

*“I’ll do it from the top, like popular/cool, in-between/normal,
loser and nerd”*

*Factors that influence the emotional wellbeing of a group of
Year 8 boys from one Christchurch intermediate school*

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“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts”

Winston Churchill

Abstract

There is a developing international understanding of the relationship between gender, wellbeing and educational outcomes. Wellbeing influences students' abilities to learn and emotional wellbeing is fundamental to children's learning and ability to develop positive relationships with others. Research has found that those who have emotional competencies and skills find it easier to manage themselves, relate to others, resolve conflict, and feel positive about themselves and the world around them (CASEL, 2003; Greetz, 2008). Boys' emotional wellbeing has been a particular focus of the discussion because of their lack of engagement at school and increasing levels of violence and bullying.

This qualitative study investigated the factors that influenced the emotional wellbeing of a group of 12 year old boys in their final year of primary school. This age group was the focus of this research as it is a transitional age in relation to puberty and secondary school. The study involved one adult listening to, and making meaning from eight young boys' perceptions of their world during a semi-structured interview with two focus groups. Analysing the data involved the qualitative strategy of thematic analysis where themes and categories were identified and then further analysed for corresponding linkages and relationships.

The findings identified a multifaceted range of factors that influenced boys' emotional wellbeing. Family, friendships, school and the wider community were all specifically identified as enhancing or harming emotional wellbeing. Strongly underpinning all of the factors was the influence of normalised gendered behaviours within different social contexts that enforced conformity towards a hegemonic form of masculinity. Boys' failure to follow the 'rules' assigned to a social groupings hegemonic form of masculinity, ran the risk for them of being relegated to a lower rank, being unable to manage or express emotions, being excluded, or becoming the victim of bullying.

The research concluded that boys need support in developing a wide range of personal and interpersonal skills and strategies to enhance emotional wellbeing. Underpinning the development of these skills however, is the need for a safe and supportive home, peer group and school environment where students can be empowered to think critically and deconstruct the way in which gender norms influence social interaction and behaviour. Peers, teachers, schools, families and the wider community working in synergy are crucial to developing an approach that addresses and enhances emotional wellbeing.

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Chapter One

Introduction

“Stop crying, you sound like a girl” said a parent to their young son.

“He just has no motivation and is angry all the time. You’re lucky, girls aren’t like that” said one mother to another in relation to her teenage son.

The tone of these two overheard statements suggested that girls are not a ‘problem’, but boys are ‘different’ or at least expected to ‘act’ differently. It is statements such as these, and being a parent of two boys, that have stimulated my thinking regarding assumed gender differences; in particular the influence gender has on boys’ wellbeing and their behaviour in and out of school. Initial discussion with friends and colleagues around this dissertation readily identified the range of conflicting and contrasting ideas and opinions about gender differences and gender expectations. Many of the ideas that people hold are influenced by frequent discussion within a range of media around the ‘problems with boys’ in relation to their academic achievement and behaviour. Media interest in boys started in the mid 1990’s although there was evidence of research in academic journals many years before this (Skelton, 2001). The focus on boys in the 1990’s was seen by some as a reactionary response to the educational gains by girls and the focus on schools to enhance student achievement (Weaver-Hightower, 2008). Schools were required to look at achievement outcomes and the focus tended to be on the differences between boys and girls. Consequently, ‘boy issues’ became a popular topic and in response numerous books appeared on the market. The focus was not only in relation to raising achievement of boys, but also how to ‘raise boys,’ why ‘gender does matter,’ helping boys turn into ‘good men’ and how we can ‘fix’ the problems with boys (Biddulph, 1997; Lashlie, 2005; Sax, 2005).

Books such as these and accompanying media articles offered many solutions to the espoused problems. For example, an article in the Dominion Post (2008) suggested “playing rough helps boys learn” and discusses how boys need to be exposed to rough play as it is part of boys’ ‘natural’ behaviour and allows them to release their emotions. While the homogenisation of boys is based on the assumption that all boys are the same, many boys I

have taught do not like rough play, or other stereotypical boy activities such as rugby. Furthermore, many are able to express themselves emotionally through verbal communication. In my experience, there are more significant differences between boys, than between girls and boys. To homogenise all boys when referring to aspects such as communication, is simplistic.

As my interest in gender and the wellbeing of boys grew, I found Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity aligns well with my own experiences. Connell describes a dominant form of masculinity that is prevalent within a cultural context. Skelton (2001) describes this as "dominant modes of masculinity which claim the highest status and exercise the greatest influence and authority" (p. 50). It involves the positioning of boys and girls within cultural expectations in relation to gender and the social group. Hegemonic masculinity plays out from a societal level as well as a micro level where there can be different expectations depending on the social grouping. Other forms of masculinity are then seen in relation to the hegemonic form and boys choose to either engage with or reject the dominant form. My interest lies in the ways boys position themselves either consciously or subconsciously within forms of masculinity and how this influences their emotional wellbeing.

The concept of wellbeing is paramount in my guiding theory in the teaching of health education. As a teacher for 18 years, I have been exposed to the range of impacts, within a New Zealand context, that gender roles have on boys' wellbeing: mentally, socially, physically and spiritually. Within various educational settings, my students often reflect on their experiences of Year 7 and 8 in relation to puberty and gender expectations. In particular, these were times when they felt they could not talk to anyone about their fears and problems. From my experiences in primary and secondary classrooms, I have found that many social skills or health education programmes do not fully acknowledge the interplay of social practices associated with gender. Consistent with research in this area, I have found that students who experience social and emotional problems, at some point, are more likely to have difficulties with families, suffer from bullying or bully others, and misuse alcohol and other drugs (Barker, 2000; Becroft, 2006; Carroll-Lind, 2009; Milligan, 2008; Warrington & Younger, 2011). The literature suggests therefore that emotional wellbeing and behaviour are related (Gretz, 2008; Milligan, 2008).

Emotional wellbeing includes the ability to recognise and manage emotions, establish positive relationships, develop concern for others, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations effectively (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional learning (CASEL), 2003). Emotional wellbeing is fundamental to children's learning, moral development, and motivation to cooperate and achieve. Students who have emotional competencies and skills find it easier to manage themselves, relate to others, resolve conflict and feel positive about themselves and the world around them (Gretz, 2008). An extensive study by Wang, Heartel and Walberg (1997) found that eight of the 11 most influential factors related to learning involved social and emotional factors such as student-teacher social interactions, peer group dynamics and the classroom culture.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2006) identifies that sound mental health is integral to academic learning. The influences on young people's mental health and specifically their emotional wellbeing need to be explored so that effective approaches and programmes can be developed that enhance health and wellbeing. The importance of emotional wellbeing is also recognised in the *New Zealand Curriculum (NZC)* which identifies the key competencies needed for living and lifelong learning. These include the ability to manage self, relate to others and think critically to make sense of one's experiences (Ministry of Education, 2007). If educators are to successfully implement and develop programmes that address the key competencies and the vision of the *NZC*, they need to first explore what factors influence children's wellbeing and then develop effective pedagogical practices to address them.

I chose to explore how a group of eight 12 year old boys make sense of their worlds and the factors they perceive that influence their emotional wellbeing. The study is based on one adult listening to and deriving meaning from eight boy's statements. This age group was selected because 12 years is a transitional age in relation to puberty and secondary school. I also found a paucity of specific New Zealand research in relation to the links between gender and emotional wellbeing of this age group. The literature in the field focused more upon severe emotional and behavioural issues rather than addressing wellbeing for all students. Further, principals have reported to me that there exists a minimal level of support for Year 7 and 8 children regarding their emotional needs. Many have even expressed the view that only when students go to secondary school, at the end of Year 8, can they finally access support through guidance counsellors and that sometimes this intervention is too late to be effective.

This exploratory qualitative study investigates the factors that influence the emotional wellbeing of 12 year old school boys. It discusses participants' ideas and perceptions in relation to the literature and wider research around the 'boy' debates and emotional wellbeing. By adding to current research, this study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge about what constitutes best practice when working with children both in and out of the classroom. In particular, it aims to support teachers' professional practices about how they address the emotional needs of all boys.

This dissertation is organised as follows. Chapter One is the introduction, and sets the scene around the purpose and passion for undertaking this research. Chapter Two explores the literature in relation to health and wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, gender, and the school environment. Chapter Three describes the methodology and research design utilised for this qualitative research. Chapter Four reports the analysis of the data under three themes and discusses the findings in relation to the literature. Extracts from the data are used extensively to enable the reader, relative to their own beliefs, experiences and epistemological position to derive meaning from the boys' words. Finally, the concluding chapter discusses the implications of these research findings for schools, parents, the wider community and most importantly our young men of the future.

Chapter Two

Literature review

This study investigates factors that influence the emotional wellbeing of eight 12-year old boys. Internationally there has been a great deal of research conducted in this area but there is a paucity of research related to New Zealand intermediate school aged children. The review is organised in four sections. First an overview of health and wellbeing, and historical paradigms of what constitutes a ‘healthy’ young person is provided. Second, I outline the literature related to the emotional wellbeing of children, including the factors that influence their wellbeing, and how their wellbeing impacts on others and society in general. Third, given that the focus of this study is boys, literature around gender and how it influences emotional wellbeing is reviewed. Finally, I discuss some relevant literature related to the school environment as a site which is recognised as fundamental to children’s wellbeing (Graetz, 2008).

Health and wellbeing

Over the last 50 years there has been a significant shift in our understanding of health and the factors that influence it. For some time now, there has been recognition that there is more to health than a person’s physical state. The shift from a focus on ‘absence of disease’ to a more holistic understanding is reflected by the WHO (2006) and within the structural framework of Health Education in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007). In a New Zealand context, Durie (1998) examines Maori health perspectives and identifies a consistency with the global orientation towards a holistic understanding of health. His ‘Whare Tapa Wha model’ looks at health from the perspective of a four sided whare. To have good health, or a sense of ‘wellbeing’, involves four dimensions that are mutually supportive and based on a broad understanding of health. The four dimensions are taha wairua (spiritual wellbeing), taha hinengaro (mental/emotional wellbeing), taha whanau (social wellbeing) and taha tinana (physical wellbeing). These four dimensions of wellbeing reflect the WHO definition of ‘health’ but emphasise spiritual, rather than physical wellbeing as the beginning point. All four interdependent dimensions (physical, social, mental/emotional, spiritual) are crucial in promoting the wellbeing of students (Durie, 1998).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) is a useful framework for understanding the factors that influence the dimensions of wellbeing. His model describes four levels of systems stemming outwards from the individual. All four systems contain a range of customs, roles and conventions that interdependently influence people's wellbeing. Bronfenbrenner's model consists of first; an individual's immediate environment, for example the classroom, described as the microsystems; second, the associations between an individual's immediate environments, described as the mesosystem; third, the external environments which indirectly affect individuals, for example parents, described as the exosystem; and fourth, the larger socio-cultural context, described as the macro system (Stephens, 2008).

In alignment with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model, and the WHO (2006) view that health is greatly influenced by socio-cultural factors such as culture, lifestyle, economics, environment, politics and social factors, the New Zealand health and physical education learning area aims for students to develop "understanding of the factors that influence the health of individuals, groups, and society" (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 23). Health education in New Zealand is about students reflecting on and enhancing their wellbeing, contributing to the wellbeing of others and society as a whole. Within the health learning area students are encouraged to reflect on the determinants of health and how these impact not only on themselves, but also their relationships with others and society as a whole. This paradigm shift from a disease focus towards a more holistic approach focusing on wellbeing has a strong emphasis on social relationships which is an element of emotional wellbeing.

Stephens (2008) identifies how this shift from the traditional view helps us to understand the very social nature of health, and the importance of how the structure of any society determines the wellbeing of its members. Wilkinson & Marmot (2006) examines the determinants of health and identifies the importance of social factors such as social exclusion, stress and social support as crucial components of wellbeing. In particular, this study argues that any attempt to enhance the wellbeing of students must address the social context of health, for example, how a society constructs gender and how gender influences wellbeing.

Wilkinson's (2005) work similarly draws on research and theory to show how social status, social support and early emotional and social development can be negatively affected by unequal social relations. Importantly, these above factors have been shown to be critical in enhancing a person's wellbeing (CASEL, 2003; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2006). Stephens

(2008) also discusses the evidence that identifies the need for social approval as fundamental to wellbeing. Stephens states, “If things are going badly for a person’s social status, social support and childhood development, evidence suggests that this will affect important psychological outcomes such as sense of control, self esteem, depression and hostility” (p. 62). If emotional wellbeing is to be enhanced in young boys exploring how young boys relate to each other, or are expected to relate to each other, is paramount (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Emotional Wellbeing

‘Emotional wellbeing’ involves recognising and managing emotions, establishing positive relationships, developing concern for others, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations effectively (CASEL, 2003). Emotional wellbeing is fundamental to children’s learning and their motivation to cooperate and achieve. Students who have emotional competencies and skills find it easier to manage themselves, relate to others, resolve conflict, and feel positive about themselves and the world around them (Graetz, 2008; WHO, 2006) .

Emotionally healthy children are more effective learners, have more positive relationships with their teachers, family members and friends, and display more resilience when it comes to meeting life’s challenges (International Union for Health Promotion (IUHPE), 2009; Peters & Thurlow, 2002). Children today have to deal with a wide range of emotional and social issues related to factors such as lack of family support, family unemployment, decreased connectedness to their community, media pressure and the decreasing age of pubertal development (Ginsberg & Jablow, 2006; McCreanor, Watson & Denny, 2006). Milligan (2008) discusses how New Zealand schools are seeing these issues manifested through students with mental/emotional health problems such as increased anxiety, anger, bullying, unhappiness and depression.

Mental/emotional distress in primary school aged children may detrimentally affect not only their ability to learn, but also the learning of their peers. Students may behave inappropriately, disengage from the learning process and/or have low levels of school attendance. Those who disengage from school invariably develop fewer positive connections and suffer poorer social and emotional health. Carroll-Lind (2009) identifies how bullying and violence impact on student wellbeing and is a substantial factor in school suspensions in New Zealand. Becroft

(2006) identifies some characteristics of youth offenders as including: disengagement from school, drug and alcohol problems, a history of abuse and neglect, and some form of psychological disorder. Furthermore, students who are disengaged from education have lower levels of achievement and create a higher economic cost to New Zealand society (Becroft, 2006; Blissett et al., 2009).

There is evidence to suggest that primary school teachers and principals are being expected to deal with many of these issues despite often feeling they do not have the knowledge or skills (Milligan 2008; New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI), 2007). A principal of a contributing primary school reported that his school has responded to the societal stress reflected in students by employing a counsellor for one day a week (personal communication, 2009). A high proportion of the children using the counselling service were found to be Year 5 and 6 students. Students were not classified as ‘problem’ children rather it was acknowledged that they were dealing with a range of emotional and social issues frequently due to relationship difficulties with family and friends.

Recent research finds that teachers want and need, more support in dealing with the emotional and social needs of students (KidsMatter, 2007; Lewis, 2009; NZEI, 2007). This is further substantiated by Milligan (2008) who discusses how ‘youth anger’ in New Zealand has been identified by professionals as increasing in frequency and intensity. Furthermore, anger is being exhibited at a younger age and needs to be addressed in the primary school (Becroft, 2006; Milligan, 2008). Correspondingly, teacher safety is an issue as exemplified in an NZEI (2007) report that states “58% of teacher’s surveyed reported aggressive verbal confrontations with children” (p. 4); an increase on previous surveys.

The impact of bullying on children’s emotional wellbeing has been well documented. The School Safety Report (Carroll-Lind, 2009) found that New Zealand rates poorly in relation to bullying and keeping our children safe in schools. Carroll-Lind (2009) identifies that “of all forms of youth violence, emotional violence (bullying) is the most common” (p. viii). This is further supported by the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2006/7 which identifies a high level of bullying in New Zealand primary schools compared to other OECD countries (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 2008). More importantly, young people themselves through the Office of the

Children's Commission (OCC) Young People's Reference Group, raised 'health' as their number one issue, with bullying being a close second (Carroll-Lind, 2009).

Being a victim of bullying has serious consequences for children. Those who do not attend school due to bullying lose a vital social connection to others; this connection is a key component in developing social skills and resiliency (Ginsberg & Jablow, 2006; Warrington & Younger, 2011). Children with poor social skills and emotional distress are vulnerable to bullying and that has the potential to influence their emotional wellbeing not only as a child but throughout their adult life (Carroll-Lind, 2009; Greatz, 2008). The extent of bullying and friendship/family issues affecting young children in New Zealand is reflected in the Child Helpline statistics. The New Zealand child helpline 0800WHATSUP received more than 1400 calls per day in 2008 (Barnardos, 2009). Forty-two percent of their callers were aged 7-12 years and often students rang more than once before they presented with a problem. Of the 20% who did present immediately, the recurring problems which accounted for around 70% of the calls were: peer relationships, bullying, and relationships with family. When the calls in 2008 were disaggregated by gender, 47% were male and 53% female, suggesting health issues influenced both genders. International comparisons showed New Zealand mirrored international Child Helplines in terms of the top four broad categories - peer relationships, abuse and violence, family relationships and sexuality (Taylor, 2008). Internationally, only the Child Helpline in Ireland had a higher level of utilisation by proportion of the population. This suggests further emotional support for children in New Zealand is needed, especially considering 'WhatsUp' helpline in New Zealand was only able to answer 29% of young people's calls (Barnardos, 2009). Considering these statistics, research is needed to examine how we can best support children's emotional development and therefore reduce the need for young people to use the service.

Supporting 'WhatsUp' statistics, Marmot (2004) discusses concerns around the effects of social status and how people position themselves in relation to others in society. He provides evidence of the link between physical bullying and those with low social status in their peer group. The importance of social support, including positive social relationships inside and outside the family, positive childhood experiences and a sense of internal control are seen as crucial to emotional wellbeing (Barker, 2000; Carroll-Lind, 2009; CASEL, 2003). Extensive

evidence demonstrates that a lack of friends, low social status, and childhood stress negatively influence wellbeing (Bernard, 2006; CASEL, 2003; Greatz, 2008).

Emotional wellbeing or being emotionally competent is vital for children. Emotional wellbeing enables them to cope more effectively with the stressors in their lives and to develop positive relationships with parents, families, teachers and friends. This then helps children to cope with the demands of school and may improve academic achievement (Graetz, 2008). Hilton's (2007) research on emotional competence finds that young boys want to learn "strategies for coping with upset and hurt that enable them to discuss feelings more easily" (p. 168). This research reflects the 2006 New Zealand Youth Connectedness project findings that fostering a positive school environment that enhances student relationships and an effective guidance support network are key components in enhancing male social and academic success (Crespo, 2006). This includes helping boys to manage emotions and in particular to accept and ask for help.

Similarly Bernard (2006) finds that teaching children about emotional competence enhances their motivation to perform well at school and improves their overall wellbeing. The 2007 Australian Scholarship Group (ASG) study supports the need to help boys manage emotions (Bernard, Stephanou & Urbach, 2007). Their study states that over 40% of students had difficulty calming themselves down and over 40% also said they worried too much. A third of the participants mentioned that they were mean to and bullied others due to losing their temper and not being able to deal with their anger. The socialisation of boys which includes not expressing emotion comes at a cost to their mental health and emotional wellbeing (Barker, 2000).

One of the other significant findings of the ASG study is the recognition of the important role of parents (Bernard et al., 2007). Students who had parents who talked to them about their feelings and helped devise strategies to deal with negative feelings, had higher levels of emotional wellbeing. In a New Zealand context, the role of the family has also been found to be crucial in enhancing the emotional wellbeing of young people. McCreanor, Watson and Denny (2006) conclude that families "remain a crucial site for interventions to enhance the wellbeing of young people" (p. 156). This further supports other research that identifies positive connections with supportive family help students to manage emotions, establish

positive relationships, and effectively handle challenging situations (Ginsberg & Jablow, 2006; Silva & Stanton, 1996).

Irwin (2009) further supports the research around the emotional wellbeing of boys in New Zealand. He suggests that New Zealand boys find it difficult in certain situations to express their feelings and are four to five times more likely to suffer from depression or commit suicide than girls. New Zealand's high rate of youth suicide in males is of concern, as are the statistics on alcohol use and motor vehicle accidents (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2008). The use of alcohol is a multi-factorial issue, however research suggests that key factors influencing young people's drug use include: stress, worry, anxiety and the social structures related to the need to 'conform' to a dominant group's normative behaviour (Barker, 2000; Gaddis 2006; Ginsberg & Jablow, 2006; Warrington & Younger, 2011).

Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) provide many examples of boys talking about how stress and the need to 'fit in' led to their drug-taking. Dealing with stress, and recognising and expressing emotions are key components of emotional wellbeing. A range of research identifies that boys find it more difficult to do this due to an environment that sustains and supports pressure to conform to the gender norms around masculinity (Keddie, 2006; Skelton, 2001; Warrington & Younger, 2011; Weaver-Hightower, 2008). Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2005) specifically identify that young boys want help with managing and expressing emotions but there is a lack of safe environments in which to ask for help. Barker (2000) in particular, reviewed multiple studies that demonstrate boys want help with emotional issues, but are less likely than girls to have someone to talk to, or seek out help from external agencies.

Promoting the emotional wellbeing of all children well before entering high school appears to be crucial especially considering that "interventions with adolescents are more expensive and less effective than interventions with younger children" (Blissett et al., 2009, p. 24). Young people who develop social competence, a positive sense of self worth, a sense of hope and have the ability to problem solve and set goals are more likely to meet the challenges that life brings (Peters & Thurlow, 2002). What is further demonstrated by the literature around emotional wellbeing is the need to address it within a gender equity framework. An exploration of the literature around gender therefore, becomes essential in any research around enhancing the wellbeing of boys.

Gender

Babies are born and assigned a biological sex; gender (femininity and masculinity) on the other hand, refers to the social construction of differences in behaviour according to sex (Francis & Skelton, 2001). Femininity and masculinity are binary terms that are encapsulated in the structural properties of a society and are dependent on historical, cultural and social constructions (Connell, 2000). Therefore, when looking at gender it is important to recognise that gender is not an individual construct, but rather developed through social interactions with others (Francis & Skelton, 2005; Kehler, 2010). Literature related to gender reveals contrasting and conflicting theoretical perspectives that are central to understanding gendered power relations and the influence on young boys' emotional wellbeing (Biddulph, 1997; Clatterbaugh, 1990; Connell, 2000; Coulter, 2009; Hoff Somers, 2000; Keddie, 2006; Kehler, 2010; Martino, & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005; Warrington & Younger, 2011). Any research around 12 year old boys and their emotional wellbeing must therefore, include an examination of the literature about gender and the social construction of masculinity.

Masculinity

For purposes of this discussion, I have adopted the definition of masculinity given by Law, Campbell and Schick (1999) who define masculinity as “those ideals, traits and practices that shape what members of a social group construe as appropriately male” (p. 13). A ‘social group’ refers to a group in society that comes together for a common purpose (Hyndman, 2007). In this study, that social group comprises Year 8 boys from one intermediate school.

Different theories and theorists use different terms to conceptualise masculinity, but their understandings broadly indicate similar categories (Skelton, 2001). Exploring the theoretical underpinnings of masculinity is important because how we understand, perceive and address the emotional wellbeing of boys depends on our chosen paradigm. For my research I have chosen Clatterbaugh's (1990) six perspectives on masculinity as the conceptual framework as his categorisation has been one of the most widely used in my readings. Clatterbaugh's six categories have been loosely organised by Skelton (2001) into two main strands relating to the construction of masculinity. These are the ‘**personal**’ strand and the ‘**political**’ strand. These two strands should not be seen as purely oppositional but more of a continuum where people draw aspects of the six categories to define their position.

The ‘personal’ strand exemplifies more of an essentialist or biological perspective where gender evolutionary theory plays an important role. Three categories of conservative, men’s rights and spiritual are classified in the personal strand due to their reliance on essential ‘maleness’. With the further development of brain scanning equipment in the past few years, many researchers have used this technology to promote the paradigm of the biological differences in males (Sax, 2005). However, there are differences in how all three categories perceive ‘boy issues’ can be addressed, especially in the school environment (Skelton, 2001). This is evident in the increasing number of books and media articles which take this personal strand framework to promote ways we can assist boys (Biddulph, 1997; Lashlie, 2005; Sax, 2005). Some take a conservative approach which emphasises traditional gender roles and advocacy for boy-focused components such as increased physical activity, boy-specific programmes and classes, and stricter discipline. Boys and girls are seen as different and these differences need to be accommodated.

Skelton (2001) identifies how the ‘men’s rights’ category has been most evident in the political policy decisions around addressing boys’ achievement in schools. This category views schools as ‘failing boys’ due to the feminised curriculum and environment. Proponents of this perspective argue for interventions such as the implementation of pedagogical practices that are more ‘boy’ friendly. Their view is that strategies to support boys need to be addressed through a gender equity framework and that programmes need to promote equal relationships between girls and boys. They differ from the supporters of ‘political’ strand though, in terms of solutions, which still involve an essentialised perspective of boys becoming “secure with themselves as males” (Skelton, 2001, p. 48). The ‘men’s rights’ category can be seen in the titles of Lashlie’s work, *The Good Man Project* and the consequent book, *He’ll be ok, Growing Gorgeous Boys into Good Men* (2005). Skelton (2001) also classifies the spiritual category as aligning with the personal strand theories. She identifies the category as viewing male role models and fathers as important in addressing issues with young men. The spiritual category is often seen as encompassed within conservative and men’s right category where male mentors are seen as important in supporting young men through adolescence.

A common criticism of the personal strand theories is that they are grounded in the essentialist view that treats all boys as a homogenous group. They fail to recognise and explore the role

that culture and social class plays in a construction of a range of masculinities. Consequently, there is a tendency especially in the popular media, to talk about ‘boys’ as reflecting all boys (Barker, 2000; Connell, 2000; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005; Skelton, 2001). A further criticism of personal strand theories is that a focus on masculine practices perpetuates the dominant stereotypical assumptions that are prevalent within a social group. Therefore attitudes and values that are not conducive to good health, for example limited expression of emotions, are reinforced rather than broken down (Francis & Skelton, 2005; Martino, Kehler & Weaver-Hightower, 2009; Weaver-Hightower, 2008).

In the ‘political’ strand gendered behaviour is not seen as biological or innate, but rather socially constructed through social interaction. Skelton’s (2001) political strand constitutes three classifications: ‘pro-feminist’, ‘socialist’ and ‘group specific’. Those classified under the political strand umbrella are interested in how personal identity and interactions with others are constructed and reinforce the binary of masculinity and femininity, therefore influencing the wellbeing of individuals (Francis & Skelton, 2005). Rather than any solutions resting with the individual, political strand theorists take a broader view on gender issues. The inherent issues and solutions are perceived as to be multi-faceted and need to address broader social processes (Keddie, 2006). For political strand theorists, the difference between boys and girls is not seen as inevitable, it is society that needs to deconstruct these gender differences.

Boys and girls construct gender identities by conforming to what they think is expected of their gender (Warrington & Younger, 2011). Connell’s (1995) work, which has widely been used in research that aligns with the political strand theories, uses the term ‘hegemonic masculinity’ to describe this conformity. Francis and Skelton (2005) use Connell’s (1995) work and define hegemonic masculinity as “the high status, socially accepted expression of masculinity, identifying the way it excludes and subjugates other expressions of masculinity as well as femininity”(p. 29). This concept is useful as it recognises many forms of masculinity, and also how one form can dominate over another.

From the political strand, it is not masculinity *per se* that is criticised, but the impact of the dominant or hegemonic form on men’s wellbeing or, in the context of my study, boys’ emotional wellbeing. Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2005) discuss this in relation to how politics and politicians have constructed the perceived ‘masculinity crises’ and the ways in

which schools have become sites where the focus on a traditional dominant form of masculinity is percolated. Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2005) identify that even though the use of the term has varied, the perceived masculinity crisis generally refers to males being prevented from participating in a societal role based around traditional hegemonic masculine ideals. Factors such as the economy, the culture and the political structures therefore lead men towards acting in harmful ways towards others and their own wellbeing.

Kenway (cited in Skelton, 2001) argues that “masculine identities are not static but historically and spatially situated and evolving (p. 50). Construction of gender identities are influenced through broader societal factors as well as everyday interactions in a range of contexts. Emotional wellbeing therefore, is influenced by the expected conformity to a masculine identity that is situated within time, space and social groups (Keddie, 2006; Skelton 2001). What it means to be a ‘normal’ male or ‘proper boy’ may then, be promoted within in a narrow version of masculinity which occurs in opposition to femininity. Other studies have identified how focusing on this binary aspect of gender can reinforce the hegemonic construction of masculinity (Hilton, 2007; Martino et al., 2009). In particular ‘subordinate masculinity’ is created in contrast to the hegemonic form (Skelton, 2001). This has implications for emotional wellbeing given that males, who are perceived as subscribing to an inferior type of masculinity, are open to bullying and violence from males who conform to a more aggressive type of masculinity (Skelton, 2001; Warrington & Younger, 2011). Carroll-Lind’s (2009) report supports the need to address gender roles and traditional notions of more aggressive masculinity in relation to addressing violence and bullying in the school environment.

Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli’s (2003) research around masculinity and the role of health education identified some important issues connected to emotional wellbeing. They discuss how many risk-taking behaviours are strategies of conformity to hegemonic masculinity where “...boys undertake risk-taking behaviours in times of vulnerability or need, having been discouraged by the codes of ‘cool’ masculinity from engaging in help-seeking behaviour” (p. 265). Furthermore the National Education Monitoring Project data for Health and Physical Education in New Zealand found that over a third of Year 8 boys had very limited strategies for dealing with relationship problems (Flockton & Crooks, 2006). What is significant here is that boys who do not have the strategies or skills to deal with relationship

problems and do not seek help are identified in the research as having a much higher risk of emotional distress and disengagement from school (Becroft, 2006; Carroll-Lind, 2009; Skelton, 1997; Taylor 2008).

Coulter's (2009) research with Canadian school boys reveals how "the power of deeply rooted hegemonic beliefs about masculinity and gender relations" (p. 82) influences identity development. She discusses how the boys found it difficult to express their emotions and feelings due to their perceptions of emotional expression as more of a 'feminine' trait. The use of the word 'feminine' by the boys in her study perpetuated the notion of an oppositional binary of masculine versus feminine. Coulter's (2009) work also demonstrates the fluidity of the terms masculinity and femininity and how this affects different actions in different social contexts. Martino et.al (2009) discusses how gender reform initiatives in schools are often based around stereotyped assumptions about what 'boys' should be like. The school environment, rather than accepting and valuing differences amongst boys, tends to homogenise all boys and emphasise further the binary of masculinity and femininity.

Some researchers who lean towards the personal strand of conceptualising masculinity, posture that boys' innate gender differences make it harder for them to express themselves, because that is not what boys are 'hardwired' to do (Biddulph, 1997; Irwin, 2009; Lashlie, 2005). Others, who align to the political strand, argue that relying on the biological differences perpetuates gender stereotypes within a narrow binary of what constitutes masculine and feminine behaviours and this limits boys' ability to express themselves (Coulter, 2009; Keddie, 2006; Skelton, 2001). Both groups therefore, tend to agree on behavioural issues but disagree on the reasons for the behaviours. The 'political' strand however, has the potential to facilitate change, the 'personal' strand does not.

Keddie (2004) seeks to explore boys' understandings and enactments of masculinity within and beyond the context of the primary school. Her research highlights the impact of hegemonic masculinity on boys' emotional wellbeing, particularly their inability to manage and express emotions. The semi-structured questions used in data collection enabled students to talk about their lives. As a result Keddie (2004, 2006) was able to generate an understanding of what is relevant to the boys' emotional wellbeing. Keddie (2006) examines how one young boy's emotional distress was influenced by the prevailing discourses of masculinity. This young boy struggled with the mixed messages he encountered about how he

was meant to express himself as a man. Consequently, this struggle impacted on his emotional wellbeing: “Mathew’s frustration, unhappiness, unresolved anger and sense of helplessness in these contexts highlight the inadequacies and limitations he finds in taking up these hegemonic masculinity discourses” (p. 529). Drawing on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model, the larger socio-cultural context influencing the individual’s immediate environment is important. The school environment, as a constructor and regulator of masculinity, becomes crucial as an influence on emotional wellbeing.

The school environment

There is a complex and powerful interplay between the school environment and students’ emotional wellbeing (Carroll-Lind, 2009; Connell, 2000; Coulter, 2009; Hill, Laybourn & Borland, 1996; Martino et al., 2009). Any school environment has a culture that will covertly or overtly shape, define and contribute to boys’ understandings of masculinity, thereby influencing their sense of self and emotional wellbeing. Whilst this study does not specifically focus on the school environment, it is nonetheless a site where boys spend a large amount of time and it would therefore be expected to influence their wellbeing.

A number of research studies have found that the production of gender and gender relationships are influenced by the school culture, specific classrooms, teacher’s expectations and peer group dynamics (Francis & Skelton, 2005; Warrington & Younger, 2011). This is further reflected in the extensive research that highlights the negative effects of bullying on the emotional wellbeing of children. In particular, research demonstrates how harassment originates from gender and sex based discrimination (Carroll-Lind, 2009; Graetz, 2008; Keddie 2006; Kidsmatter, 2007; Martino et al., 2009). The structures and strategies that enable a school to function have been found to perpetuate school bullying and violence, as they influence the culture where masculinity is then constructed, regulated and normalised (Keddie, 2006). Research identifies the need for schools to utilise a gender equity approach in creating a school culture that enhances emotional wellbeing for all students (Martino et al., 2009). This approach is supported by Keddie (2006) who finds that effective pedagogical practices that improve emotional wellbeing, and educational outcomes, include students looking at inequitable power relations and social interactions.

Evidence-based pedagogical practices are needed to engage students and make their learning meaningful (Coulter, 2009; Hilton, 2007; Martino, Lingard & Mills, 2004). These practices include: the opportunity to think critically; being exposed to different ways of being, not just connecting them to a hegemonic masculine way of being; a supportive classroom environment that allows students to take risks with their learning and facilitates self expression without fear of bullying; and experiences within a non-normative environment with multiple ways of enacting masculinity discussed and acknowledged. Hilton's (2007) findings reflect the importance of these pedagogical practices. When looking at what boys wanted from sexuality education, she found that "they wanted to be given strategies for saying no, in a way that allowed them to not lose face and appear foolish or 'chicken'" (p. 168). Furthermore Tasker (2006), whose research focused on New Zealand children, concluded that a focus on health issues that failed to acknowledge the wider socio-cultural and structural factors as well as social dynamics had resulted in a failure to meet the needs of children in New Zealand schools.

Health and Physical Education is one of the eight learning areas in the *New Zealand Curriculum (NZC)* (Ministry of Education, 2007). The aims of health education include building resilience, strengthening self worth, making responsible decisions, understanding the factors that influence wellbeing and developing skills and understanding to enhance relationships. One of the most important aspects in health education is developing competency in looking after one's mental/emotional wellbeing. The importance of emotional wellbeing is also recognised through the key competencies such as:

Managing self - "they have strategies for meeting challenges"

Relating to others – "able to interact effectively, listen, share ideas and realise how their actions can affect other people"

Participating and contributing- "have a sense of belonging and the confidence to participate"

(Ministry of Education, 2007, p.12)

The *NZC* represents a vision that children will be positive in their own identity, resilient, able to relate well to others and be members of a community. If this is to be achieved, then it is imperative to understand the influences on the well-being of children, and effective strategies and pedagogical practices that enhance emotional wellbeing.

A ‘Health Promoting Schools’ framework for enhancing children’s emotional wellbeing

There is a developing international understanding of the interlinked relationship between education and health. Consequently schools are seen as a site of engagement that can be utilised to improve the wellbeing of students. The WHO Health Promoting Schools (HPS) framework is premised on the assumption that schools, working together with families and communities are crucial to establishing the protective bases needed for positive mental health and emotional wellbeing (St Leger, 2005; Stewart-Brown, 2006). The HPS approach is based upon improving children’s wellbeing through three interdependent key components. First, actively promoting positive, supportive and nurturing school environments that enhance relationships; second, developing children’s social and personal skills through sound pedagogical curricula; and third, engaging in partnership with members of the whole school community (Kidsmatter, 2007). HPS is not a programme but a conceptual framework that provides a valuable tool for addressing the wellbeing of children (St Leger, 2005).

A comprehensive review around the HPS approach identifies that schools can improve the health and wellbeing of children but also finds that some programmes are more effective than others (Stewart-Brown, 2006). The most effective programmes are shown to be those “that promote mental health in schools, including preventing violence and aggression” (p. 4). To be effective, programmes need to be of sustained length, high in intensity, and involve the whole school, the community and the family.

The HPS evidence is also supported by Hornby and Atkinson (2003) and McCreanor et al. (2006) who identify the family as central to enhancing and supporting children’s mental health. The evidence shows that holistic programmes based on mental health would better address the underlying causes of many ‘health issues’. This is reflected in the *NZC* where health education programmes that address issues such as drug use and misuse, are taught through a ‘mental health’ context not a ‘body care’ context (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Some of the essential aspects of HPS in addressing health needs of students sit comfortably with the vision and principles of the *NZC*. For example, upholding social justice and equity concepts, providing a safe and supportive environment, involving student participation and addressing the health and wellbeing of staff and students (IUHPE, 2009; Ministry of

Education, 2007). HPS therefore, provides a framework for exploring and identifying essential components, processes and structures for enhancing the emotional wellbeing of boys and indeed all children in the school environment.

This chapter has sought to address four fundamental aspects of health and wellbeing including:

- 1) What constitutes a healthy young person
- 2) The emotional wellbeing of children
- 3) The influence of gender on emotional wellbeing and
- 4) The influence of the school environment on emotional wellbeing and the role of an HPS framework

As this review of the literature shows, emotional wellbeing is crucial if children are to be more effective learners, have positive relationships with others and cope with the challenges that lie ahead in life. Further evidence identifies that schools are dealing with more behavioral issues that relate to societal pressures (Peters & Thurlow, 2002; Adolescent Health Research Group, 2008). This suggests young people need more support and education around the skills needed to enhance wellbeing. The literature review also indicates that if we are to enhance emotional wellbeing, then we need to address the underlying issues around gender construction within schools, families, communities and the wider New Zealand cultural context. In response to this literature review, my study engages with young people to identify their perceptions around emotional wellbeing and the factors that influence it. The review of the literature led to my research question:

What do a group of year eight boys identify as factors that influence their emotional wellbeing?

Sub questions:

- What coping strategies do boys use to support/enhance their emotional wellbeing?
- What do Year 8 boys think that adults (teachers and families) can do to enhance children's emotional wellbeing?
- How might the Year 8 boy's perceptions of masculinity be related to the factors that influence their emotional wellbeing?

In my experience as an educator, I have found that young people, rather than being unreflective or unaware of the social practices that go on around them, are often very insightful. Many researchers have found that inviting them to engage in the research process

provides a 'voice' that is very powerful (Allen, 2008; Coulter, 2009; Martino et al., 2009). Consequently, acquiring statements from Year eight boys in an endeavor to give them a 'voice', has informed my methodology which is outlined in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology and research design utilised in this study. It describes the theoretical framework, the specific processes used to collect and analyse data, and the relevant ethical issues.

Theoretical framework

As human beings we do not all see the world in the same way. Individuals bring to any situation their view of the world based around experiences throughout their lifetime. Research therefore can contribute to our quest for knowledge so that we can make meaning from the world around us. How our view of the world is framed by an awareness of one's own social position in their culture or social group is important (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2003). This awareness includes becoming sensitive to the values involved in one's own theoretical positioning about knowledge and the research questions and practical applications that inform a researcher's theoretical framework.

An interpretivist methodology seeks to understand and describe meaningful social action (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). The intention of utilising interpretive methodology is to seek an understanding of the way in which individuals generate meanings, rather than to make grand generalisations and produce new universal truths. The interpretive paradigm assumes that people derive meaning from the world around them and then the researcher interprets these meanings. The methods used are therefore usually qualitative, because they seek to explain rather than measure the experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Davidson & Tolich, 1999).

According to Mutch (2005) qualitative research aims to “uncover the lived reality or constructed meanings of the research participants” (p. 43). It is an approach that allows researchers to explore a phenomenon from the participants' perspectives. Qualitative research can be conducted in a wide range of settings using a wide variety of forms (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The data can come from sources such as open-ended, structured or semi-structured interviews, observations, document inspections, and questionnaires. Qualitative research is an ‘umbrella’ term to refer to several research approaches that share certain characteristics. There appears to be consensus however, that one of the key characteristics of qualitative research is

that it is descriptive, rather than based on statistical data (Davidson & Tolich, 1999; Silverman, 2006). Qualitative approaches describe behaviours, emotions and feelings, as well as the way organisations function, and different cultural ways of being. It is about understanding or making sense of people's lives from the subject's own frame of reference. Qualitative research does not set out to answer a specific question or hypothesis, but attempts to understand the meaning or experiences of people while engaging in the setting and collecting the data (Silverman, 2006). A qualitative methodology is identified as an appropriate approach for this study, as it would enable me to make meaning from the statements made by a group of 12 year old boys.

Case study

A case study investigates a case in order to explore a research question (Gillham, 2000). A single case could be an individual, a group or an institution. Single cases can also be studied as multiple cases where, for example, a number of institutions would be classified as a multiple case study. Aligned with qualitative research approaches, case study research is concerned with subjectivity and deriving meaning from the phenomenon. Case studies provide descriptions of experiences pertinent to the case that allow the researcher to interpret how people make sense of themselves and their world (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

The primary emphasis of case study research is to give a 'voice' to those being studied and to limit the extent to which the researcher voice is heard (Cohen et al., 2000; Gillham, 2000). Being situated in the interpretive paradigm, a case study can enable the use of statements to demonstrate how participants make meaning from their experiences and frame of reference. It is not appropriate to make generalisations from the in-depth data of a small sample because it is not reflective of the wider population. Case studies though, can be used to examine the broader socio-cultural factors when related back to other research. Keddie (2004) cites the work of Stake who contends that generalisations gained from one case can endorse generalisations made by other cases. The results of one case study can build on an extensive research base, therefore contributing in a small way to new theories and ideas (Cohen et al., 2000).

Data Collection methods

It is important that data collection methods for case studies provide opportunities for participants to describe their experiences and semi-structured interviews fit this purpose.

Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are a successful and useful tool in qualitative research (Gillham, 2000). Semi-structured interview questions that are well-developed can provide the researcher with authentic sources of data as the intention is to allow participants to tell their stories. Gillham (2000) argues that “the overwhelming strength of the face to face interview is the ‘richness’ of the communication that is possible” (p. 62). Although a set of questions guide an interview, the interviews should not be prescriptive but follow more of a semi-structured framework to allow for flexibility (Hill, Laybourn & Borland, 1996). Participants then have some control of the process in an informal way as they tell their stories.

Unstructured interviews do gain a wealth of data but there are disadvantages. As a beginning researcher, I acknowledge the caution of Gillham (2000) and Mutch (2005) in terms of how much skill and time is needed to conduct and transcribe interviews. In a small study surveys may give more data from a wider representative range of people whereas interviews often give more in-depth data but with limited claims to representation (Gillham, 2000).

Group interview

A variation of the individual interview is a group interview which is a “useful tool for busy practitioners as it can combine the best of surveys (a broader sample) and interviews (an in-depth response)” (Mutch, 2005, p. 128). There are advantages and disadvantages of group interviews. Although group interviews may lead students to follow the group consensus and/or feel inhibited, they can also provide a relationship between students which provides a safe environment for discussing personal issues (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). Furthermore it can be quite daunting for young boys to be interviewed on their own, as they could feel pressure to answer the question correctly in front of the interviewer. As this study involved 12 year old boys, I have taken note of Allen (cited in Coulter, 2009) who argues that helping boys learn about themselves and other people’s ideas, beliefs and values are particular features that arise out of group interviews. Allowing young men to talk in a different setting is identified as an important research tool (Coulter, 2009; Keddie, 2004).

Affinity groups are based on the construct that beliefs are reinforced in groups and therefore groups must contain people who know each other and the setting must be as natural as possible. The research interview can take on more of an informal approach when interview groups comprise people who know each other. Groups that have an affinity with each other support children to talk about their ideas and feelings (Keddie, 2004). Therefore students tend to be more comfortable and the research statements are more likely to be authentic (Keddie, 2006). Hill et al. (1996) used groupings of children who were selected by the teacher. They found the participants were more comfortable with each other and that it promoted a sense of cohesion within the group. Participants were very willing to talk because they were not discussing issues in front of strangers. This may also be a limitation of this type of study, given that groups will have familiarity with each other and may not be willing to discuss certain personal issues in front of their peers.

Group interviews need to take place in a location that is emotionally and physically comfortable for the participants (Keddie, 2006; Cohen et al, 2000). As a Health educator I understand the crucial need to set guidelines that develop authenticity, rapport and confidentiality when interviewing children in groups (Hill et al., 1996). Previous studies have found that interviews with children were more relaxed and open when carried out in the school environment (Keddie, 2004).

Ethical Considerations

A study involving the emotional wellbeing of 12 year old boys could engender a high level of risk for participants and the researcher (Mutch, 2005). For example, risk of embarrassment; risk of personal issues being exposed; risk of confidence being eroded due to statements from other participants or the researcher; risk from parent's interpretation of the study's findings; or risk of a power imbalance influencing participant discussion. Identifying and minimising any risk is therefore paramount to ensuring the safety of the researcher and of the participants, and more likely that authentic data is gathered (Keddie, 2004). Throughout the process of data collection I endeavoured to proceed in an ethically correct manner. The application of the following ethical principles underpinned my research design as they were paramount in ensuring the safety of the 12 year old boys.

Informed consent

Initially I gained written consent from the principal on behalf of the Board of Trustees to conduct the research. At this point I made available all of the correspondence to be given to parents/caregivers, staff and student volunteers. All participants and their parents/caregivers provided written informed consent prior to the interviews. Participants had the right to withdraw at any phase of the research and parents and students were given a copy of the interview questions before the interview. To ensure the participants were still happy to participate, they were asked at the beginning of the first meeting and again at the taped interview if they still wanted to take part.

Confidentiality and data storage

The participants were informed that their information would remain confidential to the researcher, the participants and the study supervisors. Personal names and the school name were not used but replaced by pseudonyms chosen by the participants. Participants were informed that all data would be stored in a secure locked cabinet in my office for five years and then destroyed. As previously discussed, in conjunction with the school, a common room was found so that the interviews were conducted in a safe place where conversation could not be overheard. All students were informed of the protocols of the group discussion and confidentiality within the group. I explained the group guidelines to the students in the introductory session which was conducted five days prior to the group interview. On the day of the interview, the guidelines which had been written up were re-iterated and discussed prior to the audio-taped interview.

Participant safety

In any research there could be potential for harm to participants if they disclose information that affects their wellbeing. This was discussed with school leaders before the group interview and I followed their protocols to mitigate any risks. The school counsellor was also informed of the research but did not know of the participants' names. Students were also informed of whom to approach if they had queries or concerns about the research. Being young boys, I realised they could choose to reveal their participation in the study. I asked them not to share the content of the interviews and I referred them to the group guidelines that we discussed and agreed to, therefore minimising risk to participants.

Research design

In this study an interpretivist methodology was used to understand how 12-year-old boys from an intermediate school interpreted their world and made meaning out of it. A case study design was utilised with eight 12 year old boys interviewed. I recruited participants voluntarily from a single school as I considered it would be advantageous for the boys to have a sense of cohesion. I approached a local intermediate school with the research proposal and gained permission from the principal and the Board of Trustees (appendices, 4 & 5). I then met with all of the Year 8 boys in the school, approximately 50 boys, in the library with the one teacher who was involved in the process as the liaison person. I outlined my research to all the boys, including the framework and my reasons for undertaking the project and invited them to ask questions. They were all given an information sheet for themselves and their parents as well as consent forms with a return envelope (appendices, 3, 6, 7 & 8). If they were interested in participating, they were asked to return the form in the envelope to the school office where it was placed in the pigeonhole of the one teacher involved. The office personnel in the school were not informed about the project. Confidentiality of information shared was guaranteed at all times.

Eight boys returned their consent forms and agreed to participate in the study. The final two groupings of four boys in each group, was done in consultation with the one teacher involved in the study. When forming the groups, the teacher and I took note of the Hill et al. (1996) study which interviewed groups of children. They used children who were known to each other and had worked and talked together before. Names of participants were known to the researcher and the teacher involved, otherwise they remained anonymous. Each boy was asked to choose a code pseudonym; this was to ensure anonymity and to give them a sense of involvement in the study.

Pre-interview introductory session

An introductory session of approximately 20 minutes was conducted with each of the two groups before the actual interview. It was intended that this take place the day before the interviews, but due to school timetables it took place five days prior. The pre-interview meeting was important as it allowed everyone to get to know me, feel more comfortable and establish some written ground rules. In line with my experience as a health educator the environment that was set up, which included couches for the boys, facilitated the boys feeling

more at ease. In response the boys were conversant and readily opened up about personal experiences and feelings. The introductory session concluded with students completing a sentence stem questionnaire.

Sentence stem questionnaire

This initial questionnaire was used to gather the boys' initial reactions and to provide potential stimulus material for the group interview. The questions (Appendix 1) were based on the interview questions that would guide the research. The boys completed the questionnaire on their own. This provided an opportunity for them to respond to the sentence stems free from others' influence. It was a private source of data that I collected in at the end of the introductory session. The sentence stem questionnaire did act as a stimulus in the group interview as the boys referred to what they had written about.

Audio-taped, semi-structured group interview

An audio-taped, semi-structured group interview was used as the main data collection method to ensure that the 'voices' of students were heard. Semi-structured questions allowed the interview to flow more naturally and to gain more rich 'real' data (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005). Whilst fully structured interviews may have been an easier means to gain data, they would not have allowed the boys to fully express their ideas thoughts and feelings (Gillham, 2000). All interviews were held in school time and students came out of timetabled classes. Interviews took place on the school grounds, in a classroom that had couches, and was considered by the students to be a relaxed and safe place.

Both interviews lasted just over one hour and I supplied some food and drink to finish. The interviews started with an outline of the emotional safety features of the group to ensure maximal student safety. This included the previously agreed group guidelines and what/who they could go to if anything uncomfortable was raised through the interview. A brainstorm around what is 'emotional wellbeing' was then used as a starter for discussion (Hill et al., 1996). A set of semi-structured interview questions focused around the boys' feelings, hopes and values; environment and reality; past and present fears; and hopes and dreams for the future prompted the discussion (Appendix 2). I also encouraged the boys to expand on their thoughts by using open questions when the need arose. At the end of the interview I asked all boys if there was anything else they wanted to say.

I also used a research journal for my personal notes, such as my thoughts, ideas and observations of the research process. This allowed me to record my reactions to the interviews, especially aspects of body language that cannot be recorded on tape. It also allowed me to record any potential bias as a qualitative researcher and mother of two boys. The research journal also helped in the early stages of my data collection. As Gillman (2000) observes, “this notion of ‘open accounting’ is partially an ethical stance – demonstrating your reasoning and your chain of evidence on which it is based” (p.23).

Data analysis

The data collected from the interviews was transcribed by a professional transcriber, rechecked extensively by myself, and any discrepancies amended. Analysing the data involved the qualitative strategy of thematic analysis as it enabled categories to be taken from the data as they emerged (Mutch, 2005). Thematic analysis is personally time consuming but it allows the researcher to engage in-depth with the data and identify common patterns and themes. When first examining my data, I took note of LeCompte and Preissle’s steps of thematic analysis as cited by Mutch (2005). This included analysing the data initially for first impressions; then looking for similarities and differences; evident groupings; stronger patterns; and common links and relationships. The process began with each transcript being read and coded using a highlighter, and as themes emerged the data was again read over and recoded if necessary. Through this process, themes were identified and the data was cut and pasted into those themes. I created mind maps on large sheets of paper to visually represent the themes and categories and the corresponding linkages and relationships that were emerging (Mutch, 2005). After sharing my analysis with my supervisors I further continued the analysis to eventually finalise my three main themes and their associated categories which are described in the next chapter. While this was a challenging and time consuming task, it was nonetheless invaluable to understanding and taking meaning about the boys’ perceptions of the influences on emotional wellbeing. The analysis of the data is reported in the next chapter.

Chapter Four

Results and discussion

The focus of this research was Year 8 boys' perceptions of the factors that influence their emotional wellbeing. In this chapter I start by providing a brief overview of the participants from the two separate group interviews. Next I report the analysis and the findings of the study are discussed in relation to the literature.

An introduction to the participants

The participants interviewed in this study were eight Year 8 boys (aged 12 years) from one Christchurch intermediate school. They were interviewed in two focus groups with each group consisting of four boys.

Group One

The boys in group one chose the pseudonyms Jay, Macca, M.W and T.G. Three of the boys, Jay, M.W and T.G. were in the same class and all 4 boys knew each other. The school's size meant all the students had an association but they did not consider themselves best friends. The four boys were going to different high schools the following year and were excited and nervous about what that was going to mean for them.

Group Two

The boys in group two chose the pseudonyms Bob, Jo, Steve and Tom. Three of the boys Bob, Jo and Steve were in the same class. Tom was in the class next door but they all knew each other. They did not consider themselves best friends with each other but often played games together, along with others, in the school grounds.

Analysis

I analysed the data by reading the focus group interview transcripts and looking for key themes. Three main themes were identified and each theme was comprised of a number of categories as identified below.

Gender role expectations

This included categories of:

- Making sense of masculinity and gender roles
- The expression of masculinity within different social contexts and the expectation that boys should fit within a narrow gender binary framework
- The influence of gender on expression of emotion
- Managing emotions.

Family and the wider community

This included categories of:

- The role of the family in influencing emotional wellbeing
- Family stress
- A safe and supportive environment that was free from violence, intimidation and where positive connections were fostered.

School environment

This included categories of;

- The impact of bullying and an unsafe school on emotional wellbeing
- The power of teachers' to influence student wellbeing.

Theme One: Gender role expectations

Making sense of masculinity

Across both groups, conforming to the dominant form of masculinity emerged as a key factor that influenced emotional wellbeing. The way the boys made sense of perceived gender roles and the consequent enactment of these roles had consequences for all aspects of wellbeing. In particular, this involved the way they managed and expressed their emotions; the way they related to others; and the way they handled challenging situations. Law, Campbell and Schick (1999) defined masculinity as “those ideals, traits and practices that shape what members of a social group construe as appropriately male” (p. 13). When asked what they thought were the expectations on boys in New Zealand, all boys’ first responses were to quickly identify ‘being sporty’.

I - What are the expectations on you being a boy in NZ?

Tom - *Being sporty. Being sporty, like in rugby, supporting rugby, I hate rugby.*

Steve - *Same here.*

Tom - *Personally it is so stupid, what’s the point in actually ruining your body when it is so fit and healthy and then smashing it all up, and then when you are 40 or 50 you start getting arthritis. I mean how dumb can you get?*

What was worthy of note with Tom and Steve’s statements was the instant link between rugby and sport. In New Zealand, researchers have identified certain components that are generally considered ‘popular/cool, manly’ as being good at sport, competitive, fearless and tough, and limited expression of emotions except on the sports field (Allen, 2003; Ferguson, 2004; Gaddis, 2006; Kehler, 2010). The group two boys endorsed the elements of hegemonic masculinity as exemplified in Tom’s association between being a boy and supporting or playing rugby. Interestingly, his awareness of the expectations associated with gender also came with a rejection of the practices of partaking in rugby. Steve further expanded on his reservations around the expectation for boys to play rugby by stating his beliefs:

Steve - *Let them be what they want to be. Yeah. Don’t judge, sort of like, don’t sort of like, be like a big rugby man, and your boys want to do ballet or something, don’t stop him and try and teach him all this rugby stuff if he wants to go out and do ballet, then let him do that.*

Steve’s statement identifies the normalisation practices associated with gender that influences his view of the world. He recognises that rugby is associated with being ‘masculine’ and ballet is associated with being ‘feminine’. His desire for people to be non-judgemental and

allow young people to '*be what they want to be*' suggests he perceives that this does not occur for some young people, perhaps including himself. His statement also reflect research identifying that a key component of emotional wellbeing is accepting a child as an individual and providing activities that interest them (Bernard et.al, 2007). Steve's statements seem to conflict with the work of those who take an essentialist perspective to enhancing boys' wellbeing (Biddulph, 1997; Lashlie, 2005). The expectation to engage in boy stuff is not what Steve sees as conducive to wellbeing. Conversely, his statements support the approach advocated by other researchers who highlight the need for schools and society to address a wider range of ways to be 'masculine' (Connell, 2000; Coulter, 2009; Frances & Skelton, 2001; Keddie, 2006; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005; Skelton, 2001). Therefore, developing parents and teachers' understanding of how hegemonic masculinity influences boys' personal identity seems crucial (Coulter, 2009; Keddie, 2006; Martino, 1999).

Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity was further demonstrated through the boys' perceptions of the different groups that exist within their school and the expectations associated with each grouping. Both groups in this study identified that students were labelled within a clear pecking order or rank as illustrated in a discussion by group two.

I - *So are there different rankings in the school?* [Question was in response to their identification of rankings within the school]

Tom - *Yeah*

Steve- *Yeah there are different rankings, like Yeah!*

I - *Jo, do you think there are different rankings in the school?*

Jo - *Yeah I think there are and I don't think it should be like that. I think that everyone should be equal. Yeah equal.*

I - *So what are the rankings?*

Tom - *I'll do it from the top like popular/cool, in-between/normal, loser and nerd. Yeah!*

The fact that Jo wanted the rankings to be equal denotes he wanted no ranking. This warrants further discussion, particularly given that he later talked about the bullying that happens within the school and the injustice he feels about this. This will be explored further in theme three, but it is important to note that the impact of this ranking was discussed by all boys at some point through the interviews and regularly emerged in the group discussions. This above statement endorses the findings of other researchers who suggest that higher level groupings (popular/cool /manly group) are associated with more masculine traits; conversely, lower groupings (loser/nerd) are associated with traits that are considered feminine such as

academic success and non- involvement in sport (CASEL, 2003; Keddle, 2006; Martino, 1999; Weaver-Hightower, 2008; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2006).

In New Zealand schooling is a powerful and important socialiser. It can therefore be a site that perpetuates hegemonic masculinity. This was evident in the boys' identification of rankings that reflected the degree of conformity to hegemonic masculinity. During intermediate school years, students are forming their identities and engaging with the roles they are expected to take on as they prepare for high school. This time period is associated with social interactions with peers that overtly or covertly pressure pre-pubescent to conform, otherwise they may be relegated to a lower ranking. As previously stated masculinities are not static but are enacted differently within gendered spaces. Within the school environment, there is a formal curriculum, but much research has highlighted the informal or hidden curriculum as being more powerful (Connell, 2000; Ferguson, 2004; Skelton, 2001). Both groups of participants in this study recognised the school as a site of conformity and discussed the effect on emotional wellbeing for those who did not seem to conform and were therefore relegated to the lower rankings:

Tom - *I saw someone crying that I know that, that is labelled a loser, I just saw him running into the toilets.*

I - *They would label him as a loser?*

Tom - *Cos people peer pressure. Like there are cool guys, in between guys or losers and nerds.*

The use of the phrase 'label him' in conjunction with 'people peer pressure' demonstrated how boys interactions with each other can be based around avoiding the lower rankings. Being labelled a loser had obvious consequences such as being harassed. Therefore avoiding the lower ranked labels becomes crucial to emotional wellbeing (Keddle, 2006; Martino, 1999). The negative impact of this ranking on emotional wellbeing was evident, as all boys talked about making choices at school that were based on how they felt they should respond or act in a wide variety of situations. Tom continued:

Tom - *It's like, we were talking about peer pressure before, like everyone is in to it, so that means if one person is, doesn't like it, they are sticking out like a sore thumb, so like then he is more forced to do it.*

Tom's statement further illustrates how boys' choices are sometimes made so they are to be seen to be 'fitting in', not stepping outside the norm and therefore avoiding being labelled as 'losers' (Warrington & Younger, 2011). Research has identified how social approval is

fundamental to wellbeing (CASEL, 2003; Marmot, 1994; Wilkinson, 2005; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2006). As demonstrated within the previous statements, those students who are seen as not fitting in can run the risk of being labelled 'not cool', being ostracised, feeling distressed or feeling pressured to do something they did not want to do. Tom's statement of being '*forced to do it*' has implications for emotional wellbeing as he inferred it was not physically forced but covertly influenced through social pressure. Group one also talked about how boys acted in ways to maintain or enhance their status with their peers:

I - *So why is that? Why would the boys say that? [oh I hooked up with her yesterday]*

Macca - *They try to be a man in front of their mates.*

I - *Is it that important to look cool in front of your mates.*

Jay - *Yep,*

M.W - *Yeah,*

T.G. - *Yep*

The instant replies from all boys demonstrated the perceived importance of conforming to what a group of boys construe as 'cool'. It particularly draws attention to how the underlying heteronormative forms of masculinity influence the way these young boys relate to each other. As identified later in this theme however, trying to live up to this 'cool' status can adversely affect emotional wellbeing. These above statements affirm that schools need to address what 'being cool' means in the life of young boys (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005). Supporting the need to deconstruct gender identities in New Zealand are Becroft (2006) and Gaddis (2006). They identified the need to consider peer pressure within the New Zealand male culture if such issues as violence and drug use are to be successfully addressed. Evidence suggests, however, that addressing peer pressure can only occur within the context of the contemporary hyper-masculine culture of young men (Kehler, 2009; Martino, 1999).

The following statements from Macca, and supported by group two, highlight the need to listen to students if negative aspects of gender role expectations are to be minimised:

I - *How real is peer pressure and how much does it actually impact on what you do?*

Macca - *Oh people just go I just did this, and did this, and you wanna be up there with them. So you do it and then you talk to them and all of a sudden it's a lie, and you are the only one who did it.*

I - *Were they doing it to try to get you to do it?*

Macca - *They try to do it so they can look tough.*

Macca's statement again demonstrates that the decisions some young boys make are predicated on the basis that if you are not '*up there with them*' you may be relegated to a lower rank. Macca's statement particularly identifies how making decisions, a key component of emotional wellbeing, could be affected by where the outcome of the decision would position them. Decisions therefore often go against what they may believe or know is the best option. This statement supports the literature on how peer pressure, the need to 'conform', and the powerlessness that some young men feel, are crucial elements that need to be addressed when designing strategies that enhance emotional wellbeing (Carroll-Lind, 2009; Milligan, 2008).

Social expression of masculinity

Real or perceived pressure to look or be cool and measure up to the stereotype of what is construed as masculine within different social groupings can have a detrimental effect on how boys relate to other males and females. Group two in this study explored this issue and endeavored to make sense of the different rules for each gender, as the following discussion exemplifies:

Steve - *It is also for the thing that like I found it quite amusing like it was on the big Tui billboards, and it said, two guys kissing is exactly the same as two girls kissing, and then it had Yeah Right! It's sort of like from a bloke point of view, if you if he sees two girls kissing, it is hey, hey, hey, if he sees two guys kissing it is oogh go away. And even if a girl sees two guys kissing, they go away.*

I - *But it is alright for two girls to do it?*

Bob - *Yeah.*

Tom - *And some days like you like see three of them hanging out. It's almost like it is okay to be gay, almost.*

Steve - *Only for the girls.*

Jo - *Yeah only for the girls.*

I - *Why is that?*

Tom - *Because um girls like I think there is just a rule, cos I asked a girl, like, like, it's alright for girls to love each other, to hug each other, but it would just seem wrong for boys, like but why, you would be gay if you do it, but I said you would be lesbian if you do it to a girl, woah. Ah, I don't really know!*

The statements above highlight how young boys negotiate and make sense of how sexuality is used to define hegemonic masculinity. Despite normalised societal expectations for boys to 'do' masculinity which does not include hugging and 'loving' each other, Tom recognises that there seems to be inconsistencies. Tom's last statement, "*Ah, I don't really know*", demonstrates the confusion that construed gender rules can bring. There was a real sense from

all the boys in group two that they were quite critical of the normalisation practices that influence how boys and girls behave. Even though they were critical, their statements throughout the interviews suggest they still conformed to the expected gender rules. When asked questions relating to sexuality, there was a general consensus amongst both groups that it was not safe to step outside of the gender norm of heterosexuality. Within a heteronormative society, the boys perceived that being gay or labelled as 'effeminate' would position them as outsiders. The following statements demonstrate that the participants in this study felt it would be unsafe to identify as anything other than heterosexual.

Group Two

I - *What would happen do you think, to Year 8 boys, if you felt like you didn't want a girlfriend, but you wanted a boyfriend?*

Jo - *You would seriously be teased. Yeah*

Bob - *You would likely get beaten up eh!*

I - *Would a person feel safe to tell?*

Bob - *No! (quick response)*

Jo - *No it wouldn't be safe to tell.*

Group One

I - *Do you think it would be pretty tough for someone at school to feel that way [gay]?*

M.W - *Oh yeah, definitely.*

Jay - *They wouldn't be able to say.*

M.W - *There are so many people that would say "This fella's gay" and then everyone would find out.*

I - *So there are a couple of dominant people at the school who make people feel unsafe?*

Macca - *Oh yeah. No one would know you were gay cos we always have hand-shakes, or a hug or something you know or shoulder.*

M.W - *We always go oh you 'gay guy'.*

Macca's body language and that of all the boys indicated that too long a hug might not be 'cool'. The use of 'gay guy' suggests that being gay represents the 'feminine' and is not an acceptable way of doing masculinity and a rejection of the hegemonic form of masculinity (Connell, 2000). The last two statements illustrate how boys are socialised into adopting certain modes of relating. For example, some practices such as giving the 'shoulder' are acceptable, but only within certain boundaries. Supporting this is the work of Kehler (2009) who found that young boys have numerous fears about developing close friendships with other boys due to the culture of homophobia. The statements from the boys in this study, suggest that this homophobia comes about as a bi-product of the heteronormative social practices within the school environment (Kehler, 2009).

Associated with this is the expectation that having a girlfriend is considered part of being heterosexual and masculine. The concept and word 'frigid' was brought up by both groups without any prompts from the researcher. Telling someone they were 'frigid' is seen as a way of putting down others through making judgements about their sexuality. It also reinforces heteronormative masculinity; maleness equates with heterosexual sexual activity. The boys' from group two all talked about the pressure of being called frigid, but Macca from group one, responded in terms of how it would affect his decision-making which is a key component of emotional wellbeing.

I - *Why do you think they say that?* [Girls say, Oh you're frigid and stuff]

Macca - *Just to make them look more 'not frigid'. To make them look tough, or just better looking. I don't know.*

I - *So how would you feel or how do you think a year 8 boy would feel, if they were being told that by a girl?*

Macca - *Oh I wouldn't like it.*

I - *You wouldn't like it so would it make you do anything differently?*

Macca - *I would just probably do it eh or actually try it. When a girl actually says, you frigid, I wouldn't want to say no.*

Macca's statement that he would 'do it eh' further supports the need to address the underlying reasons for the decisions that some young boys make, especially in relation to sexual decisions and unsafe practices (Becroft, 2006; Weaver-Hightower, 2008). What was interesting here is the fact that the boys talked about how it was the girls who were calling other boys' frigid. This suggests that the girls are well aware of the power associated with sexuality within a heteronormative society. The boys' statements illustrate that developing students' interpersonal skills needed for emotional wellbeing, without addressing the social practices based on gender issues, will be of limited effectiveness in changing student behaviours (Ginsberg & Jablow, 2006; Keddle, 2006; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003; Weaver-Hightower, 2008).

Expression of emotion: Real men don't cry!

The attitudes of friends, siblings, parents and the wider community were all mentioned at various times across both interviews, as factors that influenced how and when the boys expressed their emotions. At some point in the interviews every boy discussed times or reasons why they could not talk about their feelings. This was not simply related to a lack of how to express themselves but also reasons why they couldn't or shouldn't:

I - *And is that something you feel you shouldn't do?* [start crying again]

M.W - *Yeah because it's like embarrassing.*

I - *It's embarrassing to cry?*

M.W - *Yeah – like you invite your friends over you like try to act all tough and stuff.*

Macca - *Pretty much a boy thing*

These statements reflect how the boys' perceptions of the dominant discourses of masculinity influence the way they express themselves. The specific reference to acting tough in front of your peers illustrates how they thought they should act. Macca's statement that it's a *boy thing* suggests that if emotional wellbeing is to be addressed, the exploration into a multitude of ways to enact masculinity is needed (Keddie, 2006; Kehler, 2010). The social processes of masculinity that endorses limited expression of emotions versus the internal need to express feelings seem to be in conflict. The boys further stated:

I - *You were nodding in agreement that it wouldn't be okay to cry.*

Macca - *Yeah I do think it would be kind of embarrassing when your mates are there and....it's not really like you don't really find many boys that go up to their mates and cry next to them or anything, it's just not really a guy thing.*

I - *Have you ever thought about why that is?*

Macca - *All the people like call you cry baby and all that stuff.*

Jay - *You get teased about it*

M.W - *And every one would go on about it for like the whole year.*

I - *Would they really?*

Macca - *Yeah at this school they would. So we just have to 'harden up'. But when I'm by myself I just cry by myself in my bedroom, or don't go out, have a feed, go back to bed.*

This statement around emotional conflict endorses the work of researchers who have found boys' emotional wellbeing is influenced by the existing assumptions/gender norms around masculinity that operate within a person's environment (Coulter, 2009; Keddie, 2006; Kehler, 2019; Skelton, 2001). Macca's statement particularly shows how his inability to cry in front of his friends related to his fear around being labeled a 'cry baby' which was a derogatory term designated to a lower ranking. The term was used to identify behaviour that did not fit within the perceived 'acceptable' forms of masculinity; it is okay to cry on your own, but not in front of mates. Macca's statement that they just have to '*harden up*' is worthy of further discussion as it has long been associated with the expectation of being a male in New Zealand (Ferguson, 2004; Gaddis, 2006; Martino, 1999). It emphasises how young boys at an early age associate expressing emotions as a 'feminine' trait, not something that 'hard men' should do.

T.G and M.W, like Macca, identify the need to conform to the dominant gender expectations when expressing emotions in front of their mates. However, they further identify that in different social contexts, different discourses around masculine behaviours are played out:

T.G - *Oh yeah, I've got mates at school I wouldn't cry around them because there's other people around at school. When I was talking about I cried in front of my mates before it was at home with my mates in my street, and they were really cool about it, just be with them, with close mates, not at school mates.*

M.W - *It depends on what kind of mates you have if they are like cruisy and don't care what you do, then I don't care but if they are like real cool, popular and 'try hard' kind of one's then I don't [cry in front of mates]*

These statements reflect the fluid nature of masculine identities that is evident within different social groups (Skelton, 2001). T.G's and M.W's statements demonstrate that although they would express emotion at times, they would not express their real feelings if the mates were 'cool and popular' or 'school mates' rather than 'street mates'. What is acceptable or 'cool' behaviour with one group may not be acceptable or 'cool' in another. The above statement further supports the literature around how boys adopt multiple positions in relation to masculinity, particularly in relation to how safe they feel within those spaces (Coulter, 2009; Warrington & Younger, 2011). A safe space was provided by friends that supported a wider range of behaviours that constituted masculinity and were not the 'try hard kind of ones'. Consequently, it seems reasonable to assume that schools should reflect on their classroom programmes and culture, and recognise the types of masculinities evident so that they can be deconstructed (Skelton, 2001). This could provide a platform for students to think critically in terms of addressing gender equity. Any school curriculum initiatives must therefore involve real life connections to the social and cultural norms that perpetuate narrow versions of masculinity and femininity (Kehler, 2010; Martino et.al, 2009).

Managing emotions

Throughout the interviews all boys discussed coping strategies and a range of ways of managing emotion. They identified eating and sleeping, chilling out, playing with friends and doing something else. The two most common ways of coping, that were mentioned by both groups, were 'keeping it to yourself' and 'smacking or punching' something. Tom discussed some trouble he had at school and the strategies he employed to manage the situation. He said:

Tom - *I've had like trouble at trouble at school, here, not bad trouble, just classroom trouble, and I don't know how to tell my parents what I can do about it, cos if I tell them, they could tell me off. Like so I like don't say anything now. I just sit in my room and do something to get it out of head.*

I - *Does it get out of your head?*

Tom - *Actually it doesn't, cos I sleep in the night and then it's just back and stuff like that. So yeah in the end I actually get into more trouble than I could do if I actually told them so. I've actually learnt that you should actually start telling people.*

Tom's statements highlight the normalising practices around the health harming emotional regulation that some boys employ (Keddie, 2006; Skelton, 2001; Weaver-Hightower, 2008). His ways of handling a challenging situation impacted on his emotional state to the point where he ended up in more trouble than he would have if he had sought help earlier. The following statements further show the conflict between wanting to express feelings and the inability or fear of these young boys to do so. When they explained why they do not discuss their feelings with anyone, they said:

Group one

Macca - *I just can't. I don't know why.*

M.W - *You feel that you want to but just can't.*

I - *Can you explain that to me more?*

M.W - *Like when I am sad and stuff I like want to tell people and like talk to someone but if I do I would probably start crying again or something like that.*

Jay - *Me the same*

Group two

Jo - *I can't really talk to anyone, I just keep it to myself.*

The boys' statements that they wanted to talk to people but that they just couldn't, suggest an internal conflict between how they were meant to manage their emotions. What is interesting about Macca's statement is that it appears he was not concerned about talking, rather the concern related to being seen to cry in front of others. It seems reasonable to suggest that for some of these boys, their pre-conceived beliefs around acceptable ways of expressing feelings have influenced behaviour. What is concerning about the boys statements is that some of the consequences of a young person's failure to manage and express emotions or to deal with conflict, may be manifested as increased levels of anger, bullying, depression and anxiety (Becroft, 2006; Carroll-Lind, 2009; Milligan, 2008). The boys' limited responses about health enhancing practices utilised to manage wellbeing, seem to endorse the findings of the 2006

National Education Monitoring Project that found over a third of Year 8 boys have very limited strategies to deal with relationship problems (Flockton & Crooks, 2006).

One of the key ways of dealing with emotional distress identified by six of the participants involved releasing the anger that they felt. The common phrases used by the boys involved; 'throwing', 'smacking' or 'punching' someone, and 'beating the crap' out of something:

M.W- And you get real angry so you throw your skateboard.

I - So when you get angry you throw your skateboard.

Jay- You throw anything that you are close to.

I - How did you dent the car door?

T.G - With my fist.

Macca - Yeah that's what you do, take your anger out around the house, just punch anything you see.

Concurring with Becroft (2006) and Milligan (2008), the above statements suggest that these young boys can legitimise their emotional distress through expressing anger via violence towards property or material things. With an increase in school violence, bullying and an inability to deal with anger impacting not only on students but also on families and school staff in New Zealand, it seems crucial that the origins of the behavior are investigated (NZEI, 2007). The discussion within group two suggests that physically dealing with anger is acceptable. As T.G explained how he dealt with his anger, the rest of the group all appeared to agree that it was a good option:

T.G - I have a big stuffed dog. I beat up on that.

That's why I want a trampoline. I have all these big teddies I never use and I, like when I get angry I go on the trampoline and beat them up.

I - What do you mean by beat them up?

T.G - Wrestling with them. Beat the crap out of them. Shove their head in the springs and turn the springs [laughter from the whole group].

While some people may disagree about the legitimacy of T.G's release of anger and emotional distress, his statements and the group's laughter are worthy of further exploration. T.G had previously stated that he would only cry in some groups, but not with school mates. In this discussion however he elicits an affirming response from the whole group in terms of his statement about his teddies, "shove their head in the spring". It appears that he was aware of the aspects of masculine behaviour that were acceptable within this specific gendered

space. The motivations of the group served to encourage the other boys' feelings to be expressed through more physically violent methods (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005). The following discussion in group one, of how the boys perceive the girls' ability to deal with anger, demonstrates how entrenched the cultural norms around gender expectations and behaviours were for these boys:

I - *Do you think that girls do the same thing? [Deal with anger by punching something].*

Jay - *No they just deal with it.*

I - *What do you think they do with it?*

T.G - *I don't know, they just probably tear at their hair and ruin their make-up and sit crying in bed probably.*

M.W - *Eat ice-cream. Cry into their pillow.*

Macca - *I don't have a clue actually.*

Although this study is about factors influencing boys' emotional wellbeing, the boys' perceptions of girls seem relevant. If boys avoid behaviours which they perceive as feminine then how they perceive girls deal with anger may influence their emotional expression. What is interesting in the statements above is that even though the boys were unsure of how girls might have dealt with anger, three of the group surmised in terms of equating female responses with 'feminine' behaviours. Their references to ruin their make-up, sit crying in bed, and eat ice-cream equate with many responses that are shown in the media as stereotypical feminine behaviours. The statements seem to reinforce how boys reject practices and behaviours that demonstrate sensitivity and the ability to express emotion; behaviours that are considered feminine (Coulter, 2009; Martino, 1999). Jay's statement is particularly poignant, he saw girls as dealing with problems, which implies that boys don't!

In summary, perceived expectations and normalisation practices around stereotypical perceptions of masculinity influenced these boys' emotional wellbeing. How they behaved and related to others within certain social groupings appears to be dependent on the gendered social practices within the groups. The factors influencing the boys' decisions have been the ranking of different groups and the fear of being labelled into a lower ranking. Such fears can influence emotional wellbeing. The boys' statements suggest they had been exposed to a narrow range of ways to enact masculinity in relation to emotional wellbeing. Consequently, a limited range of health enhancing strategies is evident in relation to managing their emotions.

An approach that explores a move away from the stereotypical aspects of masculinity towards a wider discussion around gender equity seems worthy of further exploration.

Theme Two- Family and the wider community

Family

At some point all the boys' discussed how their relationships with family, including siblings and parents, influenced their wellbeing. In response to the question "what makes you happy?" all the boys talked about the positive things that family could or did do to enhance their wellbeing. These included doing activities with their family, just spending time with them, having a sibling to talk to, having parents cook food for them, talking with them, not "getting grumpy for no reason" and other factors that have positively influenced their wellbeing and engendering feelings of happiness. As Tom stated, "It's probably when my family is happy, because when they are unhappy everyone is unhappy". Spending time together was the most frequently mentioned influence and was specifically identified in the statements of Macca and Tom. For Macca, family improved his emotional wellbeing by "having them there, cooking me roast". The importance of 'having them there' is an important point to reflect on, especially for parents, as it reinforces the need for family engagement (McCreanor et.al, 2006). The sense of the family as a support base for these boys continued to unfold as the interviews progressed:

Tom - *I do something every weekend. Like cos I think I'm like the string, like the string that's tying my family together. Like my brother and my Dad and I are always doing something. Like I always, like I believe in the family at least at the weekend to do something together.*

Tom's statement illustrated how important it was to him to spend time with his family. Furthermore he noted the role he perceived he played in keeping the family together. The boys' statements supported the research that identified the family as being crucial in enhancing the emotional wellbeing of children (Becroft, 2006; IUHPE, 2009; Milligan, 2008). Specifically, this is seen in how positive parent/child interactions develop connections that become crucial elements in developing emotionally competent young people (Ginsberg & Jablow, 2006; Peters & Thurlow, 2002). Given the importance of family and parental role modelling in young people's lives, quality time spent with a child cannot be underestimated.

When asked what they could do as a future parent to ensure their own children were emotionally healthy, the importance of family communication was re-iterated. All boys discussed the importance of talking to their children and helping them to solve problems, both key components of emotional wellbeing. This is illustrated in a discussion from group one:

I - One day when you decide to be a parent, what are you going to do to make sure your children are emotionally healthy?

Jay - Chat to my kid. If I had kids, I would probably talk to them a lot, if they need anything, probably go down to the school and talk about it with the teachers, if the teachers are annoying him or her. If there are bullies, bullies, definitely.

I - If you were being bullied, would you tell your parents?

M.W - Yeah.

Jay - I'd tell my dad.

T.G - I'd tell my dad too.

I - Why wouldn't you tell your mum?

Jay - She would say, Oh well when he tries to bully you just laugh at him.

I - So M.W what would your Dad say?

M.W - Dad would say give them a hiding and my dad would probably come down and help me.

Macca - Nah, my dad would probably say just knock them out. He just doesn't do anything.

Jay's first statement draws attention to the need for families to spend time talking with each other. An assumption by some parents that young people around the age of 12 do not want to talk to their parents is not borne out in this study (Ginsberg & Jablow, 2006). In contrast, after re-reading the statements of both interviews, it is clear there is a need for quality positive discussion time with family. In light of the statements it seems crucial that parents and young people communicate more effectively and that therefore, the development of basic interpersonal skills for both parents' and young people is needed. Another point of interest in the above statement is the way the boys, in their roles as future parents, would probably handle a challenging situation such as bullying, and how this differs from the way they perceived their families would respond. The boys' statements indicate that the mother is seen to be promoting verbal strategies to solve problems while fathers, in contrast, would sort it out physically. In line with the concept of hegemonic masculinity, toughness and violence are therefore role modelled to the boys as feasible solutions to sorting out problems (Connell, 1995; Ferguson, 2004). There was a real sense that the boys in this group had not been exposed to a wide range of ways to enact masculinity within their family context when dealing with challenging situations. Group two discussed times when they would choose to talk to their mother about bullying, but similarly to group one, it was because their fathers were again not perceived to be as helpful.

Family stress

Another key finding from this study is the impact of families under stress on the boys' emotional wellbeing. Supporting the view of Barker (2000), the young boys in this study appeared to be perceptive in terms of reading 'actions' of their families. Seven of the boys discussed how stressed, busy, absent or fighting parents negatively influenced their emotional wellbeing. Four boys made particular reference to mothers who were tired and stressed. The following discussion identifies how stress within the family situation is picked up by young people and the consequent impact on emotional wellbeing (Bernard et al., 2007; McCreanor et al, 2006).

I - *Would you all agree you can tell when your parents are stressed?*

Jay - *My mum just drives up the driveway really really fast puts on the brakes, opens the door, slams it. You just know before she gets out of the car.*

Macca- *You'll just know before she gets to the door.*

M.W - *Yeah when my mum's angry she turns up the music in her car really loud. So you know when she's angry you just go out the back yard and do whatever to get away from her cause you know she'll just growl at you if you do one little thing, one little thing.*

Macca - *Yeah you just go somewhere else. Just go.*

The above statements suggest that although the boys recognised signs of stress in adults the boys were limited in their knowledge of how to respond. There were few statements in relation to health-enhancing ways of managing challenging times. The use of avoidance strategies appeared to be the main method of dealing with problems or challenges. It is reasonable to assume that teaching parents to role model healthy ways of managing stress is crucial if young boys are to be exposed to effective ways of dealing with tough times. This assumption is supported by the work of McCreanor et.al (2006) who found that reducing stress in New Zealand families is crucial to the enhanced wellbeing of New Zealand children. It is interesting to note that in the 'health promoting schools' framework, including family in any health initiative is recognised as being crucial to the enhanced wellbeing of all children (IUHPE, 2009). The need for all members of society to work together in developing effective strategies that support families under pressure and therefore enhance rather than harm children's emotional wellbeing seems of paramount importance. There was a real sense in these interviews that the saying '*It takes a village to raise a child*' is worth reflecting on.

After discussing ways they dealt with stressed parents, the boys were then asked how their parents' emotions impacted on their wellbeing. Macca and M.W in particular noted how angry it made them feel when their parents were stressed and angry.

I - *So how do you feel when your parents get that angry?*

Macca - *Angry as well.*

M.W - *I just don't know what's wrong. Mum just gets angry for no reason and if something happens at work she comes home and takes it out on us.*

I - *How does that make you feel?*

M.W - *I get a bit angry— punch my bed and everything*

Macca and M.W's statements illustrate the power of parents to project their emotional state onto the people around them. It is reasonable to assume then that if interpersonal skills such as conflict resolution are modelled, they might be taken onboard by young people. M.W's statement that he didn't know what was wrong when his mother got angry indicates a lack of communication within the family. Research has identified a link between stressful family situations and a lack of positive connection to family which can manifest itself as anxiety, violence and bullying, disengagement from school and a lack of self worth (Becroft 2006; IUHPE, 2009; KidsMatter, 2007; Lewis, 2009; Milligan 2008; NZEI, 2007). The importance of communication within families is further exemplified in the boys' general statements about tired parents and how this has influenced their wellbeing.

I - *Can we go back to talking about your family and how they make you feel? You've said (pointing to student) that sometimes your mum comes home angry and you feel angry. Anyone else want to talk about that?*

T.G - *Mum comes home from work, she comes in tired. It's quite hard to talk to her.*

M.W - *I play music and play guitar. It's hard when mum is tired, I can't play when she gets home what I learnt. It's just hard. She's tired. She doesn't want to listen.*

I - *She doesn't want to listen*

M.W - *She's just tired.*

It became evident to me that the boys wanted more positive, health enhancing communication within their families. In particular the above statement supports the findings of Barnardos (2009) that identified relationships issues with family, often as a result of a lack of conversation, as one of the top three reasons that children called helplines. The following statement further supports the need for parents to be receptive to the topics young people want to discuss. Otherwise young people might turn to their friends who may not always be the best source for correct information.

There were also gender differences that the boys perceived in terms of their parents' receptivity and approachability regarding conversations on topics such as sexuality.

Macca - *Typical Dad, don't talk to him about it [sexuality].*

I - *What's that, typical dad, what do you mean by typical Dad?*

Macca - *They just shut off, they don't want to do anything about you know the talk.*

I - *So why is that, do you others agree or do you have different experiences?*

T.G - *Nah, I haven't tried to talk with my parents, I just do it [talk] with my friends.*

I - *Right so you talk with your friends? Jay, so you agree it's a typical thing that dads do?* [Shut off when talking about sexuality]

Jay - *It's not like I want to talk to my dad about it [sexuality].*

M.W - *It's a mum kind of thing to talk to her about it. Dads don't really talk about that stuff.*

I - *That's the question I want to ask of you "Why is it that Dads don't talk about it, sexuality, with their sons?"*

Macca - *Because they just give the stupidest answers.*

M.W - *They just say "oh no, she's pretty hot eh, you should check her out." And stuff like that.*

I - *Really*

Jay - *Yeah, and your mum's like, "she's pretty", but she looks kind of skanky and all that stuff.*

In this case Macca, M.W and Jay viewed it as pointless to discuss sexuality issues with their fathers because they gave answers that were unhelpful. Supporting the findings of theme one in this study, the three boys indicated that sexuality discussions were part of the 'feminine' role within families. M.W's statement that '*it's a mum kind of thing*' indicated that he had not been exposed to men within his family who openly discussed sexuality in a constructive manner. The general statements from group two participants in this study suggest that that they had been exposed to a somewhat narrow view of masculinity within their families, especially in terms of what and how they perceive males to communicate. Research has identified that boys who have been exposed to flexible gender roles become more flexible in their own views about masculinity and can draw on a wider range of skills to manage and express emotions and cope with challenging situations (Barker, 2000). Consequently, if friends turn to each other for ways of dealing with challenging situations, their limited repertoire of experiences may impact negatively on the strategies drawn upon. Young people who cannot talk to helpful family or friends, or access professionals such as helplines, need to be given the opportunity and skills to seek other health enhancing options (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2008). It is therefore reasonable to suggest that schools, families, and the

wider community play a crucial role in developing students' interpersonal skills and providing access to professional support that allow young people to enhance their emotional wellbeing skills.

Parents' separating is another factor identified throughout the interviews that influenced young people's emotional wellbeing. In a discussion by four of the boys as to how separated or blended families had impacted on their own or their friends' wellbeing, Tom revealed his feelings:

I - *Has it affected them?* [Parents separating/divorcing]

Tom - *It's affected them! Yeah it has affected them a lot, like I kind of feel what they are going through. Just pick someone, pick someone for life, like a best friend or something like even that, and just even stick with them.*

I - *That's what adults should do?*

Tom - *Yeah like at least until your kids have grown up and left home.*

The above statement from Tom demonstrates how young people are aware of the impact of relationship problems on their friend's emotional wellbeing. Importantly, it illustrates how his future view of relationship strategies may be influenced by the present role modelling of adults around him. In the focus group interview Tom stated that his mother died when he was young and his stepmother had separated from his father. It is reasonable to assume that these events had influenced his view. Research has identified that the separation of families and blended families can cause emotional distress in children which may then manifest itself in a wide variety of forms such as anger and violence inside and outside of the school environment (Milligan, 2008; NZEI, 2007). There is a concomitant risk then of low levels of emotional wellbeing. This is illustrated by Bob's statement below:

Bob - *Stick together for the children. Cos, um if my parents split up now I would be kind of angry and sad and I like wouldn't be motivated for a while. Could get kind of depressed. It wouldn't be very nice.*

Bob's perceptions about how he would feel suggest they were based on what he has experienced through his wider environment. What is demonstrated within this statement is the need to ensure young people are supported when families are going through difficult times. Parental role modelling of positive healthy relationships or amicable separations are therefore crucial if young people are to develop skills for building relationships throughout their lifetime. It became evident throughout the interviews that parents do not always role model healthy ways of enacting emotional wellbeing. This lack of parental role modelling suggests

the need for parents and young people to develop skills that enhance emotional wellbeing. In line with Bob's statements, this could include skills in managing emotions and establishing clear open lines of communication. With the development of emotional wellbeing skills, young people may be more able to deal with the consequences of separation and blended families; they might also manage other challenging situations, in a health enhancing rather than health harming way (Ginsberg & Jablow, 2006; Hornby & Atkinson, 2003; Kidsmatter, 2007; McCreanor, Watson & Denny, 2006; Milligan, 2008; Silva and Stanton, 1996).

Safe and supportive environment

The importance of living in a community that allowed students to develop positive relationships was viewed as crucial by all the boys. Steve summed up the feelings of group two when asked what he would do to make sure his future children were emotionally healthy:

Steve - *Probably make sure that they're growing up in a sort of a good neighbourhood.*

I - *What is a good neighbourhood?*

Steve - *You know everyone. Yeah. Like when like you know, like you are friends with basically all the neighbours and like that and they have friends maybe a few houses away, that they can jump on their bike and go round and see, like I don't have to get the car, drop them all the way across town for like 3 hours and come back. Cos it takes an hour and a half to get there.*

Steve's statements about having friends close to him illustrated the importance of enhancing young people's friendships within the local community. His statement about knowing people in the neighbourhood is well supported in the literature as being crucial in developing positive connections that enhance emotional wellbeing (IUHPE, 2009; Milligan, 2008; Peters & Thurlow, 2002; Stewart-Brown, 2006). Spaces where young people interact in a safe manner and that support wellbeing, are well recognised as important to the development of resilience and emotional wellbeing in young people (Ginsberg & Jablow, 2006). Steve's reference to being able to jump on a bike instead of being taken in a car illustrates the importance of having this space close to home so that he can '*hang out*' with his friends. It also illustrates how important a sense of internal control, which is an element of emotional wellbeing, is to Steve. Riding his bike allows Steve the freedom to choose friends, but being taken in the car means he had to rely on others. Opportunities for positive peer interaction within spaces that

allow young people access to a wide range of engaging activities that foster emotional wellbeing become vital (Bernard et al., 2007).

The ability to ride a bike or play in the streets with friends depends on how protected people feel within their environment. The importance of a safe environment was seen as crucial by both groups when they discussed what children need to be happy and healthy:

I – *So, parents that stick it out together, what else would you do to make sure your children were happy and healthy?*

Bob – *Safe environment.*

Tim – *Yeah*

As the boys discussed what they meant by a safe environment, it became apparent that a safe environment related to their experience of feeling intimidated in the current environments. For example, gangs were mentioned by all eight boys and appeared to impact on their wellbeing, especially when gang members walked down the streets wearing patches:

Steve – *It is like, sometimes I will be walking down the street, and all these kids from School A, like, Maori and Pacific Islanders, look at me, like a real definite look and I am just walking down the street, and he looks at me, and it is sort of like, I'm going to bash the crap out of you. It's sort of like, I don't really feel safe going down there.*

When discussing what scared or worried them, group one further exemplified how gangs in their environment influenced their wellbeing:

I – *What about real things that scare or worry you?*

Macca – *Gangs walking down the street, you know, with their patches just walking down the street.*

I – *Do you see many of those? Like is that real for you?*

M.W – *You just see heaps. Wherever you go you'll see one or two. You just walk down the street you see people.*

I – *Is that like in your neighbourhood?*

Macca – *Gangs are in every neighbourhood I reckon. I don't think they will never be extinct. They'll just keep on coming and they'll come and will look scary.*

I – *That is something you do actually worry about? Gangs?*

T.G- *Yeah.*

While both groups identified the influence of gangs on emotional wellbeing, it raises the question of whether this would be the case for boys from a greater range of schools. Although this study cannot surmise findings from other schools, it seems reasonable to suggest that the location of the study school was a significant influence in the boys' lives. What emerges through the above statements are Macca's beliefs that gangs are in every neighbourhood and that he doesn't imagine an environment without gangs. Considering all the boys worried

about gangs, this worry or fear could influence emotional wellbeing, and consequently, physical, social and spiritual wellbeing. The findings of this study suggest it is essential that adults, particularly parents and teachers, reflect on boys fears and worries so that they can be addressed. Supporting this is the work of Stewart–Brown (2006) that identifies the most effective mental health programmes in schools were those that included work around preventing violence and aggression and included parents and the wider community.

In summary, family interaction, stress within the family, and the wider neighbourhood and community can influence the wellbeing of the boys in this study. The boys provided insightful statements that demonstrate an awareness of the positive and negative ways in which their emotional wellbeing was influenced by family and the wider environment. It would appear from this study that young boys need skills that allow them to enhance rather than harm their emotional wellbeing. Alongside these skills, a supportive communicative family, and a safe environment where children develop positive connections with others in the community are important aspects of emotional wellbeing (CASEL, 2003; Graetz, 2008; Irwin, 2009; Silva and Stanton, 1996; WHO, 2006). The boys' perceptions of how adults could enhance young peoples' wellbeing are insightful and raise the question of how we support parents, family and teachers to achieve this.

Theme Three - School environment

An unsafe school environment

In response to a range of questions the boys discussed factors that made them happy, sad, worried, angry and excited. Because all boys are not the same, different emotions were presented in relation to different influences. One prominent factor that was revealed as having an impact, positively or negatively, on emotional wellbeing is the school environment. In line with the *New Zealand school safety report* (Carroll-Lind, 2009) negative student relationships, bullying and an associated unsafe environment were the main topics discussed by the boys. When discussing what made them sad or angry, all the boys identified a range of bullying behaviours:

Jo - *Being dis-included. Like people not letting you do stuff, like people not letting you play games with them and all that.*

Steve - *Being disrespected, like doing something that people like say 'suck it in' or something like that and name calling at this school, at this school and at primary school as well. Um, and also some 'flight' sometimes, when you say you go off to get a drink of water and you go back to where they are and they have ditched to go somewhere else.*

Bob - *Just being dis-included or people being nasty.*

The statements from the boys above demonstrate how negative relationships with others have influenced their wellbeing. When reflecting on theme one's findings that boys had limited strategies to deal with their emotions, it seems evident that the development of interpersonal skills and a supportive, caring school community are vital for wellbeing (Bernard et al, 2007; Kidsmatter, 2007). Steve's statements are especially pertinent as language is being used in the school grounds that denote masculine behaviour: boys should 'suck it in' like a tough man. Steve's identification of name calling within primary and intermediate school is of concern as it reflects research that demonstrates bullying is still a serious problem in all New Zealand schools (Carroll-Lind, 2009). In response to being asked if bullying happened in their school, group two provided a strong and instantaneous response that it did. Furthermore, they were all adamant that people at the school provoked other people on purpose. This finding has ramifications in terms of emotional wellbeing as studies have identified that students want safe environments where they can talk openly without anyone 'putting them down' (Gaddis, 2006; Hilton, 2007).

Associated with an unsafe environment, are the roles of gossip and rumours, that Bob stated “*spread like wildfire*”. As exemplified in group two, an environment that is not safe will limit students’ expression of emotions:

Jo - *If you did do it, [hug someone] like at school, someone would see and then it would just, everyone would tease you.*

Tom - *It’s like big brother, rumours would go round.*

Steve - *Like big brother, if you do something, almost everybody sees it. Right!*

Bob - *Someone sees it, and then everybody is told about it.*

The boy’s statements were of concern given the importance of young people being able to express emotions and feel like they can ‘be themselves’ without prejudice. The boys were very clear about how quickly rumours spread and Jo’s comment specifically identified that the implications of this mean they would be hesitant in engaging in behaviours such as hugging as this was perceived as not normal practice for boys in this school.

One unexpected finding from this study is the relationship between bullying and being the youngest in the class. When asked what made them sad or angry, three boys talked about being picked on because they were the youngest. Jo, who was the quietest boy in this group, talked the most about this issue. He talked about how he was “*picked on and teased and all that*” and when asked how he managed that, he said, “*I just kind of ignore them*”. Jo was a tall, strong looking boy but his body language and quiet, sad voice, suggested that he actually found coping difficult and that it had and still was impacting negatively on his wellbeing. While Jo was adamant that groups should be ‘equal’, he also appeared to provide some reasoning for why bullies often called people nerds or losers:

Jo - *It’s to make themselves feel better. Cos they might be feeling pretty bad, calling people names and stuff that are worse than themselves makes them feel like they’re above the other people around them.*

His statement of being ‘above the other people’ is important in that it emphasises how the boys who are placed on the ‘outside’ into the ‘loser/nerd group’ can be treated by the dominant group. Those who are placed or don’t fit into the dominant mould could be teased, bullied and therefore, be in emotional distress (Carroll-Lind, 2009; CASEL, 2003; Taylor, 2008). Interestingly Jo’s perception of the need for some boys to make themselves feel better was re-iterated by Macca. He said:

Macca - *Bullying. I've bullied someone, I admit that. It felt good. It feels like you are on a high. It feels like you are on top of the world when you do it.*

I - *Like you said before about success, is bullying a bit like that, you gain a bit of success?*

Macca - *Yeah you feel good. Yeah but I don't like when people do it, but when I do it you feel like on top of the world. When I see someone getting bullied I always try to jump in and stop it. I hate when, like there are masses of people bullying these small people, it's probably fair when it's the same size. Same toughness or something, so you get it back.*

Macca's statement is from a different perspective to that of Jo, that of someone who does the bullying. Macca's underlying reasons for intimidating others relate back to the need to feel good, gain success and stay within the top level of the school's pecking order. Macca's feelings suggest that bullying is not always about being tough, but rather about the self worth that comes from gaining power which is a form of success. Consequently his statement suggests the need for schools to address bullying through a range of strategies that take into account the underlying causes. Improving self worth, supporting students to achieve success, and identifying how boys could interact with each other in health-enhancing ways rather than through the use of power therefore seems crucial (Barker, 2000; Carroll-Lind, 2008).

Further to Jo's and Macca's statements about the issues of conformity, rankings and the bullying that goes on around them, Steve noted that it was the need for 'popularity' that dictated how students treat each other. At this point in the interview, the participants all talked at once, simultaneously expressing their frustrations around conformity and rankings. In terms of stepping outside the norm, or not conforming to the school environment, all eight boys acknowledged verbally or through body language that this was not always a safe thing to do. Tom's statement clearly captured the feelings of the group:

I - *How safe would it be at this school to step outside that norm?*

Tom - *Pretty dangerous.*

I - *Why, what do you mean by dangerous?*

Tom - *Like... Seriously be picked on. You would be seriously laughed at and you would seriously have a horrible time at school. YEAH! Like if you stepped out of the comfort zone that everyone is like in, like people just say that people here liked hockey and you said you liked swimming and it wasn't very popular here, you wouldn't be liked.*

Tom's use of the word 'seriously' highlights how strongly this group felt the school environment covertly enforced normalisation practices based on fear of being teased. In line with theme one, Tom perceived that different social groups' discourse regarding what was

popular, influenced these boys' wellbeing. He saw that to actively like something that was not popular meant the possible risk of being relegated to a lower rank. Yet, in line with Gaddis (2006) and Crespo (2006), there appears to be a detrimental impact on emotional wellbeing for boys who are not true to themselves and engaged in activities or behaviours that others expect of them. Steve's comment in theme one that people should let young boys 'be what they want to be' seems a pertinent point to reflect upon here. The discussion by all boys across both interviews suggests that there is a need for schools to identify and address the cultures that exist within a school.

The power of teachers to influence emotional wellbeing

A positive and supportive student-to-teacher relationship has been acknowledged as being crucial in engaging students in learning and fostering wellbeing (Ministry of Education, 2007; NZEI, 2007). In this study, the boys identified how teachers could negatively influence emotional wellbeing by perpetuating stereotypical attitudes around masculinity. When discussing peer pressure, the boys responded in these ways:

I - *Why aren't the teachers helping? [with really bad peer pressure]. Do they not see it?*

Tom - *No they see it but they don't do anything about it. Like they see someone crying about something and then they go over and say something like 'man up' or something like that. Like two days ago, no three days ago I saw a teacher say that to a kid to his face.*

I - *What do you think about that statement?*

Bob - *It's not very nice or considerate. It destroys people's motivation.*

Tom - *It does destroy it.*

Jo - *Yeah.*

Tom - *Yeah cos, our tech teachers here, the male ones, are like, like, us blokes aren't meant to be able to cook and we should be good at first aid. And I was like, whoa!*

I - *Do you know why he was crying?*

Tom - *Um, because someone had been teasing him on and on all day, and finally he just cracked up. Really that's, that's not the kind of thing you say, 'oh man up', like you've just been teased.*

Drawing on the discussion in theme one, the boys' statements above illustrate how they perceive some teachers to be not caring about students, and colluding with the more stereotypical aspects of gender. The boys' perceived that the lack of intervention in cases of bullying was due to the teachers' view that bullying was part of life, therefore boys should 'man up'. While Tom's last comment recognises his frustration with the teacher's inability to support the student, it raises the question of why Tom did not stop the teasing he had seen. It

can be assumed from Tom's and the other boys' comments, that stepping in and addressing the teasing would run the risk of being teased themselves or being relegated to a lower rank within the school. Given the importance of supporting friends, a school that does not address the underlying assumptions around gender must therefore fail to provide a safe and supportive environment for all students: this is a legal requirement for all schools. Teachers hold an important and powerful position and can greatly influence students' sense of wellbeing and enjoyment of school (Martino et al., 2004). Consequently, the teachers' understanding of gender construction plays an important role in addressing a narrow view of masculinity and emotional wellbeing. The phrase '*man up*' particularly illustrates how the hidden curriculum or underlying language reinforces some masculine behaviour. Tom mentioned earlier that he often got into trouble at school for being a 'loud mouth'. It would be reasonable to assume that his frustration at the normalisation of boys, demonstrated throughout the interview, was a factor in his '*getting into trouble*' behaviour. In line with the findings in themes one and two a school must address the health harming practices that pervade its culture, and focus on creating a safe, positive and supportive school.

In summary, the importance of healthy respectful relationships between students, and between students and staff, is identified as important for enhancing emotional wellbeing. What was particularly salient here is the important role that schools and teachers can play in creating a school environment that is supportive of student diversity. It appears that schools need to address bullying within a gender equity framework that incorporates a critical analysis by students and staff of the ways in which the relationship between power and masculinity impact on emotional wellbeing. In light of this research, the school hierarchy of peer groups based on gender norms and expectations, and the consequent influence on personal identity and student relationships need further exploration if acceptance of diversity between students is to be developed.

Limitations of the Study

Because the boys came from one school, the findings reflect the views of a sample group rather than a cross section of the school age population. With more time and resourcing it would be interesting to explore the similarities and differences across a range of schools. However, although small numbers are often a limitation of qualitative research, the rich

statements from the boys provide an in-depth look into the worlds of these 12 year old boys. Therefore the findings from this study are designed to add to the large body of evidence gathered from other research.

The main findings of this study are derived through interviews within a focus group structure. Because group dynamics played an important role in the data gathering, it is acknowledged that individual interviews with the boys may have produced different data. By interviewing the boys on their own they may have been freed of any external influence or persuasion from the other boys in the group. On the other hand they may have felt shy or overwhelmed to talk with me on a one-to-one basis. The fact that the interviews felt very relaxed and that the boys were at ease seemed to indicate that the focus group method was an effective tool for gaining data from boys of this age. It would be interesting to interview them first in focus groups then followed with an individual interview. This could provide a comparison to the focus group data and add further validity to the research findings.

Conclusion and implications

When I began this research I wanted to investigate a group of 12 year old boys' perceptions of factors that influenced their emotional wellbeing: that is, the ability to recognise and manage emotions; establish positive relationships; and make health enhancing decisions in challenging times. Through my analysis of the boys' statements, I hope readers of this dissertation will reflect on their everyday involvement with young boys both inside and outside of the school environment. The interviewing of these boys and my subsequent engagement with the data, confirmed to me that the influences on boys' emotional wellbeing are complex and that adults need to spend more time listening to, and hearing young people. The boys in this study enjoyed the opportunity to express, and reflect, on their concerns and frustrations in an emotionally safe and supportive environment. This became clear after I had turned off the microphone where, for example, one such reflection is encapsulated in Steve's statement *"I had never really thought of that!"*

The boys' statements have given me an insight into the world of these 12 year old boys and describe how gender roles, the family, the school environment, and the wider community influence their emotional wellbeing, both positively and negatively. The study highlights the ways in which the emotional wellbeing of boys is constrained by the essentialist or hegemonic construction of masculinity in their everyday social practices. The way groups of boys interact with each other, manage emotions, make decisions and handle tough times is influenced by the need to conform to the perceived expectations of their gender. In particular, struggle occurs when perceptions are tied to an inflexible view of masculinity. Such inflexibility creates a binary where males are socialised with a lack of interpersonal skills and a limited range of ways to express or manage emotions. This internal struggle often manifests itself as feelings and behaviours such as anger, confusion and frustration and is frequently expressed through conflict or violence within families and friendships and peer groups. Although care must be exercised when generalising from such a small scale study and potentially unrepresentative sample of young boys, such feelings and behaviours would appear to suggest that if young boys are to be effectively supported to deal with emotional distress, then there is also a need to address the underlying gender norms perpetuating this behaviour. Relationship skills similarly need to be addressed through a gender equity lens with students becoming empowered to develop lifelong strategies to support their own and others wellbeing.

Alongside these strategies must be a safe environment where there are opportunities to express feelings about wellbeing and masculinities within a real life context.

While we should not homogenise boys, this study does suggest that we need to further investigate how to empower all young boys to seek help if they are in emotional distress. Particularly, boys need to understand that externalising emotions and seeking help are not feminine behaviours. Rather than focusing on innate differences and stereotypical behaviours, it is interpersonal skills and enhancing relationships that we need to cultivate in our young people. Therefore, skills for enhancing emotional wellbeing need to be seen as a resource for lifelong learning and must be embedded into the daily culture of young people. Encouraging boys to develop their sense of personal identity and the ability to express their emotions in health enhancing ways must surely benefit the boys themselves as well as their relationships with others. Rather than keeping their emotional distress private and internal, boys need to be ensconced in a safe culture where all young people can develop healthy relationships centred on open communication, not gender expectations (Gaddis, 2006). Overall, it is clear that deconstructing the norms around masculinity that harm the emotional wellbeing of our young boys has the potential to impact positively on their relationships with other people.

The wider findings of this study confirm that home, family, school and community strongly influence young boys' emotional wellbeing. Of particular importance is that parents and caregivers accept their child as an individual without imposing gender related expectations. Observations in the study that reflect parental gender-based expectations suggest further investigation is warranted. Parents and sons need to explore together a range of interpersonal skills that encourage a deconstruction of gender norms (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003). This is especially pertinent for the boys' future roles as partners and parents because how they interact as adults with others will invariably be premised upon what was modeled to them. For the boys in this study, emotions were managed more by avoidance and/or aggression, indicating a limited exposure to a range of health enhancing strategies. Therefore, supporting parents and other adults to develop the knowledge, skills and understandings to model health enhancing interpersonal skills must be integral to any initiative aimed at improving the emotional wellbeing of young people.

Another aspect of family life that is pivotal to fostering emotional wellbeing and facilitating coping strategies to deal with life events is the need for parents/caregivers to engage with their

children. Specifically, adults need to be involved in activities that young people are interested in doing, spending time with young people and listening to them, and talking about feelings. The boys' recognition that many of their parents were busy and often in a stressed state, suggested the parents' ability to engage with their children was limited. With many parents in New Zealand both working and struggling financially to make ends meet, the impact of stressed parents on children cannot be underestimated (Milligan, 2008). How families can be supported so that they have the time and energy to engage with their children, and therefore foster wellbeing, is a complex area that deserves further exploration.

Outside the home, young people spend a large part of their day within the school environment. The school environment has emerged as an unsafe space for some boys and an environment where nonconformity can run the risk of culminating in bullying, teasing and/or being relegated to a lower rank within the school. The impact of relegation has the potential to damage the emotional wellbeing of school students. Being ranked 'popular/cool' on the other hand is still equated with stereotypical masculine behaviours. Consequently, students who do not or choose not to engage with the normative behaviours run the risk of becoming targets of health harming behaviours and may suffer long term health problems as a consequence (Gaddis, 2006; Kehler, 2010). Moreover it appears that for some young boys, the only way they perceive they can achieve success and self worth is through engaging in violent, antisocial, or bullying behaviour.

What was highlighted in this study is that schools have the potential to be an important space for deconstructing the gender binary and associated stereotypes, and addressing some of the underlying influences of violence and bullying. However it is not evident that this deconstruction is taking place. This study supports the view that a whole school approach is imperative if young people are to have opportunities to have discussions that address the influence of hegemonic masculinity on emotional wellbeing (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005). Included in this approach must be a strong classroom based health education programme taught by skilled teachers. An effective programme requires several essential components: education about relationships, personal and interpersonal skills, managing and expressing emotions, and strategies to counter abuse and harassment. Furthermore, all learning must be centered in a real life context which explores how young people perceive and practice wellbeing. This view sits well with the *New Zealand Curriculum* that identifies

two fundamental key competencies for children as being the ability to manage self and to relate to others (Ministry of Education, 2007). If school students are to achieve these competencies then a focus on the C strand (Interpersonal Skills) of the health learning area becomes imperative. It is in this strand that children learn skills such as assertiveness, conflict resolution, problem solving and decision making. The young boys in this study endorsed the need for these skills, identifying that they want and need support in devising strategies that allow them to manage their emotions, develop positive relationships with others and handle challenges such as bullying. A schoolwide focus on interpersonal skills and enhanced relationships with others is likely to have ripple effects throughout the whole school and be evidenced in improved self worth and conflict resolution, a safer environment, a more positive school culture and potentially, improved educational outcomes.

Any school-based programmes or initiatives that aim to enhance young people's wellbeing must take into account the community in which the young people live. When young people are unable or fearful of venturing out of their home, they are likely to find it more difficult to establish and maintain friendships. This provides a strong impetus for schools, parents, city councils and the wider local community to work collaboratively to provide safe environments for young people. Cultivating environments that enable young people to have ready access to their social networks without fear for their personal safety appears to have merit.

Implications

At the time of writing this conclusion there has been extensive discussion around the impact of the Christchurch city earthquake including its effects on children's and families' mental health. For example, the Christchurch Press (McCrone, 2011) included an article titled '*men dealing to stress*' that discusses how men are not dealing with the earthquake due to New Zealand's '*harden up*' attitude. Instead, according to the article, they are '*hitting the bottle*', an indication of their limited coping strategies. Many of the findings of this study are reflected in the health enhancing or harming strategies discussed in the article - providing further impetus for addressing emotional wellbeing at a young age so that children see positive ways of dealing with emotional stress. However, as is frequently seen in television documentaries and other media reports on ways to deal with the distress of the earthquake, strategies are presented as singular solutions rather than a more comprehensive and multifaceted approach. One of the main conclusions one can derive from this study is that there is no single way that

can be utilised to enhance emotional wellbeing in young people; rather, it is a combination of components working in synergy.

Drawing from research on the effectiveness of ‘health promoting schools’ (Stewart-Brown, 2006) and the findings of this study, it appears that the three components of the ‘health promoting schools’ framework provide a useful starting point and tool for addressing and enhancing emotional wellbeing in the school environment. To be effective however, schools need to implement all three components of the framework. These are: incorporating schoolwide health programmes that focus on teaching and learning through evidence based pedagogical practices, addressing the school culture, and partnering with parents and the wider community (St Leger, 2005).

Teaching and learning

It is important to emphasise the need for school programmes to incorporate personal and interpersonal skills that enhance resilience and emotional wellbeing for *all* students rather than focusing on gender differences. Programmes need to be holistic and recognise that all children bring with them their own set of experiences and ways of seeing the world.

Programmes need a strong focus on recognising and managing emotions, building positive and supportive relationships that incorporate help-seeking behaviours, and strategies and skills around handling tough decisions and situations effectively. The development of these skills needs to be based on effective pedagogical practices that enable students to think critically by deconstructing and challenging established assumptions around gender.

Correspondingly, any curriculum initiatives must be in a safe environment and involve real-life connections to the social and cultural norms that perpetuate gender based behaviours. Student centred learning seems pertinent, where teachers engage learners by listening to them and incorporating what they already know and want to know. Educators need to be familiar with their students and consider the consequences for those students who are perceived as not fitting into the dominant form of masculinity prevalent within the school.

School culture

Given that a school’s culture has the potential to perpetuate or hinder emotional wellbeing, it is crucial that schools examine underlying attitudes and beliefs, especially in relation to gender norms that influence student wellbeing. By analysing the school culture, schools are able to contribute towards changing or adapting the pervading assumptions, expectations, and

behaviours, and develop strategies that are more likely to create a positive school culture and safer environment. This is particularly important in relation to teachers' understanding of gender construction and equity, and might well necessitate professional development for teachers. The establishment of a safer school that overtly addresses violence and bullying will be more effective in supporting young people to deal with a wider range of concerns in their lives (Stewart-Brown, 2006). In line with addressing the school culture, schools need to not only create and foster opportunities for all of their members to participate in health enhancing activities, but more importantly to ensure these activities enhance self worth. Given that the boys' perceptions around emotional wellbeing were significant in this research, it seems particularly important that schools incorporate student voices in developing a positive and safer school culture.

Partnering with parents and the community

Schools need to engage with parents, family and the wider community if they are to enhance the emotional wellbeing of young boys. Families in particular, make an important contribution to boys' interpretation of expectations related to gender. If parents are to role model and expose their children to health enhancing behaviours, then ensuring a consistency of approach between school and home becomes vital. Any intervention that includes family appears more likely to have a positive health enhancing outcome; therefore fostering supportive relationships between home and school must contribute to the development of an environment that allows for open discussion. In line with this partnering with families, the HPS framework also involves working with the wider community. It is here that schools could be supported by the creation of safer neighbourhoods and communities that foster positive interaction with others.

The school environment was only one of many sites identified in this study as influencing emotional wellbeing but, as all children must attend school, changing this environment has the potential to result in the greatest gain. Schools, though, cannot be expected to utilise the HPS framework and process without adequate resourcing and a national strategic direction. Governmental resourcing and implementation of the HPS framework in Australian primary schools through the '*KidsMatter*' project is an example of investment in the wellbeing of young people. The Australian government's financial commitment demonstrates the value they perceive will ensue from investing in the wellbeing of future generations. The long term

outcomes of this project seem to warrant further investigation, especially in terms of the application of the project in a New Zealand context.

In summary

This study concludes that to address the emotional wellbeing of boys there needs to be a shift towards a health enhancing holistic model of wellbeing. Rather than boys being seen as problems, we need to identify all young people's strengths and support them to explore a wide range of behaviours that enhance emotional wellbeing for life. It appears that the 'health promoting schools' framework provides a useful approach in supporting schools in this role. Taking into account New Zealand's high level of bullying, family stress and recent natural disasters, as well as the finding that mental health programmes targeted at young people are more successful and more cost effective than those aimed at older adolescents, it seems imperative that we start addressing emotional wellbeing in the primary school environment sooner rather than later.

Finally, given the complex and contextually situated connection between boys' relationships and their school and home environments, it would be unwise to assume that effective strategies for one group of boys would work with another. Similarly what works within one cultural context might not transfer into another. Emotional wellbeing needs to be addressed within the context of young people's lives and behaviours and the broader social and cultural determinants of health. In my opinion, there is great wisdom in the words of Samuel Johnson when he says,

“Allow children to be happy in their own way, for what better way will they find?”

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Sentence Stem questionnaire

Name _____

Your responses to this questionnaire are totally confidential. Only you and I will know what you have written.

Sentence	Stems	Write your ideas here by completing the sentence.
1.	I feel happy when.....?	
2.	I feel sad when?	
3.	When I feel sad I feel better by ?	
4.	I feel scared when?	
5.	When I feel scared I.....?	
6.	The things I worry or stress about the most are...?	
7.	When I get worried or stressed?	
8.	When I get worried or stressed what helps me is ...?	
9.	I get angry when?	
10.	When I feel angry I usually?	
11.	When I feel angry, things that help me calm down are...?	
12.	When I have difficult feelings I like to talk to?	
13.	Some problems that boys of my age might want help with are ..?	
14.	If I was the principal of a school I would make sure my students were happy by ...?	
15.	If I became a parent one day and wanted my children to be emotionally healthy, I would make sure they ...?	
16.	The best thing about going to high school next year is?	
17.	The worst thing about going to high school next year is?	

Parent/Caregiver Information

Questions for semi-structured focus group interviews

1. What makes you happy?
2. What makes you sad?
3. What do you do to make yourself feel better if you are feeling sad?
4. What makes you scared?
5. What do you do to make yourself feel better if you are feeling scared?
6. What are the things that you worry or stress about the most?
7. When you get worried or stressed what do you do?
8. What helps you to cope with worry or stress?
9. What makes you angry?
10. When you feel this way what do you usually do?
11. When you feel angry what things help you to calm down?
12. Who do you talk to about difficult feelings?
13. What kind of problems/emotions do you have that you would want help with?
14. If you were the principal of a school what would you do to make sure your students were happy?
15. If you became a parent one day and wanted your children to be emotionally healthy, what would you make sure they had?
16. How does it feel to be heading off to high school next year?
17. Who do you look up to? Tell me why?

College of Education

Consent form for Parents/Caregivers



‘Notions of Wellbeing: An investigation into the factors that impact on the emotional wellbeing of Year 8 boys in one Christchurch intermediate school’.

(Please tick each box)

☐

I have read the parent information sheet and understand what will be required of my child if they participate in this project.

☐

I understand that the group discussions will be audio-taped.

☐

I understand that all information collected will only be accessed by the researcher and that it will be kept confidential and secure.

☐

I understand that neither my child nor the school, will be identified in any presentations or publications that draw on this research.

☐

I understand that my child’s participation is voluntary and they may choose to withdraw at any time.

☐

I agree that my child may participate in this research.

Full name (student) _____

Class _____

Class Teacher _____

Name of parent/caregiver _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Please return this consent form with your child’s consent form in the sealed envelope to your child’s class teacher.

-
1. The University of Canterbury, College Of Education, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.
 2. Any complaints concerning the research should be addressed to: Dr Missy Morton, Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, College of Education, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch. Ph 345 8312.

College of Education

Principal consent form



‘Notions of Wellbeing: An investigation into the factors that impact on the emotional wellbeing of Year 8 boys in one Christchurch intermediate school’.

(Please tick each box)

☐ I have read the information sheet and understand what will be required of our school if we participate in this project.

☐ I understand that the group discussions will be audio-taped.

☐ I understand that all information collected will only be accessed by the researcher and that it will be kept confidential and secure.

☐ I understand that the students, staff or the school, will NOT be identified in any presentations or publications that draw on this research.

☐ I understand that students’ participation is voluntary and they may choose to withdraw at any time.

☐ I agree that my school may participate in this research.

Name of school _____

Name of principal _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Please return this consent form to the researcher in the stamp addressed envelope. Thank you for your participation

-
1. The University of Canterbury, College Of Education, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.
 2. Any complaints concerning the research should be addressed to: Dr Missy Morton, Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, College of Education, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch. Ph 345 8312.

Letter to the principal

Appendix 5

The Principal
 XXXXXXXXX
 CHRISTCHURCH

September 25 2009

Dear _____

To conclude my study for the Master of Education degree at the University of Canterbury, I am completing a research project (dissertation) related to emotional wellbeing. My working title is *'Notions of Wellbeing: An investigation into the factors that impact on the emotional wellbeing of Year 8 boys in one Christchurch intermediate school'*.

I will be working under the supervision of Penni Cushman and Dr. Jane McChesney, Principal Lecturers in the School of Sciences and Physical Education at the University of Canterbury, College of Education.

The aim of the project is to research the factors that impact on the emotional wellbeing of year 8 boys in a New Zealand context. I want to find out what is going on for boys of this age and how schools can make a positive difference towards their emotional wellbeing. We know that emotional wellbeing is important for all students. It involves learning to recognise and manage emotions, make responsible decisions, establish and maintain positive relationships and most importantly helps young people deal with the issues around growing up. I have identified your school as one that I would like to participate in this study. This letter is to seek permission for your school to be involved and that Year 8 boys in 2009 are approached to participate in this study.

Your school's participation would involve me interviewing Year 8 students in two or three small focus groups. Focus groups would consist of 4-6 students and would take place in November 2009. The research will comprise of a 25min introductory session with the focus group where we can get to know each other and establish group guidelines. At the end of this they will complete a brief sentence stem questionnaire that can be completed within 5mins. On the following day, a focus group interview will be audio-taped which will take approximately 50-60mins.

In order to protect privacy the information gathered will be presented in such a way that the school along with the staff and students will not be identifiable. The focus group interviews will be transcribed and the raw data will be confidential. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and will only be accessed by myself. It will be disposed of at the completion of the research. I will not be at liberty to disclose such material to anyone. However from time to time generic information may be available to the school as the work progresses.

It is also anticipated that the generic results will be used to support the school and in University of Canterbury conference presentations, as well as the preparation of articles to be submitted for publication.

A summary of the research will be made available to all participants and a copy will be provided to the University of Canterbury. If for any reason the participants wish to withdraw from the research they can and this has been outlined in the letters to the students and to the student's parents.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study please contact me through the contact details provided below. The University of Canterbury Ethics Committee requires that all participants be informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher or one of my supervisors.

I look forward to hearing from you and hope your school will participate in this research. Thank you for your time.

Yours faithfully

Tracy Clelland
Lecturer in Health Education
School of Sciences and Physical Education
College of Education
University of Canterbury
Dovedale Avenue
Ph. 3458152 (w) 3428020 (h)
Email -Tracy.Clelland@canterbury.ac.nz

Letter to the parents

September 25 2009

Dear parent/caregiver

Over the past twenty years through my roles as a teacher, a lecturer and a mother I have been involved in improving the health and wellbeing of young people. To conclude my study for the Master of Education degree at the University of Canterbury, I am completing a research project (dissertation) related to boys emotional wellbeing. The title of my research is – *Notions of Wellbeing: An investigation into the factors that impact on the emotional wellbeing of Year 8 boys in one Christchurch intermediate school.*

I will be working under the supervision of Penni Cushman and Dr. Jane Mc Chesney, Principal Lecturers in the School of Sciences and Physical Education at the University of Canterbury, College of Education.

The aim of the project is to research the factors that impact on the emotional wellbeing of year 8 boys in a New Zealand context. I want to find out what is going on for our boys and how schools can make a positive difference towards their emotional wellbeing. We know that emotional wellbeing is important for all students. It involves learning to recognise and manage emotions, make responsible decisions, establish and maintain positive relationships and most importantly help young people deal with the issues around growing up. I have identified your school as one that I would like to participate in this study. . This letter is to seek permission for your Year 8 child to be involved and therefore I am approaching you to allow them to participate in this study.

Your child's participation would involve being interviewed as part of a Year 8 small focus group; they will not be interviewed on their own. Focus groups would consist of 4-6 students and would take place in November 2009. The research will comprise of a 25min introductory session with the focus group where we can get to know each other and establish group guidelines. At the end of this they will complete a brief sentence stem questionnaire that can be completed within 5mins. On the following day, a focus group interview will be audio-taped which will take approximately 50-60mins. Copies of the focus group questions are attached.

In order to protect privacy the information gathered will be presented in such a way that the school along with the staff and students will not be identifiable. The focus group interviews will be transcribed and the raw data will be confidential. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and will only be accessed by myself. It will be disposed of at the completion of the research. I will not be at liberty to disclose such material to anyone. However from time to time generic information may be available to the school as the work progresses.

It is also anticipated that the generic results will be used to support the school, and in University of Canterbury conference presentations, as well as the preparation of articles to be submitted for publication.

A summary of the research will be made available to all participants and a copy will be provided to the University of Canterbury. If for any reason the participants wish to withdraw from the research they can at anytime and this has been outlined to the principal.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study please contact me through the contact details provided below. The University of Canterbury Ethics Committee requires that all

participants be informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher or one of my supervisors.

I look forward to hearing from you and hope you will consent to your child participating in this interesting and valuable research. If so please complete the attached parent and child consent form and return it to your classroom teacher in the attached sealed envelope.

Yours faithfully

Tracy Clelland
Lecturer in Health Education
School of Sciences and Physical Education
College of Education
University of Canterbury
Dovedale Avenue
Ph. 3458152 (w)
Email Tracy.Clelland@canterbury.ac.nz

Sample letter to students

Appendix 7

Dear _____ (Student)

My name is Tracy Clelland and I am a student at the University of Canterbury as well as a mother of two pre-school boys.

What I want to learn about is what Year 8 boys think about emotional wellbeing. I want to know what things in your life affect and influence how you feel emotionally. For example, what things worry you, scare you, make you happy and sad, excite you, and motivate you. I want to know the ways you cope with these feelings and especially what we as adults can do to support your emotional wellbeing. The best way I think is to ask year 8 boys, that's you. I would like to know what you think so there will be no right or wrong answers. I will be talking to you as part of a group with other members from your class in a 45-60 minute audio-taped interview in November this year. It will be in school time and on the school grounds but it will be confidential. We will have a meeting the day before so we can get to know each other and you can see how the focus group interview will work. I would also like you to fill out a sentence stem questionnaire that will take just a couple of minutes at end of the informal meeting. The questionnaire includes information that may help me find patterns in what you and the other children say and it is confidential between you and me.

It is important that I record what you say correctly so I would like to record our interview on audio cassette (tape). No one but my teacher and I will be able to listen to the tapes as they will be kept in a locked cabinet. The things I write down when I listen to the tapes will not have your name on them and will also be kept in a locked cabinet. I am only interested in what boys your age say about emotional wellbeing so I will not be using your name.

Your parent/caregiver will have a letter so they will know what the interview is about and you or your parent/caregiver are most welcome to talk to me about the interviews or my study. If you do want to be interviewed just complete the consent form and return it to your teacher in the sealed envelope. Hopefully you will agree to be part of this exciting project.

Thank you

Yours sincerely

Tracy Clelland
University of Canterbury
Dovedale Avenue
Ph. 3458152 (w)
Email -Tracy.Clelland@canterbury.ac.nz

Student informed consent**Appendix 8****Consent form for participants - Students**

I _____ consent to becoming a participant in the Masters research being conducted by Tracy Clelland on the factors that impact on the emotional wellbeing of year 8 boys.

I understand the kinds of questions that will be asked and am happy to participate on that understanding.

I understand that the research will involve me completing a sentence stem questionnaire on my own and that the data will be kept confidential and secure.

I understand that the research will involve me participating in a group discussion that will be recorded on audio-tape, transcribed and that this information will be kept confidential and secure.

I understand that my name will not be used and that any quotes or stories will use a generic term or pseudonym.

I consent to my stories and direct quotes being used as part of a Masters dissertation and any conference articles presentations or publications.

The researcher has explained the nature of this research to me, including the purpose of the research and conditions of confidentiality. I understand what will be required of me if I agree to participate.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may choose to withdraw at any time. I have discussed this with my parents and I agree to participate with Tracy Clelland's Masters research.

If I have any questions regarding this research project I will speak to Tracy Clelland as the researcher.

Full name (student) _____

Class _____

Class Teacher _____

Signed _____

Date _____

Please return this consent form in the sealed envelope to the school office or your class teacher.