Boys in "trouble": Contestations, contradictions and conflicting notions of Coloured high school masculinities

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This article focuses of 13 high school boys' experiences of getting into "trouble" in a former Coloured[i] township high school in KwaZulu-Natal Province. This ethnographic study explored the reasons for boys being considered "troublesome"[ii] at school. Data collection included focus groups, semi-structured open-ended individual interviews and non-participant observation. Using the social constructionist perspective of masculinity as an analytical lens, the findings show that these boys' schooling experiences are fraught with anti-schooling, anti-academic and anti-authoritarian attitudes and behaviours. They construct themselves as dominant, unafraid and unwilling to conform to school rules, which brings them into conflict with authorities. While some of the group expressed determination to ameliorate their lives, others dropped out of school prematurely. Teacher attitudes are central to either perpetuating "trouble" or being sensitive to these boys' schooling woes.

Keywords: anti-academic; anti-authoritarian; Coloured; ethnography; high school; masculinities; "trouble"; "troublesome"; working class

Introduction

The study is located within the debates about boys' education (Connell, 1995, 2005; Mills & Keddie, 2007; Mills, Martino & Lingard, 2007), which illustrate that the concern about boys' schooling is a global phenomenon and not confined to the South African context. There is increasing recognition that, while schools do not meet the needs of many girls, some boys are a problem for girls and teachers, as well as for each other (Mills & Keddie, 2007).

The focus on Coloured persons emanates from the argument that the experiences of Coloured boys getting into "trouble" is linked to their constructions of working-class masculinities in a context of social ills (Anderson, 2009). Despite the fact that debates around the history and implications that Coloured identity holds for South African society have generated much controversy, there has been no systematic study of Coloured identity (Adikhari, 2005). While there is burgeoning literature on Black, Indian and White masculinity studies in the country, the paucity of scholarship around Coloured boys amounts to the neglect of their experiences, concerns and difficulties in schools (Mirza, 1999). The lack of scholarship to draw upon for this research illustrates how Coloured boys' experiences remain marginalised and hidden in academic research and writing (Mirza, 1999). The focus is on trouble and while it is mostly trouble in school, the concern is how the lives, more broadly, of many of these boys are "in trouble" and how "trouble" is tied in with problematic masculine behaviours. By drawing from their experiences, the study aims to highlight the everyday concerns, anxieties and struggles these boys encounter and to find key ways to make their schooling better and more sensitive to their plight.

Masculinities: A Social Constructionist Perspective

This paper draws on the premise that masculinities are multiple and therefore socially constructed within the bounds that gender identity is collective rather than individual. In theorising masculinities, I engage with Connell's (1995, 2005) seminal works, which focus on power and multiple masculinities and realities, as well as the ways in which they are hierarchically structured in relations of domination and subordination (Connell, 1995), authority structures and other forms.

The study positions these boys as actively constructing their identities in everyday forms of interaction through talk (Burr, 2003; Foucault, 1979), and the kinds of performances (Butler, 1990) that come to be associated with and give substance to their particular identities. This theory gives credence to the ways in which pre-democracy politics in South Africa was key to the formation and consolidation of South African identities, although Coloured identities are not simply labels imposed by Whites from that era. They are made and re-made by Coloured people themselves in their attempts to give meaning to their everyday lives (Erasmus, 2001).

In trying to highlight the problems that surround these boys, this article asserts that masculinity is central to understanding their variegated attitudes and behaviours of masculinities. The study examines how their "troublesome" behaviour is located within complex and conflicting notions of masculinity, and in so doing, draws attention to contradictory patterns of behaviour. This research broadens current perceptions of masculinity and recognises the range of masculinities represented in schools. By exploring their particular constructions of what it means to be a male in the former Coloured suburb of Wentworth on the outskirts of the city of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) South Africa, this paper provides insight into the lives of this group of Coloured boys. Moreover, the social constructionist perspective argues that people cannot interact with others independently of the social context in which they live. I draw on the literature on masculinity studies, which

argues that notions of power that shape teenage and adolescent boys' experiences are related to racialisation, classification and marginalisation (Connell, 1995; Morrell, 2001).

Literature Review

While the seminal works of Willis (1977) on the earliest and most influential ethnographies have received much criticism, their influence has been lasting. Willis (1977) explored the world of working-class boys in England. He followed their everyday lives as they moved through their last two years of school and on into the workforce. He contends that the behaviour of boys in school settings is related to the stratifications of both schooling and capitalism, and to the manner in which working-class boys deal with the inevitable contradictions in their lives (Willis, 1977). Willis (1977) outlines the ways in which different masculinities were created, regulated and reproduced within the school setting, which is further explored by various authors (Anderson, 2009; Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman, 2004; Mayeza & Bhana, 2020), and indicates how schools are critical sites in the process of gender identity construction.

In the past, particularly in the apartheid era, school life in South Africa included corporal punishment, with authority and discipline closely linked with masculinity (Morrell, 2001). Since the abolition of corporal punishment, some teachers find few alternatives available to discipline learners (Makhasane & Chikoko, 2016). Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) assert that methods of control and domination using tactics of disciplining and punishment, rather than engagement and discussion, only lead to further student rebellion.

Boys' constructions of masculinities often negatively affect their schooling experiences, thereby hindering the potential for improving their attitudes and behaviours (Anderson, 2009). The formation of certain culturally exalted masculinities propels boys to deviate from the norms or code of conduct of the school, which gets them into "trouble" (Anderson, 2009). It is therefore important to understand what it is about them that leads to "troublesome" behaviours, the boys often being their own worst enemy due to traditional norms of masculinity, encapsulated in terms such as being laddish (Mills & Keddie, 2007). Ratele (2016:75) asserts that South African men and boys face challenges such unemployment, poverty, marginalisation and peer pressure, with existing research having "not always provided a more nuanced picture of the complexities of the social construction of masculinity and the often contradictory experiences of boys and men."

The boys in this study are marginalised based on their Coloured identity, which is synonymous with residual, unworthy, bastardisation, drunkenness and violence (Erasmus, 2001). The inequalities of the past and present result in high levels of poverty in this Wentworth community, where boys place little value on academic performance (Anderson, 2009). The desperation for them to get a job results in high drop-out rates, with many boys leaving school prematurely, thereby limiting their chances of securing gainful employment or professional careers (Anderson, 2009).

Research shows that boys do not engage with education nor are they willing to go to school where they experience harsh discipline and high levels of corporal punishment, with teachers and sometimes parents expecting them to fail (Longlands, North & Untherhalter, 2008). Nor will they be encouraged to change their own understandings of and attitudes towards gender in school environments where teachers are covertly or overtly discriminatory and violent towards marginalised groups of children (Longlands et al., 2008). I therefore argue that schools are linked to the discursive and cultural production of competing forms of masculinity, and that boys must continuously negotiate these strenuous environments if they are to complete their schooling.

Contestations of "trouble"

A primary concern in this paper is to highlight ways in which the routine institutional practices of this working-class high school often facilitate rather than prevent boys' routes to getting into "trouble." The focus therefore is how they negotiate school authorities while keeping their masculine identities intact. Boys who do not passively accept the imposition of a strict disciplinary system, and reject it by bucking authority, are constructed as "troublesome", a label they do not necessarily accept (Anderson, 2009). The findings show that these boys' perceptions of "trouble" conflicts with teachers' notions of "trouble." My assumption is that these boys get into "trouble" in the process of negotiating and inhabiting dominant forms of masculinity. The intention is to engage with the multiple ways of understanding "trouble" as it affects and defines these Coloured boys in school, particularly how their behaviours are situated within complex and conflicting notions of masculinities. "Trouble" was not predefined but explored with the boys. For the purpose of this paper, a definition of "trouble" was sufficiently complex and nuanced using a continuum from petty offences to criminally liable misdemeanours. The continuum includes back-chatting and making "a fool" of teachers, refusing to do schoolwork, "bunking" classes and challenging the teacher's authority by swearing and threatening them with violence.

The school context
Merewent High is an under-resourced public co-educational Coloured high school that lacks parental support. The focus of this study is 13 boys aged 14–17 who live in this largely indigent community, where unemployment, poverty, high levels of substance abuse, violence and gang wars are a serious problem. The focus is on "trouble" and while it is mostly "trouble" in school, the concern is how "trouble" is tied in with broader social ills. Their lives are afflicted by poverty and deprivation, violence and getting into trouble with the law (Anderson, 2009). Studies have shown that class and racial status disadvantage Coloured men and boys, resulting in violent men who seek to reclaim a sense of masculinity by dominating women and other men (Salo, 2005; Sauls, 2005).

The study had three research questions to explore:
1) What are these boys' understandings and experiences of getting into "trouble"?
2) How do these boys construct their teachers and other girls and boys in school?
3) How do their constructions of masculinity lead to "troublesome" behaviour?

Methodology
This study used ethnography, as the methods involve a detailed interrogation of "talk, text and interaction" (Pole & Morrison, 2003:18), with the "multiplicity of methods and its triangulation having been described as a routine hallmark of ethnography."

I personally selected 13 key informants using purposive sampling and non-participant observation, with the selection criterion being boys getting into "trouble." During my observation over approximately three months in classrooms, corridors and on the playgrounds, I documented boys who were reprimanded, punished regularly, put out of the class and suspended, and who exhibited aggressive behaviours towards teachers. Due to time constraints, such as school holidays and examinations, I confined my observations to Grades 9 and 10, where many teachers expressed problems with these boys.

I conducted hour-long semi-structured open-ended individual interviews and focus groups, with prompting that enabled participants to elaborate.

Data Analysis
The audio recordings of the interviews and focus groups were transcribed into textual data and interpreted using thematic analysis. Data analysis began as soon as data collection started, taking the form of a preliminary analysis, which enabled questions to be redesigned if and where necessary. I categorised the selected material into preliminary themes, including data documented from observations, and produced an analysis of how they interweaved. Verbatim transcriptions facilitated a focus on overlaps and differences. The use of language usage was crucial, requiring me to interrogate what and how things were said and to identify contradictions, inconsistencies, hesitations and non-verbal gestures.

In order to understand the why and how of what the boys said, their political, historical and social contexts were important for providing a nuanced interpretation.

In attempting to verify the data by getting the boys to read the findings and to confirm that I had represented their responses accurately, I went back to them to read the transcripts. However, on the days that I went to the school, some were suspended or absent and others had dropped out. Consequently, only three boys read their transcripts and verified the data.

Ethical Considerations
I obtained informed consent from the KZN Department of Education, the Research Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the school principal, participants' parents and participants. I assured the participants of confidentiality and anonymity, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. A data recorder was used (with the participants' permission) to capture the verbatim responses, thereby strengthening the trustworthiness and validity of the findings.

Findings and Discussion
The data were analysed thematically with the following themes emerging:
1) Disciplinary interventions and their (in)effectiveness
2) Teacher biases: targeting and labelling "troublesome" boys
3) Fantasising about "getting even" with teachers
4) Teacher masculinities: moffie, stupid or harsh?
5) Alternative discourses around attitudes to school: boys and academic success
6) Boys and teachers: Nurturing, caring and respectful relationships

This article demonstrates how the boys inhabit masculinities that are evidence of an anti-authority school culture and a poor work ethic, with consequences such as suspension and expulsion, and high dropout rates. While some boys reproduce a version of masculinity reflective of the broader community of Wentworth, some express the desire to be academically successful in school to improve their life chances. As with Willis's (1977) boys, who did not aspire to obtaining middle-class employment, many of the boys in this study wanted to obtain working-class employment to earn an income. Some were content to drop out of school to become itinerant construction workers, particularly welders and other high paying jobs, in their attempts to improve their situations of indigence. Construction work is a sought-after vocation

commonly associated with Coloured males in South Africa (Anderson, 2009).

Many of the boys in the study expressed their disillusionment and lack of motivation due to their experiences with authority and school life in general. According to some, *"School does not provide any motivation to keep me interested in life at school."*

The school is an arena of struggle for dominance between the teachers and the boys, who strive for hegemony, with some boys contending that they are victimised, targeted and pigeonholed as troublemakers. Exaggerated rituals, hierarchies and authority structures in the school often lead to emasculation, loss of face and self-esteem, which in turn prompt exaggerated responses from the boys to regain their self-esteem and "save" face. The attempts by these boys to reclaim power over their lives compels them to present themselves in ways that are intended to intimidate teachers, their perceived ability to instil fear becoming a source of power.

Despite the hegemony of toxic forms of masculinities, there are a few boys, given the opportunity, who strive for academic success and more harmonious relationships with their teachers. This article highlights the contradictions in the totalising assumption around all "troublesome" boys as academic failures and essentially anti-authoritarian by demonstrating that while some show resistance to particular teachers, there are those who cultivate more cooperative and amicable relationships with other instructors (Anderson, 2009). My observations reveal no resolve on the part of some teachers to establish the motivation behind the "troublesome" behaviours. As stated by Martino and Meyenn (2001:174), "[t]here is an imperative to control boys' misbehaviours as opposed to understanding the motivation behind such behaviours of masculinity in the classroom."

Disciplinary Interventions and Their (In) Effectiveness
The problem of learner indiscipline has been characterised as serious and pervasive, thereby negatively affecting student learning (Leigh, Chenhall & Saunders, 2009; Tozer, 2010), with school violence most likely reflecting the problems experienced by society at large (Mncube & Harber, 2013). Some authors contend that there are learners who would not benefit from school without the use of corporal punishment, which is effective (Makhasane & Chikoko, 2016). During a focus group session, Neville made a comment about a female teacher: *"She's telling us to kneel in the quad. She's getting stupid"* (all laugh).

Neville's tone is defiant and challenging, illustrating the futility of teachers' use of such disciplinary methods, as indicated in his remark: *"Where we gonna kneel in the quad?"* "Where"

meaning that it will not happen, which shows a clear indication of resistance. Kneeling in the quad, a panopticonic space in the school, is a humiliating experience, and is certainly not the image he wants to project to the other learners. Public refusal to comply with the teacher's demand to kneel is an attempt to save face and bolster his reputation.

Through various disciplinary intervention strategies, rules, conventions, practices and rituals, the school defines socially acceptable behaviour, and in so doing, imposes what Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) refer to as normalising regimes. This school's disciplinary strategies are predominantly suspension for a maximum of five days and detention, which is largely ineffective. Suspended learners can return only when accompanied by parents, with the contextual constraints, specifically economic lack and employment commitments, limiting their ability to assist in their sons' schooling woes:

> Mark: *My mother's not coming to school. She says she can't take off work all the time, 'cos she won't get paid.*

Moreover, suspending boys has the propensity to intensify the problem, because when out of school, they become idle and often get into other kinds of trouble. Both the participants and the teachers concede that the disciplinary strategies used in this school have adverse effects and are ineffective. Weaver-Hightower (2008) asserts that parents of working-class boys are at the forefront of making their issues more public through formal complaints, unlike over-protective middle-class parents who have the time, knowledge and resources to advocate on behalf of their sons. In response to the question of whether suspension changes his behaviour, John said: *"No Miss, it don't help you. No. Just like normal we sit at home Miss, with friends and all that there."*

Like most of the other participants, John views suspension as a futile disciplinary strategy, and instead of being a corrective measure, it becomes a cohesive factor that brings boys with behavioural problems together outside the school environment. The term "we" is what Cameron (2001:177) refers to as a discourse of "collectivism"; that is, the self is defined in relation to others within a larger collectivity, as opposed to individualism. The term "we" emphasises the collective response of the boys to suspension, and their collective shared experiences and solidarity with one another in their exclusion from school. Some of these boys deliberately get into trouble if their friends are suspended so that they can "hang out" together. In this case, suspension is not viewed as a disciplinary measure aimed at improving behaviour, but is rather seen as a "legitimate" reason for being absent from school.

> John: *Miss, it's like you know with your friends they like say let's do something. Then we all do it and then we get into trouble.*

These boys appear to be almost immune to whatever disciplinary measures are implemented, with the dominant construction of hegemonic masculinity bestowing high status on those who challenge teacher authority. When asked what happens when they are put out of the classroom, Neville explains:

> Interviewer: *So what do you do during this period?*
> Neville: *I just walk around.*
> Interviewer: *Don't the teachers see you?*
> Neville: *They see me. I make like I am sent and I put my bag in the bin over there.*

Neville's attempt to hide from other teachers that he has been put out of class indicates that this scenario is not one of an unequivocal display of blatant anti-authoritarian masculine performance, where visible resistance is a currency that purchases great esteem among his peers. In the absence of peer support, the propensity for blatant insolence diminishes, thereby highlighting the contradictions in his behaviour.

Teacher Biases: Targeting and Labelling "Troublesome" Boys

The boys expressed how they were affected by being publicly derided and belittled by their teachers. While remaining mindful of the fact that these boys do present problems for teachers, it is evident that their behaviour is exacerbated by the responses they receive, which bolster their opposition and intensify their reactions.

> Dane: *No. The teachers pick on us. Like the other day when the class was making a noise, the teacher made us stand and the rest of the class sit.*
> Interviewer: *Who's us?*
> Dane: *The naughty boys. Like also when Trevor's parents were called in for something he did. We weren't even involved yet we were brought into this thing. We weren't even at school but our names were mentioned. They always bring up old things.*

The distinction emphasised in "us" and "the rest of the class" has the effect of polarising bad boy groupings, thereby cementing their association with each other. Boys voice their dissatisfaction with the teachers who "always bring up old things", which has the effect of reinforcing the "troublesome" label. While many boys acknowledge that they are often "troublesome", they also emphasise that there are occasions when they are innocent of misdemeanours. Jason expressed his anger at a Coloured teacher who pronounced that Coloured boys are "*useless*" and will "*not amount to anything.*" This practice goes some way towards reifying the totalising and negative stereotypical perception of Coloureds. School authority figures, in their practice of grouping by association, together with their continuous reference to the boys' past transgressions, appear to antagonise them, which intensifies the existing problematic learner–educator relationships. These boys state that some teachers' preferential treatment is blatant, which they resent.

> David: *They don't like us. They only like the good children. When we wanna say something they* [teachers] *say hey sshh ... .*

The "troublesome boys" grouping is further emphasised in the good/bad children binary by being pigeonholed and making them feel like outsiders. David expresses how they are silenced in their attempts to speak.

> David: *Miss, if I'm naughty in the class, Miss, and then I'm in trouble for something I never do, let's just say ... alright, and they think it's me and I know I never take it Miss, they'll take me to the office, they'll never give me a chance to talk or something, they'll just say, ja it was you, they'll always say it's you ... that's why you always guilty.*

David's resistance seems to be a call to be heard and taken seriously, and being accused of something that he did not do, and not being granted the right to defend himself incurs his enmity. Moreover, some teachers' constant reference to boys' "troublesome" behaviours is a source of annoyance for them.

> Evan: *Some of them like maybe sometimes you ask ... maybe you not naughty or whatever you just ask nice, decent question you know in an appropriate manner whatever, they give you the answer in a funny manner, you know hardegat or whatever. Or they won't talk to you, they just keep quiet, and make as if they never heard you or whatever. They still keep things from the past, ja. Most of the teachers, in fact, that's the way they are.*

The teachers' perceived unfair treatment of these boys extends to the academic arena, which could have serious implications for their exclusion from academic activities. Teachers' cynicism, disregard for certain students or giving others preferential treatment angers these boys, and possibly has an impact on their future participation in lessons. The negative interaction between the teachers and the "troublesome" boys appears to negate the efforts made by the boys to redeem themselves.

> Evan: *Oh ja well of course! Because like, how can I say? Like let me just use a small stupid example right. Maybe like, maybe I'm the naughty boy in the class or whatever, maybe assessment is due today, and now I go and approach the teacher and ask the teacher, ay miss ay, can you give me a little more time ay. They tell you, no it's the deadline, either you give it to me today or you ay don't give it in at all. But if ... whereas with them* [the good boys]*, they give them one more day 'cos they know the work is gonna come out good or whatever, ay they always good, they don't give no problems whatever, let me give you more time. So that's the way they're treated.*

The assumption that all "troublesome" boys are incapable of adopting a positive work ethic is challenged.

> Interviewer: *So do you think this is unfair?*
> Evan: *That is quite unfair, I mean, if the deadline is on that day everybody should give it on that day whether you are more intelligent than this one or whoever's naughty, it should be there. The deadline's the deadline. If you giving him time then*

you should give me time too. He's not any different from me. Only thing is aright is maybe his ways and stuff. But you can't give the one and not give the others because of his ways or whatever. You can't treat us differently.

The powerlessness of some boys versus knowledge of their rights is identified as a source of great frustration and anger, which results in their often being prompted to reciprocate in ways that may be resentful.

Evan: *No! Sometimes it's a rude way, like however he responds to me I respond the same way to him. If he's rude to me I'll be rude to him. But then it's now you answering the teacher and then they log you, but then the people, they don't wanna hear ay he said this to you or whatever you know what I'm saying. They don't wanna hear your stories. The teacher's always right.*

The sarcasm embedded in his statement, "*The teacher's always right*", implies that teachers presume that they are infallible.

Byron: *Before Miss ay any small thing, he used to get me suspended for. Now I once told him ay sir, look here, I'm tryna change, I'm no more tryna be naughty and all that therewa, I wanna do my work, and now you suspending me, I'm missing out on a whole lot of work, then when it comes to end of the term I don't have the work to study with, cos almost every week I'm getting suspended for one small petty thing. Once I got suspended the whole class was talking. I was also talking, and they only suspended me. She was telling me to keep quiet all the time. So I kept quiet then the whole class was making a noise so I carried on talking and I got suspended.*

The power teachers have is further demonstrated when they appropriate their dominant positions by targeting boys whom they deem "troublesome", with Warren expressing dissatisfaction that boys labelled as such struggle to redeem themselves. According to the participant, unfair teacher attitudes and practices of exclusion hinder any will on their part to ameliorate their behaviour. The boys see their teachers as having power over them, by using the threat of detention and suspension. The (in)effectiveness of these strategies is questionable, as their response to teacher power, authority and discipline is often insolence and resistance.

Fantasising about "Getting Even" with Teachers

The power derived from these boys' visible resistance to teacher authority earns rewards via acknowledgement from other learners. Exclusion from classroom activities has the effect of separating the "bad boys" from the others in the classroom and increases their collective antagonism towards the teacher.

Brendon: *She starts vloeking us ay sit down, and shouting at us sit down and don't come to me. We never do nothing, we sat down and kept quiet. Now she's explaining the work to everyone, now they're*

doing the work and we got no work to do. We never said nothing so we were waiting for her to ask us, where's the work. We gonna vloek her.
Interviewer: *Did you swear at her?*
Brendon: *No. Still gonna when she asks us 'where's the work?'* (All the boys laugh loudly).

These boys say that they are aware of how teachers are always suspicious of them and trying to set them up for failure. In retaliation, they construct a form of hegemonic masculinity that manifests as anti-authoritarian and a rebellion against the teachers. Wentworth is notorious for numerous gun fatalities among young men due to drug wars, with in excess of six gun-related deaths of young men in 2018. One boy fantasises about shooting the principal and teachers while the others display excitement at the enactment of how the "fantasy" is described as a way of getting back at authority. Despite stating that he brought the gun to school just for fun, the actual danger of the situation, coupled with the nature of the boys' fantasy is disconcerting. Embedded in the enactment demonstration is a deeper desire in "*You tell him* [the principal] *hey, sit*"; this scenario highlighting Evan's desire to wield power over those in authority.

Interviewer: *So why did you bring it to school?*
David: *For the fun of bringing it.*
Interviewer: *For fun?*
David: *Miss, I wanted to shoot Mr B* [the principal] *in his ear* (all laugh aloud).
Evan: (Excitedly) *Maybe the teacher tries to lift you or something and something goes wrong, you say chwaa* (sound of a gun). *You tell him, hey, sit! You give him. Ayyy ... bra!*

Through fantasy, coupled with humour and a desire to "get even", Evan enacts his agency by subverting the power relationship between himself and authority figures using gun power. The demonstrative nature of this enactment illustrates his latent propensity for violence, together with the collective exhibition for the benefit of his peers in the group interview. Violence driven by extreme contempt for teachers, even if merely fantasised, is of concern. However, when asked the same question during a one-on-one interview, he said that he does not own a gun, which highlights the performative nature of masculinity and the evident contradictions simply to gain status among his peers.

Teacher Masculinities: "Moffie" or "Harsh"?

The performative nature of these boys' masculinity is contingent on their perceptions and experiences of different teachers. Some teachers are constructed as "soft" or pushovers against whom they can construct their masculine identities. Neville commented on a Coloured male teacher:

Neville: *Mr A is a moffie. He's a moffie. He's not a man.*
Interviewer: *Why do you say that?*

Neville: *Just the way he acts. And he can only hit the other children in the class. He don't hit me, Denzil and Jovay.*
Interviewer: *Why?*
Neville: *'Cos he's scared.*
Interviewer: *Scared of what?*
Neville: *He always thinks that we will hit him back if he hits us.*

Male teachers who exhibit effeminate tendencies become victims of homophobia, as indicated by the derogatory term "moffie" being used to describe some male teachers. Neville contrasts "moffies" with teachers who are "real" men.

Kerwin: *Nobody would do that in Mr G's class. Mr Green will kill you.*

This has strong resonance with Mills (2001), who states that particular forms of masculinity acquire hegemonic status only in certain situations, with the subject position these boys inhabit depending on the teacher. Moreover, the paradox in Kerwin's description of Mr G as being "a cool man", yet emphatically alluding to violence, and more specifically that he "will kill you", demonstrates this teacher's violent disposition and reputation, which compels them to conduct themselves appropriately. The ubiquitous threat of violence by the teacher is sufficient to guarantee compliance, which reflects a school environment that normalises violence as an accepted means to resolve conflict and ensure cooperation.

Neville: *I go to his class and I do my work in his class.*
Interviewer: *Why is it that you do Mr G's work?*
Neville: *Because he is gonna hit me of course.*
Interviewer: *Are you scared of him?*
Neville: *Yes. He hit me before that's why I'm scared of him.*

Neville's fear of this teacher is based on a palpable threat of violence to which he has previously been subjected. In this context, violence is a familiar and everyday phenomenon and often guarantees cooperation from boys.

Interviewer: *Haven't the other teachers also hit you?*
Neville: *No. They'll never hit me. I walk out the classroom. The last time I took Mr C's stick and threw it over the balcony. He never hit me. He left a mark over herewa on Denzil.*

Accepting physical punishment from one teacher and rejecting it from another is demonstrative of the ways in which "troublesome" behaviour is located within conflicting notions of masculinity. Boys occupying in one instance the subject position of a victim and in the next the position of an aggressor demonstrates the immutable and fluid nature of power.

Alternative Discourses Around Attitudes to School: Boys and Academic Success

Some boys also provided a strongly contrasting, positive orientation to academic work, as they resist and conform to the pressure of being boys in this school. The following individual interview provides an example of John's resistance to the power of his friends, who try to influence his positive orientation to his schoolwork. He acknowledges the benefits of education and recognises that it holds the key to economic and social upward mobility.

Evan: *No Miss, I came to school Miss to get a education so in the future I know not just stand in the corners, I'm enjoying my schooling while at the same time I'm doing my work, I'm not just with the friends, I'm doing my work.*

Evan expresses a demeanour that is compatible with gaining an educational qualification, and despite being a recipient of an education system that is failing him, shows a desire and a sense of agency in his attempt to break the cycle of deprivation, lack and poverty. Although Evan is aware of the benefits of having an education, he acknowledges the ubiquitous nature of peer influence and the compulsion of succumbing to it. He attempts to resist the "familiar" trajectory of many Wentworth Coloured males who are afflicted by the unemployment, poverty and boredom that is linked to early school drop-out and the subsequent lack of job opportunities. Evan is emphatic in his statement that he is "*doing* [his] *work*" and in this way exemplifies an alternate masculinity in negotiating this difficult context.

Evan: *Ja. 'cos my marks and stuff like that. Maybe if I'm in another class I'll concentrate more whatever if we separated. Ja, because some of them are a big influence on me whatever.*
Interviewer: *Are you happy to be with your friends in class?*
Evan: *Ja. I'm kind of, ja. Well not happy 'cos like there's a lot of my friends and stuff that's why I am not too happy, but I'm happy in a way too 'cos we joke and laugh so. But when it comes to the work it becomes a bit of a problem … My naughtiness aright, my jokes, ja my … past … ja my anger and stuff like that.*

Evan appears conflicted by being in the same class as his friends, who provide fun but are also the reason for his poor performance and obstruct his academic progress. Frosh et al. (2004) describe this phenomenon as part of the way in which boys are policed by other boys, including the policing of classroom practices. This highlights the multiple subjective positions that he occupies, namely, troublesome and anti-authoritarian versus hardworking and achieving academically. The alternative positions being negotiated in relation to school life are signs that some adolescent boys in school can provide positive examples of masculinities in a community that places little emphasis on academic excellence and commitment to school.

Interviewer: *Do you think being a hard worker at school and doing academic work is associated with girls?*
Evan: *No. 'Cos at the end of the day you not here for people. You are here for what you wanna*

> *become in life and stuff. You here for your dreams. To make something out of your life.*

In this scenario, Evan rejects the link between academic success and femininity, and sees in education what Simpson, McFadden and Munns (2001:156) refer to as "a gateway to opportunity rather than a pathway to further oppression." This resonates with John's assertion that:

> *You get those girls that did three years in eight. Ja. There's girls in my class that failed last year. They just as lazy as us. There's no difference. School work's different. At home a girl can clean a house a boy can't clean a house. But in school we all the same.*

John is emphatic that the diligent girl/lazy boy dichotomy is not a true reflection of what happens in this school, but contradictorily positions girls as being essentially different from boys in that they have a special ability to do housework.

Boys and Teachers: Nurturing, Caring and Respectful Relationships

Mutually respectful relationships do exist between the boys and some of their teachers, with those who take a personal interest in the learners' general well-being both in and out of school evoking more respectful and cooperative relationships. This has resonance with Morrell and Makhaye's (2007) work with black African boys. These authors assert that working with and not blaming young men facilitates more respectful relationships between them and adults. I attended group support sessions named Teenagers Against Drugs and Alcohol (TADA) for learners that were hosted by a male teacher (Mr S) who gives up his breaks and offers his classroom as a venue. This initiative boasts a number of boys who were rehabilitated by offering assistance and support to those struggling with addictions. Boys talk of another teacher Mr B:

> Interviewer: *Why do you think you behave in his [Mr B's] class?*
> Byron: *Miss 'cos he don't see the naughty side of me, he tells me I'm a good boy and all that therewa Miss, but before I used to be naughty in his class Miss. He never used to like try and hit me or anything like that. He talks or something, now he's cool with me Miss, but I behave in his class now, I do my work.*

Of the 13 boys, only three have fathers living with them, with some viewing Mr B as a fatherly figure due to his ability to treat the boys in a respectful, caring way and because he counsels them. Mr B's popularity and ability to get cooperation from the boys derives not from a dominant masculinist demeanour, but rather from a more caring, non-aggressive fatherly image, one that evidently earns cooperation and respect from many boys. The boys expressed a sense of loss that Mr B had left the school. Support from teachers (even females), as opposed to disdain, has the effect of positively modifying their behaviour.

> John: *Ms M cos know Miss, sitting minding your own business and she'll tell the class right keep quiet, no long stories, get out, no screaming, swearing Miss, those they not making noise, and the children will see ay no, the lady here she don't treat us badly and all that there, she's alright, we just sit down and do our work.*

Their investment in the discourse of respect demonstrates their desire to be respected. John's perception of the gender stereotype is reinforced in the "ladylike" behaviour he ascribes to the female teacher who does not scream and swear at them.

Interacting with teachers on a more personal level shows care and concern that enhances harmonious relationships in the classroom, and suggests that common interests between the boys and their teachers can translate into amenable relationships. The findings also illustrate the positive impact that sport, particularly soccer, has on the relationships between them and some teachers, as it offers a cohesive ingredient to the formation of more respectful relationships.

> Evan: *I have like a good relationship with Mr G, even though he hits us like men. When we at soccer we talk on another level. We don't only see him like one way. I also talk about other things to him. We get to know teachers in another way and those teachers like who go with us on tour or something we have a better relationship with.*

Despite Mr G's firm disposition with the boys during class, soccer provides a safe space to develop good relationships, and provides an opportunity to address issues that they may not have an opportunity to do with another adult male. This indicates that male teachers can be instrumental in nurturing alternative masculine traits that encourage boys to talk about their lives. Soccer is constructed as a key unifying factor, which has the propensity to develop respectful and amicable relationships between some boys and their teachers. It is also an alternative subculture in Wentworth (Chari, 2005) for boys who seek a sense of belonging.

Sport is a positive and cohesive factor that has the potential to create and promote good relationships, not only between these boys and their male teachers, but also with female teachers. Evan's encounter with a female teacher who nursed his injuries in a soccer match draws attention to the "motherly" role that forged a more respectful and closer relationship between them.

Conclusion

I have argued that these Coloured boys' understandings and experiences of getting into "trouble" are intertwined with their constructions of working-class masculinities in a context of social ills, economic deprivation and labelling by teachers. Their masculine identities are fluid and conflicting, with little attention to academic

achievement and schooling. Their subject positions around dominance and subordination are negotiated in relation to certain teachers. They take up alternative masculine behaviours that manifest in mutually respectful relationships with some teachers while "troublesome" with others. When teachers interact with these boys on a more personal level, the potential for more amicable and harmonious classroom relationships becomes possible.

Mills and Keddie (2007) suggest the use of pedagogies directed toward the specifics of boys' education that can also improve the experiences of girls, boys and teachers. The lack of adequate teacher training to enable them cope with the diverse needs of children, and to understand that the way they engage with the learners is as important as what they teach in academically challenged communities, is likely to affect not only "troublesome" boys, but all learners. This research posits that if the "troublesome" behaviours of boys are to undergo substantial modification, then their constructions of masculinity ought to be challenged. This research only touches on this phenomenon and therefore requires more research in schools and the broader context of Coloured identity in KZN that will shed light on ways to work with boys and men to destabilise and dismantle the problematic forms of masculinities they inhabit. Future research should provide opportunities for mixed groups of boys and teachers to talk about their attitudes, including boys' pessimistic attitudes towards schooling, which can provide spaces for boys and teachers to reflect and work on forging amicable relationships.

Acknowledgements

Notes
i. Coloured: A racial categorisation in South Africa used to refer to people of mixed descent. "Coloured" is constructed as a residual, supplementary identity, "in-between" whiteness and blackness and interpellated in relation to registers of respectability and (sexualised) shame (Erasmus, 2001).
ii. I enclose the label "trouble" due to the contested nature of the word "trouble" and "troublesome."
iii. Glossary of slang: *vloeking – swearing; dizzy – stupid; tryna – trying to; therewa – there; herewa – here; gonna – going to; wanna – want to; joyila – interfering; hardegat – hard-headed/argumentative; waaing – happening/going on; bunking – staying away.*
iv. Published under a Creative Commons Attribution Licence.
v. DATES: Received: 31 August 2018; Revised: 12 December 2019; Accepted: 28 January 2020; Published: 31 December 2020.

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