow up to be an adult... a male adult... ja...he must be satisfied
with this body... And whatever that body wants to do... You know...
whether it [his body] wants to be heterosexual.... Or gay or... cross... You
know a transvestite... I just think of his flamboyance you know... Uhm... or
what ever... just to be... just to be comfortable in his body. /ja/... But not in
a.. in a male body...you know...

Johanna's construction of her son's dress-wearing appears fraught with contradictions.
While she expresses the sentiment that she will be "happy and glad" if he "does turn out
gay", she also appears to feel that she may be helping to provide an outlet for what could
be seen as homosexual tendencies in his clothing choice. Accordingly, she describes J.'s
"flamboyance" as if it may be an indicator that he will be gay as an adult. Although
Freudian theory has had a powerful influence on Western culture, and boys' early
identification with their mothers is basic to the theory, when boys manifest behaviours or
desires that could be constructed as anything other than "strictly male" their sexuality is
brought into question. This is corroborated by Alyson's reaction when asked her feelings
regarding the notion of her son wearing a dress. She immediately contrives a discourse
surrounding homosexuality, and the reader must bear in mind here that homosexuality
was not asked about in the interviews, just the notion of boys wanting to wear dresses:

Int :   This is very different... this is a very different kind of question. What, if he told
you... or not even him... what if somebody in his class... a boy... who was like
wearing dresses all the time... Or J. said, "I want to wear a dress to school
today /unclear/... Or like wearing or whatever... ./laughs/... How would
you react? ...What would you do? How would you...?

Alyson: That's right... That hits at the core of the question /ja/... That is quite an
interesting question... /ja/... Uhm... (2)... I have one...two close gay male
friends... /uhm/... My son is also friends with them. And we were driving.
He's 19.... He's a six foot... six foot...six foot rampant queen... He's a kind
of Afrikaans boy... A beautiful... beautiful boy. He used to hike through
Africa on his own. /wow!/... He's not your ordinary moffie... You know what
I mean... He's a crazy boy!... Brilliant... brilliant... brilliant artist...
uhm... (2)... Fabulous conversationalist... And we were driving up Kloof
Road one day. We were talking... He was telling us about some boy he met the
night before... And J. stuck his head between us like this.../laughs/... And he
looks at us and says, "Is T. **gay**?" And we all laughed and laughed and

laughed…and that's just the **last** thing he said about it. There was not… there's
no…He didn't care a lot about it at all. It was totally… He accepts it completely
and totally. But **he doesn't** want to be gay../uhr-huh/… He **perceives** it as…
as… as different to what he is… /uhm-hmm/…. You know what I mean…/

In Alyson's response, she says that the thought of boys wearing dresses "hits at the core
of the question". In this discourse then, the binary once again comes into play; either one
is feminine or one is masculine. Furthermore, Alyson goes on to describe her gay friend
as "not your ordinary moffie", in the sense that her friend has done "masculine" things
such as "hiking through Africa". So, while the discourse Alyson constructs appears to be
accepting of homosexuality, (indeed, in another part of the interview she spoke of her
own lesbian sexual liaisons), it is also a dichotomising force in her construction of her
son's sexuality. The study participants' constructions of their sons' sexuality do indeed
"hit at the core of the question" as the link between masculinity and sexuality is nearly
impossible to disentangle.

Feminism 'on the ground'

The final discourse I would like to discuss here is one of feminism. Many of the women
in the study constructed distinct feminist sensibilities in our conversations. Their
feminist "theory" is akin to what Cherríe Moraga terms "theory in the flesh" (Moraga,
1983: 23). Accordingly, their feminism is drawn from their experience and the contexts
within which they move. I offer here some examples of feminist constructions from the

research participants. To be sure they do not fall neatly into any particular theory of feminism, but they present a picture of women employing feminist notions in the negotiation of daily life. One can term such discourse, feminism 'on the ground', yet, on the other hand, the previous pages display the myriad contradictions embroiled within the participants' feminism.

Natalie:	And they girls are sort of like, there's another part of them that gets squashed down… /ja/… They can't just be… /ja/… I think that's what it is. They can't just be what they want to be…
Marian:	I was raised to be tough. My mother raised me to be tough.
Alyson:	Although I was wild when I was young and I crossed loads of boundaries… /ja/… /laughs/…
Joanna:	Even if you looked at them… I mean…obviously… uhm… I must have been a very aware little girl… /hmm/… You know I looked at all of this and I… didn't… It didn't all make sense for [me]… why did all these **bright, intelligent women** let this happen?. /ja/… [unclear]… It was like an arrow…
Clara:	I would like… S. can do what I was doing… upholstery… I like /oh ja/… the whole idea…that men and women, they can do the same job…

Moya's (1997: 145) claim that "the relationship between social location, knowledge, and identity [are] theoretically mediated through the interpretation of experience…" supports the picture of 'ordinary' women creating feminist 'theory' to serve their needs. I end this chapter with these last excerpts in the hope that a certain optimism can be gained from the knowledge that feminism has impacted upon the lives of the study participants, and therefore their children.

Conclusion

My own experience resonates with much of what the mothers said while, at the same time, critical deconstruction seems the only way to break down the gender mandates,

both inside and outside of our minds, with which we all live. The mothers interviewed are all trying their best to raise "good men" within the constraints of their lives. As we spoke, the institutionalisation and virtual invisibility of the dominant discourses surrounding gender became ever more apparent. Thus, while the mothers in this study commonly claimed to dismiss stereotypical masculinity for their sons, they often described their boys in terms of just such stereotypes. By illuminating these very contradictions, inherent in the participants' understandings of gender and masculinity, I hope to contribute to the discussion of, and recognition of, the complexities with which we deal when trying to negotiate gender for our children.

CHAPTER 5

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Subjectivities

In analysing the interviews I have necessarily applied my own perceptions to the research. Clearly, the background I bring to the study influences those perceptions and positioning oneself as a social constructionist researcher does not preclude one's *own* constructed positivist or essentialist tendencies. While I have attempted to refrain from generalising, I recognise the potential hazards and contradictions involved in doing this sort of research, especially when one is removed from one's social milieu.
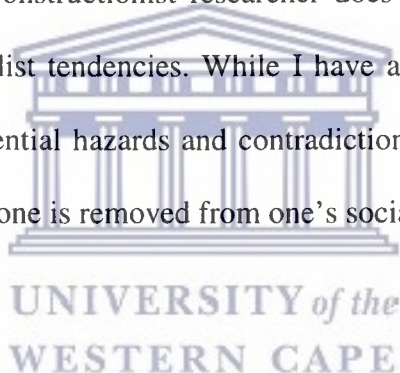
Co-constructions of Discourse

The fact that I was the researcher and I have a child in the same school as the participants most certainly impacted upon the interviews and analysis. This influence is not quantifiable, yet it must be recognised. As the participants and I share many similar daily experiences, it is not incorrect to look at these discourses as co-constructions, nor would it be wrong to think my interest in the participants is solely as a researcher. Rather, I feel a passion for discovering the ways that *we as parents*, construct gender for our children, and how these constructions affect the children into adulthood and in turn the communities to which we belong. A clear example of this can be seen in the following

exchange between Johanna and me about her young son who chose to wear dresses rather than traditional boys clothing:

Int: Uhr…the dresses?

Johanna: He likes the way he can dance in [it]… It flows…

Int: Because… because it twirls… /It twirls/… It looks
                  very nice…/ja/… ja

Johanna: He loves the fact that uhr… they're **pretty**… /ja/
                  /ja/… because boys clothes aren't pretty… /Ja/…   You know….

Int: Ja, it's not very good for… He's quite right, isn't he?

Johanna: He's totally right! Because everything makes perfect sense!

Int: Look at the boys' section and the girls section /Ja!/ at Woolworth's or
                  something… /It's shocking!/… The boys' [clothes] are brown and dark blue…

Johanna: Here's a pants with a shorts… And… a::nd… Every morning I take out his
                  clothes… and shame… there are the same shirts… and another pair of shorts
                  or pants or whatever… And I don't… Then what he does… Now-a-days, he
                  will put on someone's bangles or something… /uhr-huh/… So he's got a few
                  dresses… or whatever… You don't know… It's… really it's phasing
                  out…You can actually…You see where this whole dresses like start… when
                  it started… when S (daughter) started wearing dresses… /uhr-huh/… And he
                  said, "Oh how beautiful!"…sweet./Ah/…You know, it's very
                  sweet…/nice…yeah/…We get dresses passed on from other people and uhr…
                  She can try it out and you can really say… "Oh, just look at that!" And then
                  he'll say, "I'll wear five dresses!

Int: I wanna look sweet too!

In this exchange, Johanna and I are co-constructing her son's dress-wearing preference as ordinary behaviour for a little boy. In an empathetic attempt at normalising what I suspect are conflictual feelings for Johanna, I as the interviewer, speak as if it is perfectly understandable in the face of tremendous social pressure to do the opposite. The discourse we created together in this instance served to reduce any strain or tension we may have been experiencing at the child's breaking of the unwritten, yet oppressively strict, rule that 'normal' boys do not wear dresses.

The mutual meanings we created during the interviews influenced the flow of the conversations and my own subjectivities underpinned my choices when deciding which excerpts to highlight and which to exclude. While I am trying to elucidate patterns of shared understanding and meaning amongst the study participants, I am interpreting what I perceive to be patterns through a filter of limited local knowledge, as my eighteen months in South Africa has been punctuated by periods of confusion due to unfamiliarity with the myriad complexities of South African life. This is not to say that I brought none of my own situated knowledge to the conversations, as clearly I did. Apart from the standard labels one attaches to oneself in search of a definition (white, middle class, North American etc) my knowledges also have been influenced by the fact that I have thought much about gender as it relates to myself, my partner and our daughter, have spent many years in university exploring feminist texts, and have travelled extensively in Southern Africa. The cumulative and intersecting affects of my myriad subjectivities undoubtedly created assumptions that crept in as I tried to make sense of the interviews. This must be taken into account, not as a weakness in the study but rather as an example of the necessity of the inclusive and open nature of this research.

The study participants necessarily guided my questions and the conversations, and I was regularly made aware of the differing subject positions we brought to the interviews. I asked each woman what questions she might have asked, as well as what issues she thought I should have addressed with the thought that it would help me to frame my next interview. One mother, Carmen, aided enormously in the subsequent interviews' question formulation regarding the boys' negotiation of sexuality. Another said she would have liked to have her child's father included in the interview process. The

participants' input was decidedly and collectively helpful as I moved on to each new interview.

The political context of this country seemed to be just one of many realities for the study participants. I had imagined the bulk of the conversations would centre upon the negotiations of masculinities in terms of post-apartheid South Africa and I thought that discourses of transformation would comprise most of the content. Again, I think this was partially due to my position as a visitor. Apartheid was at the centre of my prior research and investigation into this country. It permeated everything I had ever thought or learned about the nation. I am not trying to say here that the racist regime and its legacy is not pivotal in constructing the subject positions of the study participants, I am rather exposing my relative ignorance regarding my preconceptions of their lived realities. These interviews gave clarity to the obvious for me, the fact that people move within and construct their daily lives in spite of their oppressions as well as because of those same oppressions. I had imagined conversations based upon intellectual and political insights into the apartheid state, much like the conversations I'd had with poilticised South African friends and activists during the 1980s, and much like the stimulating discussions centering race in the UWC lecture rooms. While one participant, Alyson, did say that apartheid "made everyone suspicious of one another", the participants did not discursively tie their sons' growing masculinities or their sons' political and social futures to the legacies of the apartheid state. What was constructed in our conversations was rather more the individual struggles of motherhood. Though this should come as no surprise to me, it did. I had expected the mothers to speak of themselves as constructed by apartheid whereas they more readily responded with the

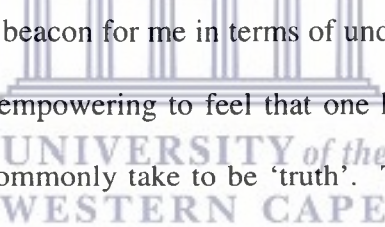notion of themselves as women in a confusing world, who were trying to do their best to raise healthy boys.

Clearly these particular study participants do not separate the concept of 'masculinity' from the notion of 'men'. While their discourses do not entirely discount the postmodern conviction that masculinity is socially constructed, they also convey an enduring essentialism, thereby reminding us that the power of hegemonic gender ideology looms large. If we are to comprehend what it is about gender identity that frames social relations, we must first understand these "practical ideologies" (Gill, 1995: 5). This study interviewed a very small and particular sample, and accordingly the results cannot be extrapolated to be representative of any other but this group. The findings are, however, a reminder to feminist academicians steeped in postmodern theory that, in order to be true to the politically transformative goals of social constructionism and feminism, we must not stray too far from women's own accounts of experience.
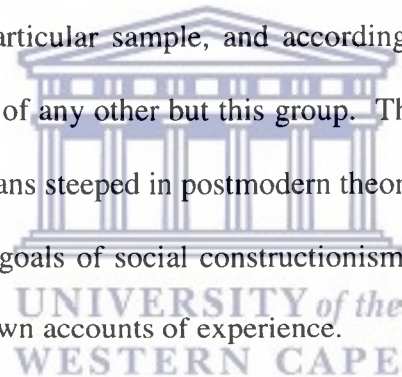
Discourse versus 'Lived Reality'

Most traditional social and political theory has commonly excluded women's perspectives, and it is to this lack that women's and gender studies and feminist research must speak. As Oleson (2000: 216) points out, "...without in any way positing a global, homogenous, unified feminism, qualitative feminist research in its many variants, whether or not self-consciously defined as feminist, centers and makes problematic women's diverse situations as well as the institutions that frame those situations". Postmodern theory, while effective in articulating complex understandings of

subjectivities, must take into account that these subjectivities are experienced as realities, and women's everyday lives are at issue. It is imperative that social construction theory and research be put into action to transform what women experience as the realities of oppression. Oppressive material existence is only 'constructed' according to those who are not living it. It is not fair or just to claim that a woman living in a leaky shack in an informal settlement with no heat, running water, or electricity is 'constructing' herself as poor. To be sure, the meanings given to the woman's life experiences may vary with the interpreter, but feminist academics must ensure that research based within a discursive social constructionist paradigm does not allow the woman to be constructed by others in terms that could worsen her material circumstances.[10]

Social constructionism has been a beacon for me in terms of understanding and analysing the participants' discourse. It is empowering to feel that one has the tools to critically investigate what so many of us commonly take to be 'truth'. The notion that everyone has their own 'truth' both individually and collectively is one that has become ever more evident through the course of this study. My passion here has been in relating those 'truths' back to the academic research surrounding masculinities.

In outlining some academic definitions of gender and masculinity and juxtaposing them with the study participants' experiential definitions, I display here the notion of 'discourse' versus 'lived experience'.

- Connell (1995: 71) describes masculinity as a "place…an assemblage of practices and an effect of those practices…"

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[10] There may be policy implications to research which must be carefully taken into account when describing women's experiences as socially constructed. See Holland and Ramazonoglu (1995: 275).

- Smith (1996: 2) calls masculinity "indefinite"

- Lorber (1999: 417) calls gender a "status...an identity... and a display"

- Berger *et al* (1995: 2) call masculinity "the normative gender"

- Morrell (2001: 8) describes masculinity as "something that can be deployed or used"

While *none* of the above meanings rely upon essentialist theories, by far the greatest pattern of meaning that the study participants generated was based upon notions of what boys *are*. The women I interviewed did not express concern with how masculinity is experienced, or how it is institutionalised. Instead, they construct it as something "real", or as a force that needs to be reckoned with or restrained. Such interpretations need to be recognised and considered within postmodern gender theory (Stanley, 1994; Holland & Ramazanoglu, 1995). Lather (1991: 25) writes that "whatever 'the real' is, it is discursive. Rather than dismissing 'the real', postmodernism foregrounds how discourses shape our experience of 'the real' in its proposal that the way we speak and write reflects the structures of power in our society". The next excerpts are examples of how "real masculinity" feels to the study participants:

Veronica: I think that **strength**... and even the physical strength that men have... is positive. They are positive, good.... yes, that protectiveness of men!

Alyson: Because I can feel that J. is going to need quite some serious containment. I think boy-children do. You know... /hmm/... They strike out...

Natalie: He is **physical**! Ja?... And their bodies... They use their bodies...

Maria: I mean... **he's a boy** ja? I mean he is **rough-and-ready**...

Thandi: They used to have that power! /hmm/... Those days were the days that God gave them more power than women...

Clara: That they are men.../ja/... That they are **men** ...They don't want to listen first of all /hmm/... They don't want to listen.

How then do we utilise social construction theory and research in a way that contributes toward a transformatory goal? Haslanger (2000: 5) writes that "…the task is to develop accounts of gender and race that will be effective tools in the fight against injustice". So, while the mothers may not necessarily perceive gender as socially constructed, we can focus our attention upon their accounts to foreground lived experience when developing gender theories. While postmodern theories of social construction run the risk of being accessible only to a small group of elite academics whose influence on the 'real world' is debatable, qualitative research coupled with the intangibility of subjectivities forces one's thinking processes into a discursive position where concepts such as gender and masculinity *must* be depicted and theorised in as many ways as possible.[11]

Limitations of the Study and Future Research

The fact that the study participants have chosen to place their children in Gaia Waldorf School may frame the discourse in ways which are not readily apparent. The anthroposophist philosophy upon which Waldorf teaching is based springs from the teachings of Rudolph Steiner and contains its own set of gendered assumptions. These constructions are based in early twentieth century, Northern European, essentialist notions of gender. None of the mothers interviewed are anthroposophists, however, but one did indicate that her partner does closely follow Steiner's philosophies.

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[11] Usually, being in the world of academia implies some form of teaching and one must have as many descriptions as one has students if one is to reach them with words that will open their minds. Considering that it is an activist position a lecturer takes in the feminist classroom, one needs to be able to "identify and explain persistent inequalities between females and males, and between people of different 'colors' … [including] how social forces, often under the guise of biological forces, work to perpetuate such inequalities. (Haslanger, 2000: 5). It is also true that feminist social constructionist research can explore the implications of gendered inequalities in a wide range of social arenas; therefore it is does need to be confined to the gender studies classroom.

It would most certainly be enlightening to perform an analysis of boys' own constructions of masculinity. During the period during February and March 2001 when I was interviewing the women in the study, I attempted to do just this. I succeeded in interviewing two boys, one nine years old and one six years old. My sense was that it would be unethical to continue the interviewing with other boys, however, as the interview process clearly made these particular boys uncomfortable. They were not at ease speaking face-to-face with a relative stranger in front of a tape recorder. It would be useful perhaps, to attempt a boys' focus group with the children talking about gender and then, after familiarity with the process was established, perform follow-up interviews. Clearly, their comfort level would be an important guide in devising the appropriate research methodology, yet it would be a critical contribution to the discussion of gendered constructions, to contrast the boys' notions of masculinity with those of their mothers.
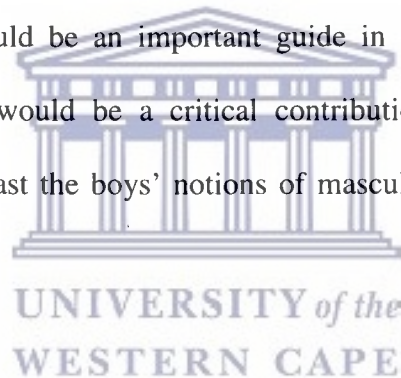
I would very much like to re-visit the research participants with a study designed to discursively investigate the notion of 'men in general'. This concept was never problematised in these interviews and it would have been interesting to explore the women's racialised, sexualised and class-based notions of who exactly these men are.

Further research into fathers' constructions of their sons' masculinities is clearly called for. It would be engaging to interview mothers and fathers separately and perhaps then together to see how their constructions develop separately and through their co-creations. Unfortunately, however, the parameters and time constraints of this study did not allow for this.

The very concepts of mothering and fathering have been problematised for me through this research. Many of the participants spoke of the necessity of male role models and the single mothers often created a discourse of "being both mother and father" to the boys. My interest lies in discovering just what it is that fathers and mothers are constructed to do differently with regard to their parenting. I would like to investigate the distinction between the two and the ways in which parents negotiate the lessons they teach their children. For single mothers, it would be enlightening to learn just what parts of parenting they feel they are missing when they construct themselves as having to be "both mother and father" to their children.

Conclusion

The research process enabled me to glimpse the study participants' constructions of masculinity as applied to their sons and 'men in general'. Though I found a major discrepancy between how the women constructed 'others' and their constructions of their own families, they were all happy to have the opportunity to discuss critically the meaning of masculinity for their sons and it is hoped that the lines of thinking opened in our discussions will continue to bear fruit as they negotiate the very difficult job of raising healthy men.

Finally, though as a feminist researcher I battle with essentialist notions of gender, there are times when I must put aside *my* constructions out of respect for the constructions of others. Through the research process, and as a mother with a child in my daughter's

kindergarten class, I have come to know and regard "Clara" as a friend. While we come from very different worlds, and her views on gender do not always correspond with mine, she has shown me a kindness and a light that will stay with me always. It is with great sadness that I write of the tragedy that has befallen her. Clara's husband was shot and killed in an act of incomprehensible violence on April 22, 2001. Out of my great respect for her I close this work with this quote from the lovely conversation we had just weeks before he died.

Int:	How do you turn them into men? Or make them big…You can't make them bigger… can you… but how do you help them?
Clara:	To be a **good** man? /ja/…
Int:	What do you think is a **good** man to you? What do **you want** them to be?
Clara:	Like… like my husband! Now I'm thinking he is a **good** man… /uhr-huh/…because my husband the way he is… I want our boys to be the same.
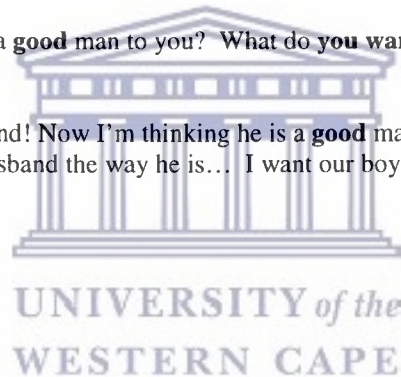
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Appendix A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Researcher: Rosemary Dixon

Participant Name:

Address:

Phone:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. This form outlines the intent of the study and a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

The purposes of this project are:

- to complete the thesis portion of my Mphil degree at the University of the Western Cape
- to gain insight and experience in the topic of motherly construction of sons' masculinity

The methods to be used to collect information for this study are as follows:

I will be interviewing participating mothers who have boys currently enrolled in the Gaia Waldorf School. Through an analysis of their discourse I will attempt to discern trends and issues that they are dealing with in their very difficult job of raising sons. I am asking each mother to think carefully and answer questions regarding their beliefs and ideas surrounding masculinity as it applies to their boys.

You are encouraged to ask any questions at any time about the nature of the study and the methods that I am using. Your suggestions and concerns are important to me; please contact me at any time at the address/phone number found on Gaia's family listing.

I will use the information from this study to write a report about your responses to the questions. This report will be read by you (if you choose), my thesis supervisor(s), an external examiner, and the appropriate UWC faculty charged with granting the Master's degree.

I guarantee that the following conditions will be met:

- Your real name will not be used at any point of information collection, or in the written thesis; instead, you and any other person and place names involved in your case will be given pseudonyms that will be used in all verbal and written records and reports.

- If you grant permission for audio taping, no audio tapes will be used for any purpose other than to do this study, and will not be played for any reason other than to do this study. At your discretion, these tapes will either be destroyed or returned to you.

- Your participation in this research is voluntary; you have the right to withdraw at any point of the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice, and the information collected and records and reports written will be turned over to you.

Do you grant permission to be quoted directly?

Yes _____   No _____

Do you grant permission to be audiotaped?

Yes _____   No _____

I agree to the terms

Respondent _____ Date _____

I agree to the terms:

Researcher _____ Date _____

Appendix B

Interview Questions

- What do you want your boy to be?

- How do you raise a good man?

- Should we raise boys and girls in the same way?

- What are your expectations of your boy?

- What are society's expectations of your boy?

- How much influence do you have over the development of your sons' masculinity?

- How does your cultural background influence your views on raising your son?

- Are there positive qualities to masculinity?

- Are there negative qualities to masculinity?

- What obstacles does your son face to becoming the kind of man you'd like him to be?

- Does masculinity bring with it any sort of power for your son?

Appendix C

Interview Questions

- How do you turn a boy into a man?

- Should we raise boys and girls in the same way?

- What are your expectations of your boy?

- What are society's expectations of your boy?

- How much influence do you have over the development of your sons' masculinity?

- How does your cultural background influence your views regarding your son's masculinity?

- What obstacles does your son face to becoming the kind of man you'd like him to be?

- Does masculinity bring with it any sort of power for your son?

- Do you think boys need male role models? Why or why not?

- How would you describe your sons' awareness of his sexuality?