# NAVIGATING MASCULINITIES: EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ADOLESCENT ALBERTAN BOYS

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NAVIGATING MASCULINITIES; EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ADOLESCENT ALBERTAN BOYS

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## DEDICATION

Sweet Mac, thank you for putting up with me during these long days, weeks, months, and years.

## ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study investigates lived experiences of masculinity among a group of adolescent Albertan boys. The study's aim is to better understand participants' perspectives, improve the researcher's teaching practices, and share implications with other educators. Seven participants, from an urban center in Alberta, were recruited and interviewed. Three themes were identified: The Expectations Placed on Boys, The Challenges of Being a Boy, and The Normalization of Negative Boy Behaviour. Expectations placed on boys explored how participants felt required to follow societal expectations of masculinity. Challenges of being a boy were described as difficult compared to those faced by girls due to having little autonomy based on societal expectations. Normalization of negative boy behaviour highlighted how participants were accustomed to negative behaviour from other males and accepted this behaviour as typical. This study provides an examination of these themes, identifies potential implications for educators, and poses questions for further research.



*Keywords*: hegemonic masculinity, adolescent boys, Alberta, education

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Accepted gender norms are created and perpetuated by society and impact how all people interact with one another and the world around them. While a person's sex is biological and based on their anatomy, gender is made up of the socially accepted norms that have been ascribed to "males" and "females" (Connell, 1994; Connell 1995/2005). Males and females learn about how to enact their gender from the world around them and navigate themselves according to the societal rules and expectations they have learned (Butler, 1990/1999; Connell, 1995/2005; Kimmel, 1994b). Gender, as a social construct, is developed and executed by individuals in society, and is understood in specific contexts. As institutions within their broader communities, schools act to reinscribe gender stereotypes and they are locations in which these norms are consistently enacted and enforced (Gutek, 2014, p. 8-9). In attempting to "fit in" with societal standards and expectations, "gender becomes something you *do* rather than something you *are*. It is a verb more than a noun, a 'doing' instead of a 'being', even if this doing is regulated by sometimes highly restrictive gender norms and sanctions" (Carlson, 2017, p. 344). Children start recognizing and understanding social norms from a young age and begin to view and organize themselves around gender and what they understand as "correct" gendered behaviour (Bosacki, 2014; Bosacki et al., 2012; DeLay et al., 2018; Goble et al., 2012; Kagesten et al., 2016; Martin & Dinella, 2012; Martin & Ruble, 2004). As students develop their unique identities as people in the world, how gender is enacted in schools is an essential part of this.

Through navigating these norms, a hierarchy is created in which individuals are consistently policing others in order to maintain their status (Connell, 1995/2005; Kimmel, 1994b; Kimmel, 2009). This concept is hegemonic masculinity, which was first conceived of by R.W. Connell in the 1980s (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and describes the way in which the

dominant masculinity acts to maintain its supremacy while others remain inferior. The masculinity considered to be most dominant within a hegemonic structure varies across social, historical, and cultural lines. The theory of hegemony itself was developed by Antonio Gramsci, who elaborated on Marxist ideas to identify that ruling ideas are created by the dominant class and consented to by the majority (Gramsci et al., 1971; Bates, 1975). When speaking specifically of hegemonic masculinity, the ruling class refers to those males who hold the most power and who best execute what it means to be "male". It needs to be stated that this ideal masculinity is unattainable for the vast majority of individuals who identify as male, as it strives for a level of perfection and specificity which cannot be reached because every male is different and possesses a unique masculinity (Connell, 1995/2005). In hegemonic masculinity, the dominant masculinity positions itself at the top of a socially constructed hierarchy in which males regulate other males and females in order to keep them subordinate. It must be noted that there are multiple masculinities in existence (as many as there are males), but the dominant masculinity in a particular context is what these other masculinities are measured against (Connell, 1995/2005; Coston & Kimmel, 2012; Burns & Kehler, 2014; Rhyms, 2012). It is assumed that gender relations, and therefore hegemonic masculinity, are relational, historical, and cultural, thus subject to change (Messerschmidt, 2019). Therefore, the type of man who represents the dominant masculinity within a hegemonic masculinity structure is subject to change depending on time, culture, community, and other societal factors. The masculinity which is considered dominant in a hegemonic power structure need not be the most common form of masculinity in a particular setting, what is important is how the concept acts to legitimize unequal gender relations by valuing the dominant masculinity above others (Messerschmidt, 2019).

In studying hegemonic masculinity and its influence within education, several researchers have discovered its impacts on schools, teachers, and students. These impacts include such things as educators altering teaching and disciplining behaviours according to students' gender, the effort put forth by students in various school subjects, the gendering of classes, students feeling intimidated to participate in physical education classes and sports-based activities, being uncomfortable in settings such as change rooms and washrooms, fear around displaying gender deviant behaviour, and even extreme cases of violence (Bennett, 2016; Borganovi, 2016; Burns & Kehler, 2014; Carlson, 2017; Claussen, 2017; Kehler, 2010; Moreau & Brownhill, 2017; Taylor et al., 2014; Watson, 2017). As students develop their unique identities as people in the world, how gender is enacted in schools is an essential part of this.

**Research Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to better understand Alberta adolescent boys' perspectives and experiences of hegemonic masculinity in their schools.

**Research Questions**

1. How do adolescent Albertan boys who resist the norms of hegemonic masculinity perceive it in their school community?
    a. In what ways have they experienced hegemonic masculinity being reinscribed and reinforced?
    b. How do they describe their experiences of resisting the rules of hegemonic masculinity?
    c. In what ways do they describe repercussions for resisting the rules of hegemonic masculinity?

## Significance of Research

Through this study, I am seeking to better understand how some boys perceive and experience hegemonic masculinity in school. I am an assistant principal at a K-9 school in Calgary, Alberta and want to explore how some adolescent Albertan boys who resist the norms of hegemonic masculinity perceive it in their school community. In undertaking this research, I am intending to improve my own practice and to better understand and support students who do not follow gender rules.

Phenomenological research will be conducted (Leavy, 2017; Merriam, 2016), which will allow for a deep understanding of the participants' own lived experiences, interpretations, and perceptions. Understanding boy's lived realities allows for a thorough knowledge of the experiences of adolescent boys living in Alberta, Canada. Individual students' voices can provide insights into positive and negative aspects of their own experiences and will help support the researcher's practice and knowledge.

In hearing students' own words regarding hegemonic masculinity, I will better understand participants' perspectives on how gender is experienced in their unique school community as well as in their own lives. There has been significant research done in the area of adolescent boys' experiences of hegemonic masculinity at school (Bennett, 2016; Burns & Kehler, 2014; Collier, 2015; Kehler, 2010; Ringrose & Renold, 2010; Skelton & Francis, 2011; Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011; Watson, 2017), and it is currently a prominent cultural issue in Western society. In a post-#MeToo era, men who have used their power and privilege to abuse others and maintain their control are being publicly accused of misconduct in large numbers (Carlson et al., 2018; Corey, 2017). The media landscape is changing in this era and the messaging youth are seeing is vastly different than it was, even in the recent past (Anderson,

2013; Bennet, 2017; Bragg et al., 2018; Burrell, 2018; Nussbaum, 2019; Ruiz, 2018; Zalis, 2019). Indeed, in 2018 the American Psychological Association published the first-ever guidelines for psychologists working with men and boys, revealing the changing nature of our understanding of masculinity and the necessity of new protocols for professionals (American Psychological Association, 2018; Pappas, 2019). The future of the #MeToo movement, the understanding of male/female relationships, and how masculinity will be defined moving forward is presently being constructed. Boys' experiences of hegemonic masculinity could be different than they were years or even months ago due to the rapidly changing climate in our society regarding gender, power, and privilege (Anderson, 2013; Bennett, 2017; Bragg et al., 2018; Burrell, 2018; Godwin, 2018). Indeed, reports of discrimination against some boys and a lack of support for schools in supporting some students in Alberta and Canadian schools are not diminishing (Callaghan, 2018; Canadian Cultural Mosaic Foundation, 2019; Greenham, 2019; Imrie, 2019; Murphy, 2019). Alberta has a distinct culture which possesses a history of both fiscally and socially conservative understandings and beliefs (Bench, 2021; Fletcher, 2018; Gerson, 2019; Levinson-King, 2019, The Canada Guide, 2021). These conservative views can sometimes be at odds with ever changing understandings and acceptance made in the larger Western society around gender roles and expectations, sexual orientation, and the power and privilege heteronormative, cisgender, White males possess (Fletcher, 2019; Gerson, 2019; Levinson-King, 2019, Sharpe, 2020). In learning and understanding more about the views of these Albertan boys, the researcher will gain insight into the lived experiences of these boys in historically conservative communities. This study will provide me with information helpful in ensuring that I am an educator and administrator who can better support these students. Further, I will be able to communicate the information learned with other educators and staff working in

schools in order to do what is possible to create safe spaces in school communities for students who do not follow the rules of hegemonic masculinity. Additionally, this research will provide insight into how adolescent boys in Alberta navigate masculinity and gender norms in their communities, which is an area that would benefit from further research.

**Definition of Terms**

Throughout this study, I will be using terminology which it will be helpful to clarify for the reader. *Hegemony* refers to the ways in which the ruling class maintains its power over others by legitimizing ideas and norms (Bates, 1975; Gramsci et al., 1971). *Hegemonic masculinity* refers to the theory which proposes that self-identifying males police other's behaviour in order to maintain their power within a hierarchy (Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, Messerschmidt, 2019; Renold, 2001). *Dominant masculinity* is used to refer to the ideal type of masculinity which is most highly valued within a hegemonic masculinity power structure (Connell, 2005, Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2019). *Males*, *men*, and *boys* are all used to identify individuals who self-identify as "male", while *females*, *women*, and *girls* are used to identify individuals who self-identify as "female"; these are based on gender concept and gender identity (American Psychological Association, 2012, 2015a; American Psychological Association & National Association of School Psychologists, 2015). *Masculine* and *feminine* refer to the culturally defined gender associations used within Western society. These terms oppose one another; they are used to identify those things which have been culturally and socially identified as being associated with the genders of "male" and "female" (American Psychological Association, 2015b; Capra, 1996). In the context of this study, which focuses on a modern, Western society, *masculine* includes such things as power, dominance, rationality, logic, athleticism, heterosexuality, assertiveness, strength, and leadership. *Feminine* includes such

things as weakness, politeness, empathy, emotionality, caring, gentleness, sensitivity, irrationality, and meekness (Capra, 1996). *Gender* refers to the socially constructed behaviours, identities, and attributes of "male" and "female", while *sex* refers to the biological attributes of males and females (American Psychological Association, 2012, 2015a, 2015b; American Psychological Association & National Association of School Psychologists, 2015). The terms *norms* and *rules* are both used throughout the study to refer to the unwritten guidelines of beliefs and behaviours that are considered acceptable in a particular social group or culture (McLeod, 2008).

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

## Theorizing Gender

As a researcher, I take a view throughout this study that gender is a social construction produced and maintained by society. An individual's lived experience in the world helps to shape their beliefs about what gender is and their own identity.

Due to the biological differences of the sexes, identifying people as "male" and "female" based on biology has become one of the easiest and most convenient ways for people to categorize themselves and one another. Therefore, studies on what it means to be a male or a female are clearly warranted (Coltrane, 1994). Society has constructed ideas and norms about what a person's character, interests, skills, behaviour, and so on are, based upon the sex they were born as. These norms are known as gender. Essentially, sex is based upon a person's biology, while gender is based upon the socially constructed norms, rules, and ideas about what "male" and "female" should be (Coltrane, 1994; Connell, 1994; Connell, 2009). For example, some expectations of females are that they are emotional, weak, nurturing, and passive. Meanwhile, males are expected to be strong, resilient, rational, and aggressive. Humans are able to identify the biological sex of a child when they are in the womb based on the child's anatomy. The socialization of the unborn child begins as male or female names are considered, nurseries are decorated using particular colours, and gendered toys are bought for the child (Connell 1995/2005; Connell, 2009). This gendering continues after the child is born and the socially accepted ways of being based on the child's sex are taught and enforced through their social interactions. These norms continue to be reinscribed through parents, peers, the media, schooling, and so on (Connell, 2009).

Due to the categorization of people into genders, there becomes a specific set of rules a person is expected to follow based on the gender they identify as (or that they have been assigned to by their parents and society based on their biological sex). Since words and actions look a certain way for each gender, it becomes an enactment of these social roles (Butler, 1990/1999; Connell, 2009). There is a performative aspect of gender in which people who identify as males perform masculinity, while individuals who identify as female perform femininity. Judith Butler first introduced the idea that gender is performative in the late 1980s and noted that, through a stylized repetition of acts, a person's identity is established (Butler, 1988; Butler, 1990/1999). The stylization of the body and of one's actions are not passive and determined biologically, but are rather performed and thereby reinforced constantly by individuals in society (Butler, 1988; Butler, 1990/1999). Given this performative nature, rather than being something a person *is*, gender becomes something a person *does* (Butler, 1988; Carlson, 2017; Connell, 2009). For example, some girls are labelled as "tomboys" due to their performance of enacting masculinity (Renold, 2009), this demonstrates that gender is not biologically assigned, but is rather a performance of specified characteristics. Individuals perform as either male or female through their words, their tone of voice, the clothing they wear, how they style their hair, how they do (or do not) apply make-up, the things they are interested in, their behaviours, the careers they choose, and so on. All of these actions continue to be perpetuated as either "male" or "female" in society, and therefore gender norms continue to be reinforced. It is important to recognize the ways in which gender norms are created and perpetuated so that we can accurately recognise its implications on all individuals, both males and females.

## Theorizing Masculinity

R.W. Connell explains that we can trace modern theories of masculinity back to three primary movements (1995/2005). The first is Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, which largely focuses on a person's biological sex determining their desires and actions. These psychoanalytic understandings came directly from clinicians who were working with patients. Freud's belief was that a person's unconscious desires and fears were based on that individual's biological sex, and that this largely influenced their actions and behaviours (Connell, 1994; Connell, 1995/2005). His work around the Oedipus complex noted that males suffer from a fear of castration, hatred toward their fathers, and love of their mothers. It is these innate feelings Freud thought unconsciously shaped their feelings and actions.

The second understanding, developed by social psychologists is social-role (or sex-role) theory (Connell, 1994; Connell, 1995/2005). Social-role theory believes that a person's biological sex determines their characteristics and traits and that these are innate. This theory posits, for example, that males are inherently more rational than females due to factors such as genes and hormones. This understanding believes that males have a specific role to fit in society based on their natural traits (Connell, 1994; Connell, 1995/2005). For example, social-role theory believes that males should be breadwinners in the home as they are naturally more inclined toward paid work due to their intelligence and rationality, while women should raise families and care for the home due to their nurturing characteristics (Connell, 1995/2005).

Finally, a social view of gender developed from social scientists as the women's movement gained momentum (Connell, 1994; Connell, 1995/2005; Connell, 2009). This view states that sex is biological, but that gender is socially constructed. It is this theory that is being accepted and used in this study. It was with the rise of this social view of gender that the

women's movement and feminist theories began to expand. Along with this, theories in masculinity began to develop and critical masculinity studies began to gain prominence (Brod, 1994; Coltrane, 1994; Connell, 1994; Connell, 1995/2005).

As scholars began to note the ways in which society acted to enforce roles onto females that reinforced stereotypes and acted to maintain their lessened power, so too did they begin to examine how societal norms have impacted men (Brod, 1994; Coltrane, 1994). Despite the fact that men virtually held all positions of power in Western society, individual men did not feel powerful themselves (Kimmel, 1994a), therefore examining experiences of men was important in understanding the issues facing them (Kimmel, 1994a; Brod & Kaufman, 1994).

Predictably, researchers have found that expected gender roles greatly impact males' experiences. Critical to note is that heteronormativity is clearly implied as fundamental to what it means to be male (Kehler, 2009; Kimmel, 1994b; Kimmel, 2009). The understanding that males should be heterosexual greatly impacts how they engage with one another as well as with females. Importantly, there is a belief recognised in society that homosexuality is not acceptable. The fear of being seen as homosexual greatly impacts how males act and perform their masculinity (Kimmel, 1994b; Kimmel, 2009). Being called a sexualized or a feminine insult such as "gay", "fag", or "pussy", is a fear within males. This is not necessarily because of their actual sexuality, but because it implies that they are not "doing male" in the right way (Kehler, 2009; Kimmel, 2009). Additionally, the use of females as a commodity to prove males' heterosexuality is done primarily to prove themselves as being masculine to other males (Kimmel, 1994b; Kimmel, 2009). The fear of being seen as the "wrong type" of male by their same-sex peers, not by females, is a primary concern among boys and men.

Indeed, this fear of not being the proper kind of male and not performing masculinity in the appropriate way is how males police one another and create a hierarchy (Coltrane, 1994; Connell 1995/2005; Kehler, 2009). This hierarchy places boys best performing what it means to be masculine at the top, while feminized boys and females remain below. This consistent navigating of the masculine social order and policing of one another is known as hegemonic masculinity (Coltrane, 1994; Connell 1995/2005).

**Hegemonic Masculinity**

R.W. Connell first developed the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Connell (1995/2005) writes that hegemonic masculinity "can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (p. 77). The hierarchy places males at the top and females at the bottom. Additionally, males deviating from masculine norms also lose top positions in the hierarchy (Connell, 1995/2005, p. 78). Boys and men continually police one another in order to keep this hierarchy in place; males who do not adhere to the dominant masculinity are often the victims of name-calling and taunting, reminding them of where they stand on this accepted hierarchy. Generally, this name calling is sexist or homophobic in nature (as these act to situate them closer to the position of females in the hierarchy) but it can target boys in any way which will act to subordinate them. For example, Martino (2003a) studied boys in Australia where racism in conjunction with masculine norms were often utilized to enforce the hierarchy, and PettyJohn et al. (2019) researched backlash following the #MeToo movement, in which some men attacked those who stood with women as being weak or lesser than as men.

The dominant masculinity itself, being unattainable by most boys and men, keeps men and boys in a state of fear that they are inadequate, thus allowing for the policing of others (Kimmel, 2009). In ensuring that other, less "masculine", men and boys are being subordinated, those males who are higher on this social ladder maintain their positions of power and control. Research has found that males are less likely than females to stand up to inequality or reject the gender rules that act to enforce male superiority (Kagesten et al., 2016). The masculinity which is dominant varies between contexts, but the concept of the hierarchy still exists (Castellanos et al., 2019; Kagesten, 2016; Skelton, 1996, 1997).

**Gender Inequality in Society and Societal Institutions**

Despite huge leaps that women have made in society, we still operate in a patriarchal system which values "masculine" versus "feminine" ideals (Buchmann, 2009; Capra, p. 10, 1996; Grumet/Hobart & Smith Colleges, 1981; Kimmel, 2013). It is important to continue to emphasize that while the construct of sex is biological, gender is socio-culturally defined. Those things which are considered either "masculine" or "feminine" are established socially and culturally (Capra, p. 10, 1996; Kagesten et al., 2016; Pinar et al., 1995). The two are dichotomous in nature and we define one as being the opposite of the other (Capra, 1996; Connell, 2008, p. 134). All individuals are born with both "masculine" and "feminine" traits, but the society and culture in which they develop encourages gendered behaviour from a very young age (Bosacki, 2014; Braun & Davidson, 2017; Kagesten et al., 2016; Martin & Ruble, 2004). "Masculine" norms are granted more respect and authority than "feminine" norms (Capra, 1996; Drudy, 2008; Kagesten, 2016; Pinar et al., 1995; Taylor et al., 2014). In this way, Western society has operated from a place which acts to keep White, male, upper- and middle-class men in power.

The ways in which males dominate in present Western society is not always done in the blatant and oppressing ways in which sexism occurred in the past. Instead, we are now faced with sexism in which gendered views and beliefs are so ingrained in our culture that both males and females act and think with the understanding that "masculine" is better than, or superior to "feminine". This is deeply embedded in our society and can sometimes be difficult for people to see, as socio-cultural bias toward masculinity is profound and deep-rooted (Capra, 1996; Drudy, 2008; Martino & Kehler, 2007; Pateman, 2016; Patil, 2013; Pinar et al., 1995; Quinn, 2019; Skelton, 2002, 2009).

The gender issues seen in our community overall inevitably trickle down into all aspects of society. Gender bias is systemic and prolific within societal structures, including our education system (Carlana, 2019; Chemaly, 2015; Cimpian, 2018). Being an institution operating within society, the education system and our schools themselves cannot escape the problems with gender we see in the larger culture. For example, essentialist thinking about gender roles often finds its way into education: male teachers are often generally believed to be naturally better at discipline than their female counterparts (Halpern et al., 2011; McDowell & Klattenberg, 2019; Skelton, 2002). This belief presumes that female teachers are less able or differently equipped to perform their jobs due to assumptions based on biology that women are physically and mentally weak, irrational, and emotional. This can result in male teachers being expected to perform more "masculine" labour (such as discipline and team coaching) than female teachers (Cruickshank et al., 2018; Drudy, 2008; McDowell & Klattenberg, 2019). Additionally, male teachers can be assumed to be better at connecting with male students due to the simple fact that they are the same sex, ignoring that all teachers and students have various personalities and interests which can appeal to a wide variety of individuals, regardless of gender

identity (Drudy, 2008; Halpern et al., 2011; Skelton, 2002). School subjects thought of as "masculine" (i.e., math and sciences) are generally more highly regarded in K-12 schools as well as post-secondary institutions, leading to higher paying jobs post-graduation (Buchmann, 2009; Drudy, 2008; Howes et al., 2018; Jackson et al., 2019; Pinar, 1995; Sassler et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2014; Watt et al., 2017). There are many factors that likely contribute to the gender gap in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) careers. The lack of females in these careers, as well as males in "feminine" careers is well-documented (Cruickshank et al., 2018; Holmes et al., 2018; Howes et al., 2018; Jackson et al., 2019; Sassler et al., 2017; Watt et al., 2017). Additionally, STEM post-secondary majors do not only typically lead to better-paying careers post-graduation, these careers are typically more highly regarded than "feminine" careers (Buchmann, 2009; Drudy, 2008; Howes et al., 2018; Pinar, 1995; Taylor et al., 2014). Teachers who fall outside of traditional gender and sexuality roles – particularly those who are not heterosexual and/or cisgender – often feel the need to hide their authentic selves from students, parents, and co-workers (Bower-Phipps, 2017; Martino & Frank, 2006; Mayo Jr., 2020; Wells, 2018). Fear of repercussions by districts, parents, co-workers, and students for not being considered "normal" results in some teachers presenting a different version of themselves at work and hiding other parts of their lives (Bower-Phipps, 2017; Martino & Frank, 2006; Mayo Jr., 2020). Though advances have been made to include various voices and perspectives in school curriculum, it still rarely includes all alternative voices, particularly voices which fall outside normative gender and sexual identities (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2011, 2016). Teachers often feel uncomfortable about including alternative and queer voices in the classroom due to fear of repercussion (Bower-Phipps, 2017; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016). Often, if they do include these Other voices, they feel as though they must do so secretively – implying

that these perspectives are innately "wrong" and deserve to be hidden (Bower-Phipps, 2017; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2011, 2016; Mayo Jr, 2020). Finally, boys and girls who feel that they do not fall within "normal" gendered ideals often feel isolated, unwelcome, or even unsafe at school (Burns & Kehler, 2014; Carlson, 2017; Kehler, 2010; Newsom, 2015). While the modern generation is, generally, more inclusive than past generations, bullying, name-calling, and isolation due to gender and sexual differences still occurs and results in some school places (such as change rooms and washrooms) being places students feel insecure (Burns & Kehler, 2014; Callaghan, 2018; Carlson, 2017; Kehler, 2010). All of the aforementioned examples of research surrounding gender and education will be discussed in further detail below. There has been a significant amount of research done in gender and education, and the issue is certainly one in which repercussions can be seen in many different areas of schooling, in both teachers' and students' lives.

**Gender Inequality in Education**

In education, gender inequality is prevalent in many ways. Though obvious, explicit forms of sexism are no longer as culturally accepted, implicit and elusive sexism is rampant throughout all our society, trickling down into our educational institutions as well. Some teachers treat male and female students differently, and though students may not notice, these interactions become ingrained (Halpern et al., 2011; Martino et al., 2005; Skelton & Read, 2006). As an institution within our society, created in order to perpetuate what we deem most valuable, it is unsurprising that the predominant values in society are also prevalent within educational institutions (Gutek, 2014). From the ways in which people interact, the gender association school subjects have, the differing ways males and females are treated in schools, the belief that gender

impacts how individuals learn, and so on, cultural norms have fully penetrated our educational system.

While students are no longer forced to be segregated according to their sex, many things within the educational system are still gendered. School itself has been organized in a "rational" (masculine) way; separating forms of knowledge into subjects and units, progressing all students based on their numerical age, assigning a specific percentile grade to how much teachers evaluate that students "know", and so on. Boys who are gender nonconforming have a much higher chance of being excluded by peers than gender conforming boys, gender conforming girls, and gender nonconforming girls (Paechter et al., 2021; Bragg et al., 2018; Braun & Davidson, 2017). This points out just how much the gender hierarchy is enacted in society and in schools.

**Boys and Masculinity in Schools**

Many researchers have looked into how boys maneuver their way through adolescence and the ways in which they feel they themselves are policed or police others based on gender norms (Kagesten et al., 2016; Kehler, 2007, 2020; Kehler & Greig, 2005; Kehler & Martino, 2007). Boys often feel the need to "wear a mask" when it comes to their interactions with others at school in order to appear "tough" or "cool" (Martino, 2000; Newsom Siebel, 2015). It is frowned upon to be overly emotional and the fear of appearing "feminine" can cause boys to hide who they really are and disallow them from forming natural, close friendships with other boys. Male students can feel uncomfortable negotiating male-male relationships and have to alter their behaviour depending on who they are interacting with (Kehler, 2007; Kehler & Greig, 2005). DeLay, Martin, Cook, and Hanish (2018) found that homophobic name-calling in schools can cause children to feel less similar to their same-gender peers and more like other-gender

peers; this can lead to marginalization and mental health issues when students feel they do not belong in the "normal" way their classmates do. Indeed, heterosexuality is the overwhelming norm in society (and therefore in schools as well). The fear of being thought of as homosexual, regardless of actual sexual-orientation, or not understanding "othered" peers can result in fear among students and result in homophobic slurs and exclusion of others (Braun & Davidson, 2017; Epstein, 1997; Lapointe, 2015). While what is "acceptable" behaviour among boys can change, this has to be encouraged by a dominant male in order for other boys to welcome a change and proceed as well (McGuffey & Rich, 1999; Skelton & Francis, 2011).

Generally, the dominant males in most schools have been awarded that position due to success in sports, their athletic ability "proving" their masculinity enough to allow them leeway in negotiating acceptable masculine behaviour. The phenomenon of boys becoming dominant involves a hierarchy in which boys compete against one another and police one another to maintain the accepted norms of what it means to be "masculine"; this stems from wanting to follow accepted norms as well as a fear of being seen as the "wrong type" of boy (Coltrane, 1994; Kimmel, 1994). The "right type" of boy is typically athletic, and adolescent boys who are not "properly" athletic often feel out of place in classes such as physical education because they are generally set up to be competitive environments in which the most athletic boys "win" and the others find themselves feeling out of place (Burns & Kehler, 2014; Connell, 2008; Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). Athletic ability and heterosexuality continue to dominate how boys perceive what makes someone "properly" masculine. Sports culture is embedded in schools and in society and acts to promote particular boys as leaders and to exclude boys and girls who do not share the same interest and/or ability in athletics (Bennett, 2016; Connell, 2008; Skelton, 2000).

**Male Students as "Disadvantaged" in Schools**

Several researchers have explored the idea of males being labelled "the new disadvantaged" in schools due to low literacy scores and the supposed "feminization" of teaching (Alloway, 2007; Martino, 2003b; Martino & Kehler, 2007; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012; Watson et al., 2010; Watson & Kehler, 2012). Due to teachers – particularly early childhood education teachers – being predominantly female in Western society, teaching is considered a "feminine" career (Alloway, 2007; Howes et al., 2018; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012; McDowell & Klattenberg, 2019; Watson et al., 2010; Watson & Kehler, 2012). An essentialist viewpoint considers the lack of male teachers to attribute to "feminized" schools and boys' academic underachievement, though this has been widely disputed (Alloway, 2007; Martino, 2003b; Martino & Kehler, 2007; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012; Watson et al., 2010; Watson & Kehler, 2012). Within gender studies and education, there has been attention paid to males scoring poorly compared to their female counterparts, particularly in literacy (O'Grady et al., 2019; Richards, 2017; Watson et al., 2010; Watson & Kehler, 2012). There has been much research and media attention paid to this and labelling males as at-risk students (Watson et al., 2010; Watson & Kehler, 2012). This disregards the question of *which* boys and *which* girls are at the greatest risk of low literacy and low academic achievement. It also ignores the various other factors which contribute to academic failure, such as family dynamics, culture, community, socio-economic status, motivation, health, relationships, and so on (Patten, 2019). Frank, Kehler, Lovell, and Davison (2003) have noted that representing "boys as a cohesive group enables a particular reading that highlights injustices assumed to impact on all boys, without acknowledging the privileged elements of masculinities that advantage some boys over other boys and over some girls" (p. 120). We can see how this acts to keep populations of people who

struggle academically due to factors other than gender identity from receiving adequate support. Grouping together all boys ignores the privilege that White, middle- and upper-class, heterosexual males possess. Socioeconomic status is the most important attribute in whether a student will succeed academically in school (Crawford et al., 2017; Hadjar et al, 2015; Stockfelt, 2016; Veas Iniesta et al., 2017). Using multiple predictors of socioeconomic status – such as parental income, parental education, and neighbourhood lived in – are far more helpful and predictive indicators of student success than gender (Patten, 2019). Ignoring these important factors and labelling half of the student population as "at-risk" does a disservice to all students who would benefit from more support academically. In discussing a "boy-friendly" guide put out by the Ontario Ministry of Education, Martino and Kehler (2007) write:

> Although the *Me Read?* document acknowledges that gender is 'not the only factor at play in determining performance in reading and writing,' (p. 6), it fails to acknowledge what the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2004) reported as the overwhelming fact that 'socio-economic difference is the strongest single factor associated with performance' (p. 6). Moreover, on page six of the document in a section with the heading, What about girls?, the Ministry acknowledges that 'differences among boys and among girls are greater than those differences between boys and girls' (p. 6). (p. 413-414)

Undoubtedly, socioeconomic status is of huge importance in determining student success. Boys and girls should be seen as individuals, not grouped together in an essentialist view of their gender.

## "Boy Friendly" Teaching Strategies

The push for "boy-friendly" tools and strategies in schools is an example of an essentialist view of gender which acts to re-establish gender norms. Encouraging these tools and strategies is superficial and is condescending to boys who all have their own unique identity. These strategies have been used throughout Western society, from the *Me Read?* guides out of Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, 2009) to the push for single-sex schools (Charlton et al., 2007; Grieg, 2011; Halpern et al., 2007; Martino et al., 2005). Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2012) have pointed out that, when we utilize "boy-friendly" strategies such as these, "a very specific regime of truth about boys' reading practices is endorsed, one that is grounded in familiar gender binaries through which girls are constructed as being naturally intuitive, while boys are supposedly predisposed to more concrete and rationalist thinking" (p. 433). To reduce male students to gendered assumptions and promote common sense notions such as reading "action-based" books, utilizing competition in the classroom, and incorporating several play breaks during the day assumes all boys are the same (Kehler, 2010). Indeed, any number of students, regardless of gender, will respond well to "boy-friendly" approaches, while others will not. Reductionist approaches do nothing except further embed gender assumptions into the minds of teachers, students, and parents. Furthermore, these approaches often "dumb-down" (Martino, 2003b, p. 16) class work in order to make it more accessible to all boys, this is patronizing and poses an injustice to all male students.

## Teacher Gender Identity in Schools

As a result of the belief that schools have become overly feminized, some school districts have attempted to persuade more males to apply for teaching positions (Carrington & Skelton, 2003; Cruickshank et al., 2018; Godfrey & Manis, 2017; Martino, 2008b; Mills et al., 2004;

Skelton, 2002, 2007; Stewart et al., 2016). In addition to more men in general, there has also been a significant push for non-White male teachers to enter the profession in order to better represent the diverse students they are teaching (Green & Martin, 2018; Meidl, 2019; Scott & Alexander, 2019; Will, 2018; Woodson & Bristol, 2020). These are certainly not negative actions in themselves, but some researchers have found that this becomes complicated for several reasons. There is the understanding that these male teachers are supposed to be role models for young boys and be excellent at disciplining students. This suggests that all males are innately skilled at disciplining and that, merely for being the same gender, boys will automatically see them as role models. Further, it implies that female teachers are unable to connect with students and deal with issues of authority. Martino and Kehler (2006) point out that "[t]he implication [of needing male teachers as role models] is that female teachers are unable to manage boys' behaviour and that boys need men to confirm their masculinity" (p. 120). In addition, the idea that male teachers have the supplementary job of "role model" (in addition to teacher) and the question of what type of role model schools are seeking comes into play. Skelton (2007) points out that in attempting to hire more male teachers, "there is little evidence of any wish to recognize diverse or different constructions of masculinities. Rather, men teachers are perceived as (desirably) bounded by stereotypical masculine conventions which will allow them to motivate and inspire recalcitrant male pupils" (p. 682). Male teachers are expected to possess "normal" gendered traits in order to promote these behaviours in students (due to the fear that our boys are becoming demasculinized as a result of an apparently feminized schooling experience).

In relation to teachers as role models, teachers may feel as though they are under surveillance; this results in them consistently monitoring themselves (Martino, 2008a; Martino &

Frank, 2006). Both male and female teachers are under constant pressure not to deviate from accepted gender norms. Martino and Frank (2006) point out that male teachers recognize the power dynamics of their classrooms and that they must fashion themselves within limits, knowing that in order to maintain control of male students they must exert an accepted form of masculinity. They have to consistently monitor themselves to ensure they are acting within the accepted norms. Additionally, teachers who have considered or attempted to be more inclusive of more voices have often found that they decided against sharing Othered voices in the classroom, felt uncomfortable while they did so or when questions arose, or faced negative feedback from their superiors (Blackburn et al., 2016; Cumming-Potvin & Martino, 2018; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2011, 2016). While inclusivity is promoted in most school districts' policies, in practice gendered expectations are still embedded throughout the educational system.

**Masculinity and Violence in Schools**

There has also been research into a connection between hegemonic masculinity and extreme violence in schools (Carlson, 2017; Evans, 2016; Farr, 2018; Kalish & Kimmel, 2010; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Mills & Keddie, 2010; Saee-Nazari, 2015; Stolz, 2005). Of course, multiple factors are at play when extreme events such as school shootings occur, and masculinity is just one variable. That being said, it is a factor that has been explored by some researchers. As aggression is a facet of masculinity, boys who feel marginalized will sometimes, in extreme situations, attempt to avenge their aggressors in the form of extreme violence. While school violence and shootings generally used to be associated with American schools in low-income areas where gang violence was an issue, this statistic has changed over the years – though school shootings are still most prominent in schools in the United States (Farr, 2017; Kimmel & Mahler,

2003; Saee-Nazari, 2015). The inner-city schools which were more likely to have shootings in the past have been enforced with metal detectors and security guards, causing the amount of shootings and violence to substantially decrease (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Kimmel, 2009). Furthermore, the violence that existed in these settings was generally in the form of a single student bringing a weapon to school to attack one other student over an outside incident (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). Since 1982, the landscape of school violence has changed dramatically from inner city schools in lower socioeconomic neighbourhoods to middle-class, suburban schools (Evans, 2016; Kalish & Kimmel, 2010; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). In these rare cases, a student (or students) will bring multiple weapons to a school and seemingly shoot at random. These shootings have overwhelmingly been performed by White, middle-class, male students. Kimmel and Mahler (2003) have pointed out that in the coverage for school shootings, the media pays "little or no attention to the obvious fact that all the school shootings were committed by boys – masculinity is the single greatest risk factor in school violence" (p. 1442). Indeed, if a mass shooting were performed by a female, that fact would certainly not be absent from the headlines; violence and aggression are so closely associated with males that when a horrific, violent act occurs it is assumed that it has been undertaken by a male (Evans, 2016; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Stolz, 2005). Several researchers have pointed to the masculine culture of bullying, aggression, and revenge to explain why these tormented students have responded to their marginalization with extreme and violent forms of "masculinity" (Carlson, 2017; Evans, 2016; Farr, 2018; Kalish & Kimmel, 2010; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Stolz, 2005).

# CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

## Introduction

The objective of this study is to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants. This chapter outlines the method of research and analysis which was utilized to explore Albertan, adolescent boys' perceptions of hegemonic masculinity in school. First, the setting of Alberta and its unique identity is explained. This is an important aspect for readers to understand as living in Alberta largely shapes participants' worldviews and lived experiences. Next, researcher reflexivity is discussed, which is important for readers to understand the motivation behind the research. Following, an overview of the research design used, including the rationale for utilizing a phenomenological design method, is provided. This is followed by a description of the recruitment process, how participants were selected, and an outline of the demographics of interviews and the participants. An overview of the data collection and description of the interview process follows. Then, a breakdown of the analysis of the data is included. Next is an overview of how compliance with ethical standards was maintained. Lastly, a philosophical statement outlining the researcher's positionality is provided.

## Setting: Alberta's Unique Identity

It is important here to include background information on Alberta, as its location and identity are a part of participants' lived experiences and worldview. Alberta is often considered both a socially and fiscally conservative province, having majority voted for political parties with conservative ideals in every federal election for almost ninety years (The Canada Guide, 2021). These results are often dissimilar from the rest of Canadian majority votes, indicative of Alberta's unique identity. There is a widespread stereotype that Alberta is teeming with right-wing, racist, homophobic, sexist, conservatives (Gerson, 2019; Levinson-King, 2019).

Additionally, Albertans often feel unrepresented, misunderstood, and undervalued by the rest of Canada, resulting in an ever-continuing misinterpretation and misrepresentation of voices on several "sides" (Gerson, 2019; Levinson-King, 2019). The present "us-versus-them" mentality which many Albertans hold in opposition to the Federal Liberal government has only been more heightened with the economic crash following the fall of oil prices in 2014 and the feeling that, despite years of equalization payments, Alberta is not being cared for now that it is struggling economically (Bench, 2021; Gerson, 2019; Levinson-King, 2019). During this time, Donald Trump also spent a term in office in the United States and infamously vocalized radical and hateful rhetoric throughout his candidacy and presidency (Carlson, 2017; Luqman, 2018). The witnessing of extremist views and not having political figures publicly denounce dialogues of hate for fear of undermining the value of free speech has resulted in many people becoming more emboldened to speak and act on discriminatory beliefs in their communities (Bench, 2021; Carlson, 2017; Luqman, 2018).

Alberta has always been a province that has relied heavily on its land and natural resources. The province was built around farming families and communities trying to create better lives for themselves (Gerson, 2019). The culture of farming communities and a Western heritage is a large part of what makes up Alberta's identity (Levinson-King, 2019; Thomas, 2018). Since the late 1800s, when oil was first found in Alberta, it has remained a primary resource and has helped shape the province's economic, cultural, and political landscape (Alberta Culture and Tourism, 2021). Within this sector, the primarily male workforce, the potential of earning a high wage without necessarily possessing a formal education, the "boom and bust" nature of oil, and the stereotypical "blue collar" labour have helped shape Alberta in ways very

unlike many other areas of Canada (Alberta Culture and Tourism, 2021; Gerson, 2019; Levinson-King, 2019).

Alberta is one of only three provinces in Canada in which Catholic schools are considered "public" and are funded by the provincial government (along with Ontario and Saskatchewan) (Coren, 2020; Fletcher, 2018; Government of Alberta, 2021). As Western society becomes more secular in order to include and provide for all voices and cultures equally, this results in opposition from people who feel religious education has no place in publicly funded institutions. In Alberta, separate schools are protected under the constitution (Government of Alberta, 2021). However, with large Catholic school boards often clashing with public sentiment, human rights laws, and curriculum around gender and sexuality, many are angered that these districts continue to be publicly funded and are concerned for the safety and inclusion of all students (Coren, 2020; Kerr, 2018; Offin, 2018). In a historically right-wing province, this has people concerned about the welcome inclusion of all students (Coren, 2020; Kerr, 2018).

The election of the United Conservative Party in 2019 and re-election in 2023 has many Albertans who hold views which are more left-wing concerned (Sharpe, 2020). For example, the passing of Bill 8, which makes it more difficult for students to create and effectively run GSAs (Gay Straight Alliances) in their schools, has been a cause of great concern for several students, educators, parents, and community members (French, 2019; Ramsay, 2019; Sharpe, 2020). While the government insists that Alberta still has the strongest laws to protect queer students, those who oppose the bill disagree (French, 2019; Ramsay, 2019). Language in the law has been changed which allows principals and/or school districts as much time as they like before starting a GSA at a student's request, does not ensure students are allowed to use language such as "queer" or "gay" in their title, and in exceptional circumstances, staff can disclose to parents

whether their child is part of a GSA (French, 2019). Those who oppose the Bill argue that due to these guidelines, students who fear their parents discovering their participation in the club – those who are already part of an at-risk group – are unlikely to join or start a GSA at all (Ramsay, 2019; Sharpe, 2020). It is important as educators to ensure all of our students are welcome and safe, and concerns in Alberta around conservative politics and the funding of religious schools continues to be a point of controversy (Coren, 2020; Sharpe, 2020).

**Researcher Reflexivity**

I believe "that we are actively engaged in construction and reconstructing meanings through our daily interactions" (Leavy, 2017, p. 13) and that gender is a socio-cultural construct (Lindsey, 2015, p. 10). From my perspective, knowledge is socially constructed; it has historical roots and is passed down through traditions and maintained via social interaction. Therefore, I believe that we learn things as a result of the culture around us and through structures such as schools. This belief places me within the paradigm of a constructivist. Through completing this research, I seek to deeply understand participants' own perspectives about hegemonic masculinity in their own lives, therefore allowing me to better understand how they believe it is being enacted in their school. I "value people's subjective interpretation and understanding of their experiences and circumstances" (Leavy, 2017, p. 13) and believe this is the best way to gain a deep understanding of the subject matter being explored. In order to best understand individuals' lived experiences of hegemonic masculinity within schools, I conducted phenomenological research. I focused on the experience and understanding of hegemonic masculinity at school from the points of view of my participants, who self-identified as individuals who do not follow the gender rules in their communities.

## Research Design: Phenomenology

### *Why Phenomenology?*

This study utilizes a phenomenological approach. Due to its experiential nature, phenomenology allows the time to speak with few individuals and to deeply understand the participants' lived experiences. Phenomenology seeks to understand human understanding and interpretation of a specific event, or phenomenon, and to understand what a phenomenon or concept means by examining people's experiences of them (Hopkins et al., 2017; Leavy, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Randles, 2012). It acts under the belief that all humans interpret the world around them differently and will therefore have a distinct perception and awareness of an event, concept, or phenomenon. Generalizability is not the goal, and I can "retain what is most meaningful about the case being examined" (Randles, 2012) and utilize the knowledge to directly impact my own understanding and practice. In the case of this research study, the concept participants will be asked about will be their personal experiences of hegemonic masculinity; this will result in learning about their own interpretations of the concept of hegemonic masculinity in their lives.

Phenomenology is appropriate for this study as it allows me to acutely understand the lived experiences of a small number of participants. Since the number of participants will be small, I will have the opportunity to better immerse in their experiences through the data collected. Having the opportunity to collect rich qualitative research will allow me to acquire a deep insight into participants' lived experiences.

This research, more generally, draws on Sharan B. Merriam's qualitative research approach. This is because Merriam provides a structured and informative way to utilize qualitative research in an educational setting. She "presents step by step the process of designing

qualitative research in a rather detailed fashion" (Yazan, 2015, p. 141) which will provide a useful and structured approach to this study. Additionally, Merriam notes that the "key concern is understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives, not the researcher's" (1998, p. 6), which is important in allowing participants' voices and perspectives to be shared. As the intention of this study is to deeply understand participants' lived experiences, I believe that phenomenological research provides appropriate alignment.

### *Phenomenology: A Background*

Phenomenology was first developed as a philosophy by Edmund Husserl and developed into a type of qualitative research (Leavy, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). In particular, Martin Heidegger was an important researcher in developing hermeneutic phenomenology (Hopkins et al., 2017; Neubaueret al., 2019), which is most closely aligned to the phenomenological research this study undertakes. Heidegger further developed phenomenology in narrowing it down to focus on specific participants and/or events (Hopkins et al., 2017; Neubauer et al., 2019). For this study, Heidegger's approach to phenomenological research is better suited, because it is focused more on an individual's unique experience or experiences, rather than Hessler's broader goal of essential structure (Hopkins et al., 2017, p. 22). While Hessler's focus on bracketing attempts to remove the researcher and detach them from the inquiry, Heidegger notes the importance of the researcher's own assumptions, knowledge, and understandings in interpreting the phenomenon being studied; the "messiness" of the research process is embraced (Hopkins et al., 2017, p. 22; Randles, 2012, p. 12). This is important for this study, as I believe that positionality should be embraced and that it is not possible for a researcher to be fully detached from what they are investigating. Further, the

research done in this study is intended to improve my own knowledge and professional practice, so it is beneficial and important to accept my role as the researcher throughout the process.

**Recruitment Process**

For this study, homogeneous sampling was used. This type of purposeful sampling was necessary as adolescent boys from Alberta who resist the rules of masculinity were invited to participate in the research (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 208; Leavy, 2017, p. 148). In using homogeneous sampling, I was able to recruit participants who were the age and gender specifically needed for the study to share perspectives about masculinity at school. Additionally, homogeneous sampling was useful as the study sought boys who self-identify as not following the expected rules of hegemonic masculinity in their communities; if snowball sampling was needed, participants may know and/or spend time with other individuals with a similar profile and who would also want to share their experiences.

Participants were recruited through my social and professional circles; friends, family, and colleagues were asked if they know of any adolescent Albertan boys who do not follow gender rules and who would be willing to participate in research about being a boy at school. A recruitment poster was also shared (Appendix D) which used plain language for potential participants and simply stated what would be asked of them (1-2 hours of time for an interview). Through these recruitment strategies, seven participants who self-identified as Albertan boys who resisted the rules of masculinity agreed to participate in the study. Six of these participants were students at the school I taught at during the time of the recruitment process and interviews, who were interested in participating when some of my colleagues informed them about the research study.

## Demographics

The interviews used in this study were completed between February 24 and May 27, 2022. All participants were recruited when they learned of the study from a parent, teacher, or school staff member and were given a recruitment poster. Through reading the recruitment poster and having the research explained to them by myself, all participants self-identified as boys who felt they had a different experience of being a boy in school than others might. Six of the participants were interviewed in person and one was conducted over Zoom due to the participant's comfort level and the ease of using technology rather than travelling to a different location. All seven participants reside in Calgary, Alberta. The participants included three Caucasian Canadian males, two Pilipino Canadian males, one Latino Canadian male, and one African Canadian male. At the time of interviews, one participant was in grade five, four participants were in grade six, and two participants were in grade seven. Six of the participants attended the same school, located in Southwest Calgary. One participant attended a different school, also located in Southwest Calgary.

Below is a Participant Chart providing demographics and pseudonyms for each of the participants who took part in the study.

**Table 1**

***Participant Chart***

| | |
|---|---|
| Participant #1 (Iron Man) | Participant #1 was in grade 7 at the time of the interview. He is an African Canadian male who attended the school in Southwest Calgary where the researcher taught at the time. He chose the pseudonym "Iron Man" for use in the study. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Participant #2 (Iron Spider) | Participant #2 was in grade 7 at the time of the interview. He is a Latino Canadian male who attended the school in Southwest Calgary where the researcher taught at the time. He chose the pseudonym “Iron Spider” for use in the study. |
| Participant #3 (Pierre) | Participant #3 was in grade 5 at the time of the interview. He is a Caucasian male who attended a school in Southwest Calgary. He chose the pseudonym “Pierre” for use in the study. |
| Participant #4 (Bob #1) | Participant #4 was in grade 6 at the time of the interview. He is a Caucasian male who attended the school in Southwest Calgary where the researcher taught at the time. He chose the pseudonym “Bob” for use in the study. |
| Participant #5 (Bob #2) | Participant #5 was in grade 6 at the time of the interview. He is a Pilipino male who attended the school in Southwest Calgary where the researcher taught at the time. He chose the pseudonym “Bob” for use in the study. |
| Participant #6 (Oscar) | Participant #6 was in grade 6 at the time of the interview. He is a Pilipino male who attended the school in Southwest Calgary where the researcher taught at the time. He did not choose a pseudonym for use in the study, so the researcher assigned the name “Oscar” to him. |
| Participant #7 (Arthur Morgan) | Participant #7 was in grade 6 at the time of the interview. He is a Caucasian male who attended the school in Southwest Calgary where the researcher taught at the time. He chose the pseudonym “Arthur Morgan” for use in the study. |

## Data Collection (Interviews)

### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

This study utilized one-on-one, semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 2016, p. 110; Leavy, 2017, p. 139) as this method of data collection enabled participants to communicate their own perceptions of hegemonic masculinity (Leavy, 2017, p. 139). I used an interview guide (Leavy, 2017, p. 140) in order to ensure all intended questions were asked of participants. In the interview guide, the questions asked of all participants were as follows:

1. What does it mean to be a boy?
2. Is there a certain way people expect boys to act?
3. What does it mean to be a boy outside of school?
4. What does it mean to be a boy at school?
5. Do you think that boys act differently than girls at school?
6. Do you feel like you have to act a certain way because you're a boy?
7. Have you ever witnessed anyone being picked-on for not being the right kind of boy?
8. Have you ever seen people in your school trying to get others to act a certain way?
9. Do you feel like you can act like yourself at school?
10. Have you ever tried to resist the rules boys are expected to follow?

Using semi-structured interviews allowed for deep insight and centralized the voices of the participants. Using an interview guide ensured all points I was interested in collecting information on were touched upon. It also allowed space for me to ask further questions, prompt participants to share more, and re-word questions when necessary. When insights emerged that I believed could provide interesting insight, conversations veered away from the structured, formal

questions, and participants were prompted to continue. This allowed for richer discussions and a natural conversation for participants to feel more comfortable than they may have otherwise.

It is my belief that interviews were the best way to answer the research questions because open-ended questions were used. These allowed for participants to explain experiences in ways other tools would not have had the same ability to do (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 217). Participants were able to use their own voice to describe their perceptions of what it means to be a boy, the experiences of hegemonic masculinity they have had or witnessed, and if they believe hegemonic masculinity is reinscribed and reinforced in their school. The interview guide used during researching allowed me to follow a basic structure, ensuring useful points were collected, but also providing the ability to allow participants to deliver more depth on a topic or concept that may have not been included, or to probe further to collect data on interesting or useful points (Leavy, 2017, p. 140).

### *Interview Procedures*

Interviews were audio-recorded while I also recorded notes in the interview guide. This was done in order to ensure no information provided by participants was lost (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Leavy, 2017; Merriam, 2016) Recorded notes in the interview guide included such things as non-verbal gestures that were not picked-up by a recording, any markers dropped by participants, and my own observations and thoughts (Leavy, 2017). The interview guide was also used in case the audio-recordings failed in any way (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Leavy, 2017), though this did not occur. A semi-structured interview allowed for participants to provide their own perspectives and worldviews as opposed to responding to my personal worldview, which a more structured format could cause (Merriam, 1998, 2016).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the interviews was conducted on the video conferencing platform, Zoom. Due to comfort level, the participant chose not to turn his camera on, so the researcher was unable to recognize any physical gestures made. While rapport was built, it was more difficult to do so as the participant and researcher were not face-to-face (Leavy, 2017). The same interview guide was used for both face-to-face and video conferencing interviews.

***Interview Setting***

Six of the interviews conducted took place in a classroom at the participants' school. The classroom is an open space for all students to work independently or with support; no students have had any graded classes in the room in order to maintain a space of perceived neutrality. Participants were asked where and when they would like to conduct the interview, how they would like to sit, and if they were comfortable. Ensuring the space was comfortable for participants was vital to the research as I wanted to ensure participants were at ease sharing their views during the interviews (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). At the times of the interviews, only myself and participant were in the room in order to ensure anonymity and privacy. The video conferencing interview took place on the platform Zoom. I was at home, in a closed and private room so that no others could hear the interview. The participant used a tablet shared with his family. His camera was turned off, but he stated that he was in his room alone to conduct the interview.

Interviews lasted between 15-35 minutes. The discrepancies in length are due to the interviews being semi-structured. Since I often asked further questions or prompted participants to elaborate on an idea, some interviews took longer than others to complete. I utilized probes

and engaged with any interesting markers dropped by participants (Leavy, 2017, p. 140-141), therefore interviews varied in length.

**Data Analysis**

In interpreting the data, a thematic analysis approach was applied, and six phases of analysis were used (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to guide the process.

For the first phase of thematic analysis, after completing interviews, they were transcribed, and I familiarized myself with the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was done via actively reading and re-reading the data several times searching for meaning and patterns. I considered the recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness of responses to identify patterns that appeared to be meaningful and significant to participants (Lawless & Chen, 2019). Transcripts were read through thoroughly, multiple times, while thinking comprehensively about what was acquired, and how it related to the research questions. All participant interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure that "a complete record of the interview" (Leavy, 2017, p. 142) was preserved and that participants' voices were accurately maintained. I felt it important to complete all of the data analysis and interpretation independently in order to fully understand the research process. Reading through and interpreting the transcripts was crucial in fully understanding and appreciating the data that was acquired before beginning to generate codes (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Leavy, 2017).

In phase two, I generated initial codes based on points of interest identified when familiarizing myself with the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was done manually in which codes were highlighted directly on transcripts, then put into an online document used to organize points according to code. In-vivo coding was used as it best represented participants' own words and feelings, therefore giving the best insight into their perceptions (Leavy, 2017, p. 151). As all

interviews were transcribed verbatim, this allowed for in-vivo coding and did not limit my focus (Leavy, 2017). When applicable, I included my own memos on the data as well, in order to further increase understanding of the concept and giving greater insight into the data (Leavy, 2017, p. 152). Merriam (2016) points out the importance in phenomenological research of horizontalization, which ensures all research is treated as having equal weight (p. 27). Utilizing verbatim transcripts, in-vivo coding, and my own researcher notes allowed for the equal weight of all data.

In phase three, I began to search for themes within the codes that were identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this stage, each code was considered, and I utilized a mind-mapping method to discern which codes connected with one another and categorized them into over-arching themes. To determine what was learned from the data and why it was important, I also relied on memo notes that were made and looked for patterns in the data (Leavy, 2017, p. 152). Finding links between the data collected helped in discovering important points about the concept. Triangulation was also utilized during the interpretation of the research, using theoretical and data triangulation, referring to the transcribed interviews, the interview guide (including all notes that were made), and existing literature on the subject to find correlations and various interpretations (Leavy, 2017, p. 153). Using this approach allowed me to consider different perspectives regarding the data and it helped to create meaning.

I reviewed the themes that I had generated in phase four by reviewing all codes within each theme to ensure they effectively captured the concepts that emerged from the coded data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, I also re-read the transcribed data at this point to ensure that all information which accurately depicted the themes had been collected.

In phase five of the thematic analysis, I defined and named the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this process, I identified the "essence" of each of the themes, and also observed any sub-themes which were contained in the over-arching themes (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 22). In doing so, I examined the research already completed in gender and masculinity studies and considered how these participants' responses interlinked and how their experiences and perceptions may have acted to function within the positions of power and hierarchy present in their own lives (Lawless & Chen, 2019). Finally, in phase six, I produced the report, my thesis, in order to communicate what was uncovered in my research and its relation to existing research.

**Ethics Statement**

My intention in completing this research was to better understand the concept of hegemonic masculinity among adolescent boys in Alberta who do not follow the rules of hegemonic masculinity. Understanding the experiences of others was of highest priority as I sought to deeply comprehend and appreciate the participants' experiences. The research was intended to strengthen my own understanding and improve my teaching and leadership practice as a result.

Due to the age of the participants, informed assent was signed by them as well as consent from their legal guardians. Fully explained to all participants was: the risks and benefits of participating in the research, that it was voluntary to participate, the confidentiality of the research and findings, and their right to ask any questions they may have had during the process (Leavy, 2017).

Researcher reflexivity was of vital importance in the ethics of the research completed (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Leavy, 2017). As phenomenology was utilized, my positionality was embraced, but with the intention to understand participants' experiences and perceptions

with as little personal bias as possible. Due to my age, gender, and authoritative position as a teacher in the school and researcher for this project, it was important to recognize that the participants may have censored themselves in ways they would not among peers or individuals they had a strong relationship. Of course, they also may have revealed more to me, if they were comfortable sharing things they felt unable to with those who they had relationships with, due to potential repercussions. As a cis-gender, heterosexual female who was two decades older than the participants, I have never had the same experiences or perspectives as any of the participants; it was important to put aside any assumptions or beliefs I may have held which could alter the interpretation of the research collected. While my role was recognized as an important element in the study, the participants' voices are intended to be the most prominent aspect of this research, as it is their viewpoints and perceptions that I was most eager to learn about and explore.

# CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

## Introduction

This chapter will discuss the themes which emerged from the participant interviews and observations made by the researcher during interviews. Using a phenomenological approach, the preliminary exploratory analysis revealed three distinct themes common among the majority of participants.

## Introduction to Themes

A thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six phases (2006) was used to analyze data. Through this analysis, three primary themes common among the majority of participants' experiences were uncovered. These principal themes found in the experiences and perceptions of the boys interviewed include: The Expectations Placed on Boys, The Challenges of Being a Boy, and The Normalization of Negative Boy Behaviour.

Based on the interview transcripts, all participants identified that there are societal expectations placed on boys, whether they personally believed these expectations were intrinsic or societal constructions. Either explicitly or implicitly, participants all referenced negative behaviour being the norm when boys deviate from expected societal gender roles. Finally, most participants noted, either directly or indirectly, that being a boy is difficult, specifically more difficult than being a girl.

### *The Expectations Placed on Boys*

All participants stated in their interviews that boys had expectations placed on them, both in and out of school. Their accounts of what these expectations were and how severely they experienced these expectations varied. This theme around the expectations boys encounter closely aligned with findings in the literature.

**Emotional and Physical Strength.** Overwhelmingly, participants in the study agreed that boys were expected to be "tough". When prompted to elaborate, the idea of being tough could equate to either emotional or physical strength. The term had multiple meanings to the participants, as they equated it to both physical strength as well as to holding power over some of their emotions.

Several participants talked specifically about feeling that society has the belief that boys should be physically strong. Indeed, the specific term "strong" was used consistently by participants when asked what it meant to be a boy and what society expected of boys. Arthur Morgan stated, "I guess they expect boys to act manly and strong […] burly, they like lifting weights". Iron Spider said that boys "can be weak, they can be strong, but people expect them to be strong". There was a clear awareness that all boys are not always innately strong, but that the societal expectation of strength is understood to be part of male traits. Strength was also brought up as a feature which boys may contrast and compare themselves against others. Iron Spider stated that "when you're a boy people expect you to be better, like maybe stronger than other people". He continued and noted that sometimes "[boys] don't feel strong enough, like they're useless compared to every person that's stronger than them". Oscar said that "even though people say boys are tough, some girls can be strong too." The inclusion of these points show that these participants are aware of the expectation of physical strength and do notice differences both among themselves and girls. This physical strength relates directly to existing literature noting the importance of athleticism in negotiating one's masculinity (Burns & Kehler, 2014; Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011) at school. These participants clearly recognized the expectation of strength and athleticism in being seen as male.

Participants' discussions of strength also included emotional strength, specifically around concealing or suppressing certain emotions. This aligns with past literature noting that boys often have the feeling that they are wearing a mask in order to fit in (Newsom, 2015). Iron Man stated that "if you get hurt you can't really show your emotion […] so you kind of have to hide it." This sentiment extended specifically to outward displays of emotion such as crying. In discussing society's expectations of boys, Arthur Morgan noted "I guess someone who would think, like, boys don't cry, boys are more manly, they like sports, or they don't like pink". Iron Spider stated that "when a boy wants to cry or something they [other people] expect more. Like, they're not going to cry because they're boys, you know?" These ideals around how males are expected to behave impacts how boys feel they are able to display their emotions.

The term "tough" was also used by participants to relate to both physical and emotional strength. Tough was identified as being the opposite of the feminine trait of "weakness" or showing feminized emotions, such as showing sadness, being scared, or possessing empathy. For example, when Iron Spider was asked what it meant to be a boy, his response was "tough, not sad and stuff". Iron Man noted that "in most situations you have to act the way, act more tough, act more – not more aggressive, but you kind of have to show less emotion than you normally would [because you're a boy]." These statements demonstrate the recognized understanding that stereotypical feminine traits, such as sadness, are not as desirable as their male counterparts, specifically here "toughness" and "strength". Additionally, Iron Man discussing the ways in which males are expected to "act more tough" enforces Butler's (1988) assertation that gender is performative and that there are stylized ways of enacting and embodying male and female.

**Opposite of Feminine.** Most participants felt that boys and girls were different from one another. In fact, many participants who were not able to initially articulate what it meant to be a

boy, were able to when posed with the question "is a boy different than a girl?". This is consistent with current literature, which notes that gender stereotypes are diametrically opposed as they only exist in opposition to one another (Capra, 1996; Connell, 2008, p. 134). While some participants made it clear that they believe that males and females are not different, even these participants noted that society believes that males and females are different.

Bob #1 pointed out the gender differences in crime, as well as in the perception that a criminal, such as a thief, would be a male. He stated, "criminals are more generally boys. I have no clue why, but cops and stuff like that, people generally think of robbers, criminal offenders, whatever, as boys, because there's more bad people, I guess, than girls." The idea that boys are more "bad" than girls was elaborated on by Bob #1, who noted that "some girls could be bad, just like boys. But boys have a bad reputation." The idea that boys are seen a certain way by society and carry a "bad reputation" was felt by participants in various ways, as many felt that this reputation resulted in different treatment than female peers. Oscar stated, "sometimes boys would be mistreated, unlike girls. They would be treated differently, unlike us, most of the time we would get yelled at […] for doing something wrong". Due to the idea that boys are "bad" and should be disciplined, some boys in this study felt that they were yelled at or treated unfairly compared to girls.

Due to the feelings that boys and girls are different, and that boys have a specific reputation, some participants reflected on differences in behaviour which fall into traditional gender stereotypes. For example, Pierre discussed the differences in how boys and girls may respond to a bullied peer. He said, "standing up for a friend that's being bullied, like that can be different sometimes […] they both [boys and girls] do it, but the way they do it is somewhat different. [A boy] might stand in front of the person being bullied and then say something. Just

say “stop it” in a very loud manner, and then girls might tell a teacher”. The physicality of using one’s body and increasing the volume of their voice is a typically male way of displaying physical aggression and strength in an attempt to stop another person from doing something. Meanwhile, telling a teacher about another person’s behaviour is more passive, and more typically a feminine trait.

It was also pointed out that boys and girls have innately different interests. When discussing what makes boys and girls different, Bob #2 stated that “we’ve got different interests […] if there’s like a five-year-old boy and five-year-old girl, that five-year-old girl probably wants Barbies, and the boy wants something cool or something”. Not only does this statement evidently show the belief that boys and girls are different, it also implies that conventionally female interests are not “cool”, while male interests are. This belief indicates that male and female are separate from one another and opposite in nature, supporting literature which presents the two as dichotomous, and male as superior (Capra, 1996; Drudy, 2008; Martino & Kehler, 2007; Pateman, 2016; Patil, 2013; Pinar et al., 1995; Quinn, 2019; Skelton, 2002, 2009).

**Heterosexual.** Some participants noted the importance of a boy being seen as heterosexual. When asked what might happen if a boy did not follow traditional and accepted rules of masculinity, participants noted that they may be called “gay”. When questioned further, the participants noted that they felt that there was nothing wrong with being gay, but that it was still considered an insult. There did not appear to be understanding from participants that a term being considered insulting insinuates that it is negative or unacceptable. When asked what would make other people judge him, Iron Spider stated “maybe if I acted gay?” When questioned further about why people judge gay people, he said “maybe because they won’t accept people that are gay into their lives”, which accentuates that the unacceptability of gay people comes

from others, not from his own beliefs or ideas. It was also expressed that behaviour that may be seen as "gay" was specifically not acceptable among peers at school or in other social settings. Oscar explained that this was the case for boys "because they don't want to get embarrassed in front of his class or his friends". He noted that a boy would be unable to "act gay" at "school, yeah. But at home – yeah, he could do that." The assumption of these participants was that heteronormativity was normal, while homosexuality was not. Further, they felt that school was an unsafe place to be seen as homosexual.

When asked about what may be considered "gay", participants discussed activities traditionally associated with females. In discussing boys who played with girls or took part in traditionally female activities, participants noted that it was okay for boys to do such, but others may view them as homosexual. When discussing the traditionally feminine activity of playing with dolls, Iron Spider stated that "it would be okay if [a boy] brought in a doll, but some people wouldn't accept it [...] They'd judge them because they maybe think they like the same gender". Similarly, Bob #2 discussed boys who play with dolls, stating "I mean, some kids say that they're like – like they're gay just because of playing Barbies. I think they just like to play with Barbies." The correlation with feminized interests, such as dolls, and sexuality is clearly ingrained in participants' ideals. When asked why boys are expected to behave in specific ways, Oscar noted that "if us boys act like girls they would think that we're gay or pretty much like other boys." Again, the possibility of been called "gay" is a fear in which participants said encourages boys to act in specific ways. The assumption of homosexuality and implication that it is abnormal or negative further acts to reinforce heteronormativity.

**Physical Appearance.** When asked what a boy looks like, several participants noted that a boy is expected to be muscular, be good at sports, and be a person who has short hair. These

were very specific observations, and both are assumptions based on traditional views of what it means to be male. Iron Man said a boy might get made fun of "if he was bad at sports". Bob #1 said that "some boys that don't like basketball […] then [other boys are] like, 'oh, he doesn't like playing basketball, he's never going to make it,' and stuff like that."

When asked what society expects from boys, Arthur Morgan stated that people "expect boys to act manly and strong [...] burly, they like lifting weights [...] physically strong". The idea that boys and girls should like and wear different colours was also pointed out. Arthur Morgan continued, saying,

> I guess someone who would think like boys don't cry, boys are more like manly, they like sports more or they don't like pink, nah, nah, nah. And then it's always like, 'No boys like pink' [...] Like it's just – I wear any kind of colour. But I don't think that, 'Ew, pink is gross, I don't want to wear pink, that's like girls' [...] No, there isn't a difference – there isn't girl colours or boy colours. That's not a thing.

Also bringing up sports and colour preferences, Arthur Morgan said that the expectation for boys is that "boys like sports, and blue, and boy colours, and they have short hair". Arthur Morgan also pointed out that he does not follow these rules, saying "obviously, I'm not following that because I have very long hair". The participant's self awareness in his choice to look different than most other boys was evident. When asked about this, he recalled a time in which a previous teacher had commented on the length of his hair: "My grade two teacher kept telling me to cut my hair. And I think she [was] thinking of traditional masculinity". The participant elaborated by noting that he thought that the teacher was also thinking of the impact of his hair length on his schoolwork, stating that she may have made comments "because I had my hair in my eyes all the time, because my hair was at around [chin] length then". Reflecting on the comments made by

his past teacher, the participant concluded, “I think she probably thought of traditional masculinity [...] It was a little bit uncomfortable [...] Now I don’t have as fond of memories about that teacher”. Clearly, this participant had felt singled out by his teacher and made to feel different, further exemplifying the norm of boys conforming to a specific physical appearance.

### *The Challenges of Being a Boy*

All participants in the study identified that being a boy was challenging. They described their challenges in different ways and identified various struggles related to being a boy. To elaborate upon this point, not only did participants note that being a boy was hard, but several participants, notably Arthur Morgan, Iron Spider, Iron Man, and Bob #1, also changed the tone of their voice during their interview in order to emphasize the difficulties they encountered due to being male.

**More Difficult Than Being a Girl.** Participants stated both explicitly and implicitly that being a boy was more difficult than being a girl. When asked to elaborate, participants gave several reasons for their statements. Oscar felt that society felt that boys were less important than girls, making it difficult to be a boy. When asked about what it is like to be a boy versus being a girl, he stated, “it is different, because most of the times it is pretty hard [...] most people think that girls would be more important than boys”. Iron Spider felt that girls had less expectations than boys did, saying “girls have less expectations because they - they don’t, they maybe don’t get judged as much if something happens”. When asked why he felt girls were not judged as much, he said that perhaps it was because “people don’t really care if girls are strong or weak”. Along the same lines as being perceived as strong, when asked about girls showing more emotions than boys, Iron Man explained that “sometimes, some girls or some friends I know they can talk more with their friends […] because with their friends maybe they can relate more

and stuff". Many of the participants discussed feelings of having to be strong and hide their emotions, which they felt girls did not have to do. Some also discussed the different treatment they felt that girls and boys received. Oscar said that "sometimes boys would be mistreated, unlike girls" He elaborated by stating that girls "would be treated differently, unlike us, most of the time we would get yelled at, or yelled at or for being – for doing something wrong". When asked why he thought this happened, he said, "because a boy, they can – it doesn't feel like they will get heartbroken or get sad". This further develops the idea that boys are emotionally stronger than girls and do not experience the same feelings of sadness or hurt.

**Preconceived Notions Make Free-Choice Difficult.** During interviews, some of the participants noted that, due to the expectations placed on boys, they have a challenging time being free to participate in activities of their choice, show their emotions, and communicate in the ways they want to. Some participants brought this up when discussing differences between boys and girls, noting that they felt girls had an easier time showing emotions, communicating with peers, and making choices to do things they wanted to. Iron Man discussed that boys are expected to control their emotions and appear strong, whereas girls have more freedom to express their feelings. He stated, "[girls] can show more emotion, show more – they can do more things that they want to, they actually want to do". It is clear from his statement that he feels boys are not as freely able to show emotion or do some of the things they want to do. When asked how he felt about girls being able to do more things than boys he said, "sometimes it frustrates me, but I kind of understand it. [...] I know that there's more stuff I want to do". He clearly felt that he was not fully able to participate in activities he wanted to do, noting his frustration, yet he resigned to this being the norm. Iron Man also noted that boys act "a lot differently" than girls. When asked by this was, he said that "in my opinion, girls they have

more, they can act more freely than boys because boys, it's always like kind of peer pressure to do some stuff that I don't want to". The same participant also spoke specifically about feeling pressured into doing things or going places that he would prefer not to. He stated that other boys may "invite you to go to a place to hang out after school but you don't want to because you have something better to do. Well, you can't really say no or else all of them get mad at you". When asked what it looked like when a group of boys would "get mad", He said that "they'll argue, talk back, stuff like that".

Some participants also specifically mentioned the pressure to participate in sports when they may not want to. Bob #1 said, "people playing basketball might try and peer-pressure [other boys] into coming and playing, when they don't want to play that certain sport". He also noted that people trying to get another boy to participate in a sport – in this case basketball – may start name-calling. He explained, "they're saying, 'come on, come on, don't be a wimp,' or whatever". He further elaborated, describing how a boy feeling peer-pressured to participate may feel, stating, "the person in that situation, being peer-pressured to come, then that person might think – or boy – might think that 'oh, I'd better play basketball or else I'm going to get hurt'". Iron Man stated "if don't want to do something, let's say for example in gym, let's say they're doing badminton. If I don't want to do it, well, I still kind of half to because everybody else might be doing it". These participant's descriptions of how a boy may feel pressured into participating in un-preferred activities clearly shows how freedom of choice may be difficult for boys in some situations.

**Expectations of Boys Are Higher.** Interestingly, some participants noted that boys have higher expectations than girls. This was discussed in various ways by the participants. Iron Spider stated that "when you're a boy people expect you to be better, like maybe stronger than

other people". Here, he did not explicitly note that boys are expected to be "better" or "stronger" than girls, but the recognized opposite of "boy" in society is "girl", so the implication that boys are expected to be better than girls is felt by this participant. He noted that he felt that expectations created an inequitable division, noting that "[boys] expect to be better than most people [...] And I just don't think that's fair for a lot of people". In discussing if expectations for boys were different at school and outside of school, Iron Spider said that "people still expect a lot from you, maybe your parents or your grandparents, a lot of people. Maybe an adult they expect [boys] to be the better person than the other partner". When asked about how he felt about the expectations that were placed on boys, the participant went on to say that boys "don't feel strong enough, like they're useless compared to every person that's stronger than them, like another person [...] weak". Again, the idea of physical and emotional strength is discussed, with this participant noting that failing to meet expectations may make boys feel "weak", which is traditionally thought of as a feminine trait.

### *The Normalization of Negative Boy Behaviour*

One of the overarching themes found in the study is the way in which participants seemed to normalize and accept negative behaviours from other boys. This appeared in three major ways: first in the ways in which boys communicated with one another, second in the ways in which boys described that "other boys" commonly engaged in negative behaviour and talk, and finally in the consistent verbiage around acceptance of negative behaviours and a belief of "that's just the way it is".

**Negative Communication Among Friends.** An interesting point to note from the interviews was the way in which boys described behaviour and communication among friends, as well as that in which they described "bullying" behaviour. Bullying behaviour was brought up by

participants as behaviour and language that included excluding peers, name calling, and teasing. However, all three of these were also described as common behaviour among friends and peers. Participants clearly identified negative and unliked behaviours as bullying, but when speaking of experiences they had with friends, they seemed unable to discern that these behaviours were also negative in nature. In discussing why he would not write honest or thoughtful answers during class assignments, Iron Man said "when I say or write it out it will be a lot different than what I thought [...] because sometimes the answers you put, let's say if your friend walks over to talk so that they can compare their answers and stuff, maybe they can laugh at you and still maybe make fun of you". This participant was so concerned about how friends may perceive and react to his honest thoughts, that he censored the work he completed in school. The idea of keeping personal feelings and information away from friends was an interesting point that was brought up. Iron Man also described friends telling others about his private information, saying "sometimes, if I tell them something, the next day the word can get out and spread and when I only told that one person … [it would] kind of make me mad. I wouldn't trust a person as much, kind of break something in our relationship". While he said it would hurt the relationship, he did not say that the friendship would be over, signifying that some behaviour from friends, though disliked, is still accepted. Similar to speaking behind a friend's back, some participant said that if they were to resist social norms boys are expected to follow, friends may treat them differently. Bob #1 stated that boys "might get picked on and stuff and getting said mean things and stuff" by friends for not playing an accepted game. Iron Man said, "I could get left out, maybe ignored, maybe be insulted, maybe just [...] I would be talked of differently maybe? Like I would hear some rumours behind my back". Though they were both speaking hypothetically about what could occur if they were to not follow expected norms, it is interesting to note their assumptions about

what people they considered friends may do. In discussing a peer who had been bullied for being "annoying", Iron Man said that if he were to have attempted to befriend the bullied student, his friends would begin to ostracize him as well. He explained, "I mean they wouldn't really hang out, talk with me as much, hang out with me as much. I wouldn't really see them anymore". Again, he was discussing a hypothetical situation, but it is still interesting to note that his expectation about being friends with an unliked peer was that his friends would then bully him, which is behaviour not generally associated with friendship. Iron Man also described an incident that had happened with a friend in which he was ignored after doing something that the friend, presumably, did not like. He said,

> a friend wanted me to sleep over at his house, right? But I didn't want to because the next day – it's not like I had something to do, it's just that I just, I really didn't want to. So, then he asked why didn't I want to? I just said, 'I just don't feel like it.' Then he got mad at me and then he tried to – and then he just stopped talking to me.

When asked about what happened to their friendship, the participant said that nothing else happened, and they remained friends, indicating that the behaviour had been dismissed. Name calling was also discussed by Iron Man as a way in which friends peer pressured one another. He said,

> Let's say you're skateboarding, and you don't want to do it because you're scared that you maybe fall down and get hurt, they'll call you a chicken because you don't want to do it. Or they'll call you boring because this thing, because at the time they'll just think that you don't want to do it because you're not fun.

He clearly felt that friends peer pressured and used names meant to indicate a lack of bravery – which is traditionally feminine – as a common way to communicate with one another. While these are not kind behaviours, this participant described them as common.

**Other Boys, Not Them.** Several participants expressed the negative behaviours of other boys while ensuring they used verbiage that explicitly stated that they were speaking of "other" boys when they described these behaviours and experiences. More implicitly, some participants described experiences or behaviours they said were common to boys, but othered themselves by stating that these boys were likely of a different age or attended a different school. They wanted to ensure the researcher understood that it was not them who experienced or participated in these actions.

The idea that boys who engaged in negative behaviours were in a different age group was identified during interviews. When asked if he felt that he had to behave a certain way because he was a boy, Iron Spider answered "no [...] it's mostly for older boys than not younger". When asked to elaborate on this, he said, "because they're older, that's one more responsibility that comes for them and expectations". He clearly felt that as boys got older, they began to have more responsibility and more expectations around what being a boy meant. The same participant noted that he did not see boys bullied "because I don't hang around with older boys, mostly younger people. But if I were to see, maybe I would see it happen if I saw older boys".

When asked to describe boys, Bob #1 said that "they can be rowdy, some of them". He very clearly paused to elaborate that only some boys can be rowdy, implying that he was not one of these boys. When asked to elaborate further, he explained that "some boys have – they have had bad nature, I guess you would say [...] some boys bully people and stuff". Again, he clearly identified that some boys, not him, were naturally "bad".

In asking participants what boys were like, when describing negative behaviours, several participants specifically used the wording of "some boys" rather than "boys". Bob #1 noted that "some boys might think that it's OK to steal people's lunches inside of school". He also noted that "some boys that don't like basketball, and people want them to like basketball, they're like, 'why don't you like it, why do you like that video,' you know, and stuff like that. And they're like, 'just play with us, just get in here'". When asked what happens when some boys start peer pressuring them, the participant noted that these boys "get mad and then they start telling rumours and start spreading that stuff".

**Lack of Resistance, Despite Self-Identifying as Resistant.** Another interesting thing to note was that all boys who participated in the study self-identified as boys who resist gender norms and have a different experience of being a boy than others. However, when they were questioned about what resistance looks like, and what happens to boys who resist norms, including themselves, the overwhelming response was that boys are expected to simply live with and accept these norms. This theme came up with both emotional and physical pain. When discussing feeling emotionally hurt, Iron Man explained: "Let's say that somebody, that calls you a name, a name that really hurt, you can't really cry about it or show that you're mad or sad about it. You kind of have to play it off and play it off like nothing happened. Like you're okay with it, you're fine". He also discussed getting hurt physically and said, "if you get hurt you can't really, really show your emotion [...] so you kind of have to hide it". He went on to explain that if a boy were to get hurt, "you kind of like just play it off or you just act like nothing really happened". Again, Iron Man references the response of boys to act in an appropriate way for a male to do. While a boy may have wanted to cry, get angry, or show resistance in another way,

Iron Man felt that it was necessary to perform in a way in which a male is "supposed to" – here by "play[ing] it off" – in order to hide being physically hurt (Butler, 1988; Butler, 1990/1999).

This idea of ignoring negative behaviours or acting as if they were fine with it was discussed in terms of participants' own experiences, as well as in events they had witnessed. Bob #1 described a time in which he stood up to a peer being bullied. He said, "I told them to back off or else I'll pretty much tell the teacher [...] So they didn't [...] And I told him – I told them one more chance to stop, they said, 'What are you going to do about it?' And I was like, 'Well you guys are going to get in trouble anyways'". At this point during the interview, the participant shrugged his shoulders, indicating that he "gave up" on speaking with the bullies at that point. In discussing a male peer he had seen being bullied, Iron Man said "I think [he] went to go tell the teacher at one point, but other times he didn't really do that much. He just kind of took it and didn't do anything about it". These stories indicate these participants' acceptance of letting the negative behaviours go and ignoring them or trusting that a teacher would intervene.

Iron Man told another story of a peer being bullied for being "annoying" and said that he did not intervene "because it was kind of, it was stuff that he did and it kind of escalated that it was too much for me to encourage him because it got to the point where it was really bad. Everybody was telling the teacher of the stuff he did but at that point I couldn't really do anything about it". Bob #1 also told a story of a friend who did not want to participate in an activity and ended up "giving in" and joining because it was easier than not conforming with his peers' preferred activity. He said, "originally, one of my friends, he was friends with them, the people on the court, but then he wasn't really into the sport [basketball], and then he was picked on and stuff. And then he was, like, 'okay, I see what the kind of cool things are happening, I'm going to go to join them'". It seemed that the most resistant activity participants engaged in was

simply not caring or ignoring negative behaviour, rather than actively standing up to in. Oscar stated, “I feel okay being myself at school because I don’t really care if people judge me. It doesn’t really hurt me”. Bob #2 said, “I just don’t mind them if they call me names [...] I just don’t care”. This is interesting to note as these participants resisting norms are doing so silently. It is unlikely that any negative behaviours they experience or witness will change without active resistance to societal gender norms.

**Summary**

This chapter discussed the in-depth thematic analysis of interview transcripts which was conducted, uncovering three overarching themes present in their experiences. Each of these themes was examined thoroughly in order to provide interpretation of the participants’ lived experience. Chapter five will discuss the findings from the study, as well as discuss implications for future research. A further discussion will also highlight the meaning these findings may have on other male students and on those working with boys in education. Finally, an overview of the limitations and implications of the researcher will be included.

# CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

## Introduction

This study explored the phenomenological experience of boys' perceptions of hegemonic masculinity at school. Each of the participants discussed their own experiences, beliefs, and attitudes about being a boy. The objective of this study was to answer the following research question and its sub-questions:

1. How do adolescent Albertan boys who resist the norms of hegemonic masculinity perceive it in their school community?
    a. In what ways have they experienced hegemonic masculinity being reinscribed and reinforced?
    b. How do they describe their experiences of resisting the rules of hegemonic masculinity?
    c. In what ways do they describe repercussions for resisting the rules of hegemonic masculinity?

## Summary of the Themes

This study explored the lived experiences of seven adolescent Albertan boys who self-identify as resisting the rules of hegemonic masculinity. An analysis of the participants' interviews revealed three primary themes: The Expectations Placed on Boys, The Challenges of Being a Boy, and The Normalization of Negative Boy Behaviour. These three themes offer a comprehensive interpretation of the participants' lived experiences and perceptions of being a boy. In particular, the theme of The Expectations Placed on Boys aligns closely with the existing literature on boys' experiences at school and in society. The other two themes, The Challenges of

Being a Boy and The Normalization of Negative Boy Behaviour, also align with the prevailing literature, but offer some experiences and perceptions less commonly represented in the research.

The first theme, The Expectations Placed on Boys explored participants' experiences and ideas around what they believe society expects of them. Throughout the interviews, participants discussed feelings and lived-experiences in which they felt boys had certain expectations to live up to. Participants talked about living up to being seen as "strong", both emotionally and physically. Participants also stated explicitly that being a boy meant not acting or appearing "feminine". The expectation that boys are heterosexual was also discussed by participants. Finally, fitting into an expectation of what boys should physically look like was discussed by participants.

The second theme, The Challenges of Being a Boy explored participants' perceptions of what made being a boy difficult. Participants felt that being a boy was more difficult than being a girl. They also felt that ideas society has about what it means to be a boy made it difficult for them to consistently make choices or do things they wanted to do. Finally, participants discussed that boys have expectations which are higher than those of girls.

The third theme, The Normalization of Negative Boy Behaviour explored ways in which participants minimized and normalized the negative words and actions made by boys. Within this theme, the negative ways in which boys communicate with one another was discussed. The ways participants highlighted that negative actions and word were performed by "other" boys or "some" boys, but not by them was discussed. Finally, the participants all self-identified as individuals who resisted gender norms, yet when discussing resisting or opposing these norms, the participants all described incidents or feelings of surrendering and allowing negative behaviours to continue or hoping that it would be dealt with by an adult. This behaviour from

participants supports the power of hegemonic masculinity and how it is ingrained in our society (Connell, 1995/2005); their lack of action could be a result of fear or inability to understand the hierarchy at play.

Themes from this study converge with the existing literature as well as introduce points which have been less investigated and could benefit from further meaning making and research. Research on adolescent boys in Alberta should continue to be investigated. Additionally, research into boys in Alberta from non-urban centres would provide further insight to perspectives from other areas in the province. Further research can be done on how adolescent boys navigate gender identity and hegemonic masculinity in a post-#MeToo society in which social media plays a significant role in communication and access to knowledge. Finally, research can be completed regarding how adolescent boys might resist gender norms in safe ways and what challenges this can present to them.

**Connections and Contributions to the Literature**

The findings in the present study both connect to and contribute to existing literature. Most participants noted differences between what it means to be a boy versus be a girl. The participants consistently reinforced the established understanding that being a boy is the opposite of being a girl. This aligns with research noting the dichotomous nature of masculine and feminine (Capra, 1996; Connell, 2008, p. 134). Further, participants identified that things considered feminine were considered negative and something that, if a boy were to engage with them, would cause social isolation or being called names, supporting existing research (Capra, 1996; Drudy, 2008; Martino & Kehler, 2007; Pateman, 2016; Patil, 2013; Pinar et al., 1995; Quinn, 2019; Skelton, 2002, 2009).

Consistent with existing research, findings of the present study indicated that boys have specific physical attributes, such as being athletic and muscular, and have the expectation of participating in sports (Connell, 2008; Bennett, 2016; Burns & Kehler, 2014; Skelton, 2000; Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). Participants discussed the expectation of being physically strong and participating in traditionally male activities, such as sports, reinforcing and contributing to literature around athletic ability playing a large role in which boys dominate socially (Bennett, 2016; Burns & Kehler, 2014; Connell, 2008; Skelton, 2000; Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011).

Boys are expected to not enjoy or participate in "feminine" activities, also situating the present findings alongside previous research (Braun & Davidson, 2017; Kagesten, et al., 2016; Kehler, 2007; Kehler & Greig, 2005; Kehler & Martino, 2007; Martino, 2000; Newsom Siebel, 2015). Participants also discussed the possibility of being thought of as homosexual in a negative light, consistent with existing research in the field (Braun & Davidson, 2017; Callaghan, 2018; Epstein, 1997; Lapointe, 2015).

The participants in the present study discussed ways in which they felt as though they are expected to fit into a specific role and how other boys may call them names or spread rumours about them if they do not fit into these roles. Despite society seeming to be more accepting of differences in gender, participants shared lived experiences that support research around boys feeling as though they are policed or actively police other boys (Connell, 1995/2005; Kagesten et al., 2016; Kehler, 2007, 2020; Kehler & Greig, 2005; Kehler & Martino, 2007).

**Making Meaning and Understanding the Findings**

The area of masculinity has been thoroughly studied and past research can support in understanding the findings from the present study. Established research can be used to aid in understanding participants' perceptions and lived experiences.

The questions informing this study were based upon resistance, but upon completion of interviews and coding data, participants' experiences appeared to be more aligned with their navigating of masculinity in their lives, rather than aggressively or confidently resisting it. It is interesting to note that all boys who participated in the study self-identified as individuals who resisted gender norms, however, none of the participants actively stood up to established gender norms and behaviours or activities they identified as negative in ways traditionally seen as resistant (such as marches, protests, or profound non-conformity). Rather, they appeared to resist through acceptance, noticing accepted rules, silence, and compliance. Instead of taking a bold stand against peers who they did not agree with, they simply gave up, or they would inform a teacher. This is likely to be the result of the enforced rules of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995/2005). There has been research noting that boys are unlikely to challenge accepted norms or boys higher on the social ladder (McGuffey & Rich, 1999; Skelton & Francis, 2011). Rather, real change in socially accepted behaviours tend to only occur if a boy who is high in the hierarchy within hegemonic masculinity accepts a change and popularizes it (McGuffey & Rich, 1999; Skelton & Francis, 2011). It is likely that participants who discussed negative experiences they witnessed or were part of felt it safer to simply comply with the behaviours, despite recognizing them as negative, as school may become less comfortable for them if they did actively resist norms. Indeed, many of the participants speculated that if themselves or another boy were to actively and aggressively resist gender norms, it was likely that they would be talked about behind their backs or called names. Aligning with existing literature, names they were likely to be called were things such as "gay" or "chicken"; terms used to gender them as more closely aligning to girls than boys and target sexuality or weakness (Braun & Davidson, 2017; Epstein, 1997; Lapointe, 2015).

Participants not taking a more actively resistant position against hegemonic masculinity could also be due to living in Alberta. Alberta has a history of both social and fiscal conservatism (The Canada Guide, 2021) and has been economically reliant on male-dominated farming and oil and gas industries (Alberta Culture and Tourism, 2021; Gerson, 2019; Levinson-King, 2019; Thomas, 2018). Alberta is also only one of three provinces still publicly funding Catholic schools, which tend to adhere to traditional heteronormative ideals (Coren, 2020; Fletcher, 2018; Government of Alberta, 2021). Furthermore, the government has made it more difficult for students to start Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), further implying that heteronormativity is the norm in schools and communities (French, 2019; Ramsay, 2019; Sharpe, 2020). Having majority conservative beliefs and a large portion of the male workforce working in "blue-collar" jobs results in a province structured heavily on heteronormative norms. Living in a province with many heteronormative norms in place could result in participants having a more challenging time actively resisting structures which have been so normalized. Indeed, in communities where heteronormativity and traditional ideals of what it means to be male are standard, even recognizing and noting that there is an expected way to enact being a boy, that not all boys adhere to, is a way of resisting the social structure and norms in place.

Another point of interest from the present study is the ways in which participants all witnessed or were part of negative lived experiences in regard to socially accepted views of how to be a boy, yet they distanced themselves from these instances. They noted that boys who were older would engage in negative behaviours, but not them. Or they would use the verbiage "some boys" to clarify that it was not them participating in this type of communication or behaviour. However, many of them were describing incidents that happened to them or among their friends. Despite noting that it was other boys that participated in negative gendered behaviours, some

participants noted that they remained friends with boys who had broken their trust, excluded them for not wanting to participate in an activity, or called them names. One possibility for this is that participants may have been censoring answers from the researcher for fear of potential repercussion or because they did not want to be viewed in a negative light (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Another potential reason for this is that the participants were so accustomed to this type of behaviour and communication, that they did not notice how prevalent it was among their peers and friendship groups. Organizing and gendering activities and preferences begins at a young age and the hierarchy within hegemonic masculinity is prevalent within schools and external communities (Capra, 1996; Connell 1995/2005). It is very likely that participants have been so exposed to these behaviours from friends, peers, the media, and other community members that they fail to fully recognize when they are involved in them.

## Implications of the Research

**For Boys.** This study provides various implications for adolescent boys, both in and out of school environments. Firstly, participants were able to clearly articulate their perceptions around what it means to be a boy. These perceptions closely aligned with existing research, indicating little change in the past several years regarding society's understanding of male. This is despite the #MeToo movement and examples of more diverse gender roles being portrayed in mainstream media (Burrell, 2018; Godwin, 2018; Kehler, 2020; Meyers, 2021).

**For Educators.** This study offers several implications for educators. The three themes which developed from participants' interviews indicate that boys face specific challenges that are worthwhile for educators to understand. Teachers can use the findings to recognize that boys may feel the need to hide their feelings and emotions for fear of being called names or seen as weak. Boys may also have a challenging time speaking to school staff in regard to negative

behaviour they have experienced or witnessed. Boys in this study seemed to have a difficult time challenging negative actions themselves, but noted that they may tell a teacher or hope that an adult would intervene. Teachers may benefit from recognizing that words or actions which may seem minor or like normal behaviour between male friends might be important to intervene on and address. Discussions around negative behaviours and why it is being done may help students be able to recognize power structures and norms. They may also help students feel more empowered to stand up themselves and speak out when they witness or experience negative behaviours in their own lives.

**Further Areas to Investigate.** Much of the responses from participants' interviews supported existing research. However, some findings introduced themes which previous research has not fully explored and would be worthwhile for further investigation. The normalization of negative behaviours, both from peers and those described as friends, is worthwhile to investigate. Why is it that these behaviours understood and described as negative by participants are still accepted as normal social behaviour? Further to this point, the acceptance of these negative behaviours without opposition would be an area worth investigating. In particular, participants self-identifying as individuals who resisted gender norms, but who did not articulate any active resistance to events in which they witnessed negative behaviours is an area which could be further investigated. What do these individuals believe it looks like to actively stand up to and resist gender norms and/or hegemonic masculinity? Perhaps merely acknowledging and understanding that there are socially acceptable ways to enact gender roles is considered a form of resisting gender norms? An area to further research could involve the steps in which boys take to actively oppose hegemonic masculinity. For example, perhaps the first step is acknowledging accepted roles, the second step may be not participating in a popular sport, and so on. In relation

to that, further investigation could be done in regard to boys' experiences around the possible steps involved in resisting gender norms and hegemonic masculinity. There is also further research that can be done regarding Alberta boys. Alberta still remains a distinctive province within Canada and its ever-changing political, economic, and social identity makes it a unique place to grow up, particularly for boys who resist the rules of masculinity. The participants in the present study were all from a large city. It would be beneficial to conduct research with participants from other locations, especially ones that may lack the diversity and resources a larger city does. Finally, there is research that can still be done around themes which do not directly involve adolescent boy participants. Research can be done around ways in which teachers and/or other school staff work to make school a safe place for all gender identities and individuals who do not comply with traditional gender roles. Worth researching may also be how school staff or other adults respond if and when boys report negative gendered behaviours which they have normalized. Similarly, it would also be useful to conduct research in how educators and school staff view boy behaviours; do they witness negative behaviours? If they do witness negative behaviours, what are their reactions? Related, it would also be worth investigating the experiences of teachers and/or support staff who themselves resist gender rules. Do they find themselves having to follow specific rules? Are they able to support students who also feel that they do not comply with society's expectations around gender?

**Limitations of the Research**

The largest limitation this study has was that the participants may have been – either consciously or unconsciously – biased toward providing "correct" answers, or what they presumed I wanted to hear (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Additionally, six of the seven participants knew me as a teacher in their school, which could have impacted their interviews.

As the intention of the study is to understand their perceptions, I did not want them to believe there was an ultimate "truth" being sought, only to understand their own lived experiences. My intention was to capture the most accurate and true accounts of participants' experiences and understandings of being male at school and deviating from their community's rules of gender norms. The mere fact that participants were formally interviewed for a study resulted in an abnormal experience for participants. This could have potentially altered the way participants thought about the concept being explored and resulted in them providing answers they normally would not have considered (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). This could have been positive or negative, as it may have resulted in responses that participants believed the researcher was searching for, or it may have resulted in them reflecting deeply on their own lived experiences and providing insight they had never before considered. Six of the seven participants all attending the same school is also a limitation as it does not provide the scope of perspectives that participants in other communities may have provided. Additionally, some of the participants were friends with one another and could have discussed what they would speak about before interviews.

Though interviewing only seven participants could be considered a limitation in other forms of research, it is not considered a limitation of phenomenological research (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Leavy, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Rundles, 2012). Having a large sample size is important in applying the results of research to the larger population, but one key point of phenomenology is that is not generalizable since it focuses on individuals own lived experiences and assumes that all human understanding and experience is unique (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Leavy, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In order to have the time and ability to thoroughly delve into participants' views and perceptions, I aimed to interview five to ten participants. Due

to this, the findings cannot and should not be assumed to reflect the views of multiple other adolescent boys who do not follow the rules of hegemonic masculinity in other areas. The findings are intended to represent only the participants' experiences and to inform my own understanding and practice as an educator (Randles, 2012).

## Conclusion

The objective of this study was to answer the following research question and its sub-questions:

1. How do adolescent Albertan boys who resist the norms of hegemonic masculinity perceive it in their school community?
    a. In what ways have they experienced hegemonic masculinity being reinscribed and reinforced?
    b. How do they describe their experiences of resisting the rules of hegemonic masculinity?
    c. In what ways do they describe repercussions for resisting the rules of hegemonic masculinity?

Using a phenomenological research method, participants' lived experiences and perceptions were obtained via one-on-one semi-structured interviews and transcribed for analysis. Based on the ideas which emerged in the analysis, the participants identified three central themes common to their experiences: The Expectations Placed on Boys, The Challenges of Being a Boy, and The Normalization of Negative Boy Behaviour. Participants described that they felt boys have various expectations placed on them, from how they should look to how they behave. They felt that boys faced many challenges, and many felt they were not always able to do or say what they wanted to for fear of repercussions. Finally, participants described lived experiences which

further acted to reinscribe negative behaviours often enacted by fellow boys. Participants all self-identified as resistant to gender norms, however their perceptions and experiences demonstrate a navigation of masculinity and gender roles more so than an active resistance to these established gender norms. Much of the findings from this study are consistent with the existing literature, while some would benefit from further investigation and understanding. This study provides a beginning understanding of some Albertan boys' who resist the rules of masculinity's perceptions of hegemonic masculinity.

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# APPENDIX A
## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER/ASSENT FORM

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**Alberta Boys' Lived Experiences at School: Resisting Hegemonic Masculinity**

My name is Katie Symons and I am a Graduate Student at the University of Lethbridge. I want to see if you would like to be in my study. I want to see what you think about being a boy who does not follow gender rules at school.

**What is the purpose of the project?**
I am doing this study to better understand how some boys feel at school so I can help to make schools kind, safe places for everyone to be.

**What are the requirements of participation?**
If you participate in this study, you will be interviewed once for between one to two hours regarding your experiences of being a boy at school. The interview will take place at a time and place which works well for you.

**What are the benefits of participating?**
The study will not help you directly, but you will help me better understand what it is like to be a boy at school.

**What is the withdrawal procedure?**
You do not have to participate in this study if you do not want to. Your parents or guardian have to agree for you to be in this study and then you get to decide if you want to be in this study or not. If you do not want to be in my study, that is okay and no one will be upset. If you want to be in the study and then change your mind later, you can do that, too. You can stop being in the study at any time by telling me.

**How will confidentiality be ensured?**
If you participate in the study, you will be asked to choose a nick-name of your choice so that no one will know who you are. Only that name will be used during the study. Anything that has your name on it will be kept private so no one will know who you are. You will not be the only person I interview; everyone will also have a nick-name and no one will know who participates.

**How will results be shared?**
I will be using interviews from you and other anonymous people for my Master's Thesis to graduate from university. The findings may also be published in a research journal, conferences, and other publications. Part of interviews that do not contain any identifying information may be published as examples of participant responses.

If you want to read the results of the study, you can ask me to read a plain-language summary and the full transcript.

If you have any questions, you can email me anytime at:

katie.symons@uleth.ca

☐ I understand that an in-person interview will be audio recorded and an online interview will be audio and video recorded.

☐ I would like the final transcript and simplified summary emailed to me.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation and consent to participate in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

| _____ | _____ | _____ |
|---|---|---|
| *Name of Participant* | *Signature* | *Date* |

Contact information Phone: _____ Email: _____

***A copy of this consent will be left with you and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***

# APPENDIX B
## PARTICIPANT PARENTAL INFORMATION LETTER/CONSENT FORM

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**Alberta Boys' Lived Experiences at School: Resisting Hegemonic Masculinity**

Your child is being invited to participate in a study entitled Alberta Boys' Lived Experiences at School: Resisting Hegemonic Masculinity, which is being conducted by Kathleen Symons (University of Lethbridge, Graduate Student, Faculty of Education) under the supervision of Dawn Burleigh (University of Lethbridge, Faculty of Education).

This study has been reviewed for ethical acceptability and approved by the University of Lethbridge Human Participant Research Committee.

**What is the purpose of the project?**
The primary purpose of this project is to understand Alberta boys' lived experiences of masculinity. The research seeks to understand the experiences of boys' who self-identify as individuals who do not follow traditional gender rules in their school communities. The researcher seeks to address the following research question: How do these adolescent Albertan boys who resist the rules of hegemonic masculinity perceive it in their school community?

**What are the requirements of participation?**
Your child has been invited to participate in this project because they have self-identified as an adolescent (aged 11-17) male living in Alberta who does not follow the rules of masculinity enacted in your school community. Your child's involvement in the project would include being interviewed once regarding their experiences and perceptions of masculinity in their school community. The interview will take place at a time and location which accommodates your child and the researcher. Participation in the interview will take approximately one to two hours.

**What are the benefits of participating?**
The potential benefits of your child's participation in this research include allowing the researcher and other educators to learn about their experiences of hegemonic masculinity in their school community. There is the potential for educators who read the research to better understand how to create safe and inclusive school communities in Alberta. An inconvenience of participating in the project is the time necessary to participate in the interview. Participation in the study requires reflection, which could elicit an emotional response.

The researcher will provide participants with 24-hour phone and online mental health resources should any emotional distress occur. The researcher will provide your child with the contact information for the Alberta Mental Health Line (1-877-303-2642) and Kids Help Phone (1-800-668-6868; kidshelpphone.ca), both of which provide 24 hour support available.

**What is the withdrawal procedure?**
Your child's participation in this research is completely voluntary. If your child decides to participate, they may withdraw at any time up to two weeks after the transcript has been shared with you without any consequence or any explanation. If your child does withdraw from the

study, all of their interview data will be immediately destroyed and they will not be contacted again by the researcher.

**How will confidentiality be ensured?**
If your child participates in the project, they will be asked to choose a pseudonym so that anonymity will be maintained in the interview. Only that pseudonym will be used throughout the digital recording of the interview. Documentation that connects the pseudonym to the participant's actual name will be kept separate and private by the researcher. For the interview, responses will be digitally recorded and later transcribed for analysis purposes. A written transcript of each participant's interview will be prepared by the researcher. The researcher will ensure the transcripts do not contain any identifying information. After the data has been transcribed, digital recordings of interviews will be destroyed.

Your child's identity and the confidentiality of the data will be protected. The anonymized data will be stored for ten years on a password-protected computer in the researcher's office. After ten years, this data will be permanently erased. The findings will be collected for the researcher's Master's Thesis. The findings may also be submitted for publication in a research journal, conferences, and other publications. Excerpts from the transcripts that do not contain any identifying information may be published as examples of participant responses.

**How will results be shared?**
The results of this research project will be published in the researcher's Master's Thesis as part of the requirements for graduation. The results may also be published in academic and professional journals, presented at conferences, and other publications. Upon request, the results will also be shared with participants and/or their parent(s)/guardian(s) in the form of the competed transcript and a plain-language summary.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, you may contact the researcher at the following:

Kathleen Symons
katie.symons@uleth.ca

Questions regarding your child's rights as a participant of this research may be addressed to the Office of Research Ethics, University of Lethbridge (Phone: 403-329-2747 or Email: research.services@uleth.ca)

☐ I understand that an in-person interview will be audio recorded and an online interview will be audio and video recorded.

☐ I would like a copy of the completed transcript and a plain-language summary emailed to me.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation and consent for your child to participate in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

Child's Name (printed): _____

| _____ | _____ | _____ |
|---|---|---|
| *Name of Parent/Guardian* | *Signature* | *Date* |

Contact information Phone: _____ Email: _____

***A copy of this consent will be left with you and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***

# APPENDIX C
## POTENTIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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Potential questions for the interview:

- What does it mean to be a boy?
- Is there a certain way people expect boys to act?
- What does it mean to be a boy outside of school?
- What does it mean to be a boy at school?
- Do you think that boys act differently than girls at school?
- Do you feel like you have to act a certain way because you're a boy?
- Have you ever witnessed anyone being picked-on for not being the right kind of boy?
- Have you ever seen people in your school trying to get others to act a certain way?
- Do you feel like you can act like yourself at school?
- Have you ever tried to resist the rules boys are expected to follow?

## APPENDIX D
### PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT POSTER

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University of Lethbridge

# PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ABOUT BEING A BOY AT SCHOOL

Is your experience as a boy different from other boys at school?

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study of
*Alberta boys' who resist the rules of masculinity experience of being a boy at school.*

Participants will be asked to: *participate in an interview.*

Participation would involve *one* session,
this session will be about *60-120* minutes long.

Participation is confidential.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:

Katie Symons
Graduate Student, Faculty of Education
Phone or Text: 403-554-1155
Email: katie.symons@uleth.ca

**This study has been reviewed for ethical acceptability and approved by the University of Lethbridge Human Participant Research Committee.**