‘I didn't know my father’. Reflections on the masculine identities of secondary schoolboys in Durban Secondary Schools

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Paper to the South African Historical Association Conference, University of Stellenbosch, 5-7 April 2004

Abstract: This paper is based on interviews conducted with 21 Grade 10 male learners in three different Durban High Schools. It examines how these boys portray their fathers and describes their early memories of the role that their fathers played (or did not play) in their lives. It then explores the way that these early childhood experiences have impacted on their own sense of self and their hopes for the future. The paper then investigates the relationship between experiences of fathers, visions of fatherhood and the future and sexual risk behaviours. The way in which socio-economic and family circumstance affect the experiences of these boys is discussed and a framework is suggested to explain the different imagined future trajectories and current practices of the boys

I wish to acknowledge and thank the Ford Foundation (financial assistance), the European University Institute, Florence (use of library facilities) and Claire Gaillard-Thurston, Nokuthula Masuku and Mxolisi Mchunu for their assistance with transcription of the interviews. This paper is part of an international comparative project on ‘Postcolonial Masculinities in Schools’ led by Professor Blye Frank of Dalhousie University.

Introduction

This paper examines constructions of masculinity amongst schoolboys[1]. The initial intention of the paper was to explore the impact of schoolboys' relationships with their fathers on their own dreams and life aspirations concerning fatherhood and, in turn, on the relationship between these factors and sexual risk-taking propensity. The structure of the paper still reflects this initial goal though the argument of the paper has changed as I have progressively worked through the interview transcripts.

I started the paper with the belief that I would find some relationship between experiences of a father, dreams of fatherhood and sexual risk-taking. Hypothetically, and drawing on literature which I review below, I thought that a boy without a father would be less inclined to consider fatherhood[2] seriously and more likely to take little account of sexual risk in his relationships. This paper shows that this works well as a way of approaching the data, but that the formulation is too simple and linear.

This paper argues that amongst the schoolboys at least two views about fatherhood can be detected. Some boys are powerfully vested in the idea of fatherhood (and family). Other boys have a much looser idea about the importance of fatherhood and about the likelihood of becoming a father. Becoming a father for these boys is a rather speculative issue that engages them little. There was no correlation between these two positions and the relationship (good or bad) that boys had with their fathers. This is not to say, however, that fathers are unimportant in trying to understand the construction of masculinity. It is rather to say that there are many other factors that impact on ideas of fatherhood and these are often more important than the actual experience that boys have of their own fathers.

This paper is organised into five parts. In the first, I review various literatures that deal with the subject of this paper as well as discuss the methodology employed. In the second part I draw on the accounts of six informants to distinguish the different positions that schoolboys have towards fatherhood.

The third part of the paper discusses how the informants' views on fatherhood might be linked to risk-taking. In the current context of South Africa this point is currently a part of a Lovelife media campaign to encourage safe sex. Cheryl Carolus, Chief Executive Officer Tourism SA and former SA ambassador in London, in a radio advertisement, notes the correlation between young people who have a positive view about the future and the likelihood of making safe sex choices.

In the forth section I discuss the risk-taking attitudes and behaviours of the schoolboys. In the fifth section, I discuss how the three elements – memories and experiences of fathers, visions of fatherhood and HIV risk – relate to one another and

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[1] I have chosen to call my informants 'schoolboys' because other descriptions seem too careful or wordy. Among the options that I considered were 'young male learners', 'young men', 'secondary school male learners'. Each had their strengths but despite the possible implication in the choice of the term 'boys' that I have made light of the age (which ranged from 16 to 21) of the respondents I have preferred 'schoolboys' for its simplicity and its location specificity.

[2] Fatherhood is not treated as synonymous with biologically becoming a father (impregnating a woman). It is understood in this paper as a gender role and a personal choice.

suggest that future work might profitably concentrate on this hitherto neglected area of enquiry.

1. Literature Review and Methodology

In this section I offer an explanation for the assumptions that informed the writing of this paper. It is well documented that parents have an impact on the lives of their children. Scholars writing in fields as diverse as demography, psychology, education and gender studies have repeatedly made the point that the input of parents makes a huge difference. Bob Connell put it powerfully when he wrote, "Statistically speaking, the best advice we can give to a poor child keen to get ahead through education is to choose richer parents" (Connell, 1993, 22). But it is not just a matter of wealth. Parenting practices differ vastly within social classes and between people of similar background, even though it is possible to identify variables that make a difference.

Beyond parental influence, there is the consideration of the specific influence that fathers[3] have. In the field of masculinity studies the importance of fathers is recognised in diverse ways. The absent father (physically and/or emotionally) has been the subject of much writing. Not knowing one's father in either sense is likely to be a source of insecurity for a child and to leave an indelible mark on the constructions of masculinity (Faludi, 1999, Kupers, 1993). On the other hand, writers like Bob Connell suggest that the idea of the absent father has been distorted and exaggerated and his absence used to promote a men's rights politics (Connell, 1992). It is now common to acknowledge that functional families do not need a 'father' (eg Connell, 1991). Children in female-headed, single-parent households and of gay parents do not 'suffer' because they don't have a father.

Psychological studies offer a different perspective on the influence of fathers on children. Studies of two-parent households, for example, suggest that the contribution of fathers is important to the psychological wellbeing of the child as adolescent and adult. There is a positive correlation between father involvement in his children's school and their academic performance, attendance and attitudes towards school. Lower levels of substance abuse and crime are also associated with engagement by fathers in the lives of children (Lewis and Lamb, 2003, 25-26). A child's early cognitive development also benefits and s/he is likely to be more socially responsive if a good relationship with the father exists (Engle and Leonard, 1995, 59).

The quality of the father-child relationship is important though the physical presence of a father is not in itself a determining factor. Alice Miller, a Polish psychoanalyst working in Switzerland, has written extensively on one aspect – love - of the child-parent relationship. Her argument is that a child really does suffer if love is withheld or denied (Miller, 1987). This was one of the factors which forced me to revise my assumptions – a loving mother living alone with her children can often be a much better parent than an uncaring or abusive father living in a nuclear context.

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[3] The definition of 'a father' is not simple although it is often assumed that fathers are simply the biological male parent. Issues of child adoption, sperm donations and the expansion of the term 'father' to include social and economic fathers all serve to obstruct simple usage. For the purposes of this paper, a father will be understood to mean a male person exercising the fatherhood role.

Nevertheless, some research does show that the absence of a father can be deleterious to the development of a child. The importance of fathers in childrearing is discussed in detail in work attempting to establish how changes in family form, the nature of work and patterns of father-child interaction have impacted on children. The increase in single-parent households has had an impact on children. Fathers tend to be separated from their children, time spent with children declines and this impacts on their academic performance (Cooksey and Fondell, 1996). The changing nature of work can influence practices of fatherhood (Ku, Sonenstein and Pleck, 1993). In times of recession, for example, fathers engage in parenting more vigorously (Caspar and O'Connell, 1998). Furthermore, state policies impact on fatherhood practices by encouraging or discouraging fathers to become affective and present (Brandth and Kvande, 2002; Curran and Adams, 2000), and the changing understandings of the practice of fatherhood and the emergence of new man discourses, has increased the time spent with children, extended the types of activities fathers do with children and deepened emotional engagement with children.

The subject of, especially black, teen fathers has featured strongly in the last decade as a subject of research enquiry in the US (Gadsden and Smith, 1994; Gadsden, Wortham and Turner 2003). The conditions under which young men become fathers and accept the fatherhood role enjoys particularly emphasis. For my purposes this work shows how exposure to gang or street cultures can militate against ideas of fatherhood and how the absence of a stable family or support systems can undermine attempts to 'become fathers.'

A related body of research addresses the relationship between delinquency and teenage fathers. The absence of a father inclines young men to risk, specifically of becoming teen fathers (Jaffee, Caspi, Moffitt, Taylor and Dickson, 1998). In a study of young fathers (defined as under the age of 19 years) a US study concluded that "Fathers were more than twice as likely to be delinquent than nonfathers" (Stouthamer-Loeber and Wei, 1998, 56). It went further to offer a profile of young fathers: "Compared to males of the same neighbourhood, race and age, young fathers tended to be troubled young men who were significantly more likely than their matched controls to have engaged in varied serious acts of delinquency in the year of fatherhood and in the year after. Also, they tended to be less educated, had more court contacts for delinquency, and more were frequent drinkers and drug dealers than their matched controls" (Stouthamer-Loeber and Wei, 1998, 64). This and other studies, however, stop short of identifying delinquency as a cause of teenage paternity and vice versa. When considering the relationship between fathers, fatherhood and risk behaviour research suggests that young men who grow up without fathers in harsh disciplinary and under-resourced family contexts are more likely to engage in unsafe sex (here defined as unprotected sex which results in pregnancy) than young men who grow up in loving homes.

The definition of a stable and loving home varies. It is too simple to say that the presence of both parents constitutes a stable and loving home. In Africa and South Africa extended families remain important resources of parenting. The work of parenting in extended families can be undertaken by grandparents, uncles and aunts and even siblings. In Southern Africa, it would seem that a great many children do not live with both of their biological families –over a third, for example, in Namibia fall into this category (Lloyd and Blanc, 1996, 278). Some of these children will be living

alone with their mothers, but others will be with extended family. Insofar as the importance of the extended family is concerned, in section 3 (visions of fatherhood) I shall be arguing that the existence and importance of extended families has a major impact on the way in which schoolboys think about themselves and their futures.

Fatherhood is not experienced or exercised in the same way across race, class and cultural divisions. US work on Hispanic, white and Afro-American fathers shows this although this work also debunks the idea that there are particular fathering styles that can easily and unproblematically be associated with any one group (McAdoo and McAdoo, 1995). In South Africa, the history of the country has had a major impact on the way race and class have shaped patterns of fatherhood. The process of migrant labour, for example, has produced a system in which a great many African children grew up without the physical presence of their biological father. This pattern remains powerful to this day (Barbarin and Richter, 2001). By contrast, white middle class children living in suburbia have historically lived in nuclear families. It is only relatively recently that rising rates of divorce have begun to produce families where children are quite likely to live with only one biological parent – the other being in another household or relationship. While incidence of migrant labour may have declined, there are many factors which currently militate against stable family situations. The most obvious in South Africa is the effect of AIDS and the deaths of parents (Gow and Desmond, 2002). Another factor is poverty and the impact this has on marriage rates (Hunter, 2004, Appendix 1) and on forcing people to move to urban areas to look for work. A third factor is the opening of the global labour market, allowing people with skills to find lucrative employment overseas and opening up new migrant opportunities.

Methodology

This paper emerges from a broader project on Postcolonial masculinities in School. The project maps masculinities in school, paying attention to the balance of gender forces in school and the way in which particular configurations of masculinity are located within the mesh of gender relations in the school.

I selected three schools which reflected the spread of educational institutions in Durban. I conducted interviews in the latter part of 2003 with male teachers and students in: a coeducational township school, a single-sex, urban, middle class school and in a coeducational former coloured school which has undergone rapid demographic change in the last ten years and now has a majority of African students in it. I interviewed seven learners in Grade 10 from each school. The respondents were selected to reflect the diversity of experience in the schools – sport, culture, family background, academic aptitude, race and class were used to ensure a spread. The ages of respondents varied from 15 to 21 years. Each interview lasted between an hour and an hour and a half. In the township school, I was helped by a Zulu-speaking research assistant, Mxolisi Mchunu, who translated and transcribed the interviews.

The research design reflects the view, substantiated in many recent studies, that schools themselves influence constructions of masculinity (for example, Connell, 1996; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Skelton, 2001). The research material presented below, however, is not intended directly to examine the influence of schools on masculinity. Yet the profiles of the student populations at the schools

are quite distinct. The single-sex school (hereafter referred to as Oak High) draws its students primarily from multi-racial middle class communities though there are some working class, mostly black, boys at the school. The former coloured school (hereafter referred to as Gladstone Secondary) includes many African boys from upwardly mobile families (for example, whose parents are nurses, small-scale businessmen), some from working class families (un or under-employment being a feature) and Indian and coloured boys from a wide social spectrum ranging from working to middle class. The township school (hereafter called Dingane Secondary) draws its students from the surrounding area which consists of a mix of relatively well-settled households where some members are in permanent jobs and households where it is hard to detect a source of income. The socio-economic conditions are reflected in the pattern of family forms of the students interviewed (See Appendix 1). In Oak High, all but one boy live with both parents. At Gladstone, there is a bewildering range of living arrangements including a boy who lives with neither parent. At Dingane, boys tended to live either with both parents or with their mothers.

2. Memories of Father

In this section I present the stories of six schoolboys. These are organised into two categories. In the first, I draw on interviews of schoolboys for whom fatherhood is not an aspired state. These schoolboys live in differing family forms, are of different races yet all are in well-resourced, stable family situations. The second category presents the stories of boys from Dingane Secondary. These boys are strongly interested in fatherhood and in the preservation or restoration of family.

Sibusiso

Sibusiso is 18. He attends Gladstone Secondary. He is one of two children living in a new lower middle-class area close to the school. His mother, a nurse, works in London earning pounds sterling which convert into a healthy number of South African rands. She has bought a townhouse and Sibusiso stays here with his younger sibling and grandmother. His life is strongly focused on activities associated with the charismatic church and he spends most weekends practicing and performing for a church dance troupe.

> I was born in 1985 and…I only got one parent-my mother. I don't know about my father. Since I was born, I never met my father and I'm not looking forward in meeting him because I'm happy to live with my mother.

Sibusiso lives among women who have been abandoned by men – his grandmother, mother and sister all fall into this category. He is Xhosa speaking. His extended family is dispersed around the country. He values this family and has strong sense of being 'from the Transkei'. He is not, however, keen on 'their traditions' and has no desire to go through the customary circumcision rituals which induct young men into manhood and affirm an ethnic Xhosa belonging. Sibusiso represents the relatively new, emerging African middle class; urbanised, economically self-sufficient, forward-looking. Personally the past isn't very important to him. He has no sentimental attachment to the past and has no need, or desire, to look after his mother who is, in any event, self sufficient.

Jack

Jack is 17 yrs old. He attends Oak High. He comes from a stable, nuclear family which lives with his maternal grandmother in the suburbs. He has a younger brother. The family has moved between Johannesburg and Durban a number of times. Jack explains this in terms of money. His father moves when better work options in his area of work – 'the sound business' - come along. Despite the fact that the family is stable, there seems to be little interaction. Jack is involved in domestic chores but spends most of his time with his friends. His passion is BMX and most of his leisure time and his friendships are shaped by his involvement with the bicycle sport. On the weekends he works in a bicycle shop, goes to church and then spends time with friends watching movies, playing video games and 'hanging out'. There appear to be few family events. He doesn't particularly like Oak High and objects to its emphasis on sport participation and spectating. He expresses no strong feelings about family. Family is a resource – his father picks him up from school and from his work place on Saturday mornings, his uncle will have him to stay if he visits Mauritius.

Jack's father occupies no special place in his life. He admires him (and his mother) because "they've like paved the way for how I'll grow up. Like my dad never beats my mom, so that's set an example that I must respect women and my dad's always been there so subconsciously it places in your mind that this is how your father behaves so you will behave so you will behave like the father". But Jack is quick to reject any idea that his father is a role model. This position is reserved for world champion BMX riders.

Yasien

Yasien is 16 years old. He is a devout muslim and was born in Cape Town. His family is very tightknit. Three generations still live in close proximity and keep in daily contact though unlike some other respondents, he doesn't have a vast local network of cousins, uncles and distant family. "[P]ractically half of my family" lives in Australia and New Zealand. Yasien in fact spends hours each day looking after his aged grandparents. His mother and father and two older brothers live together. His mother is a nurse and his father a mechanic. Yasien's life is largely spent in the company of his family. He spends time with father (fishing, watching TV, cooking and doing household chores) and a lot of time at home studying. He doesn't have many friends and though he has ambitions about school recognition at Gladstone Secondary (he wants to be chairperson of the Learners Representative Council) he doesn't spend much time at school after school hours. He seems very well-adjusted and is ambitious and clear about his life. He wants to study overseas, Saudi Arabia he thinks. This is a young man who feels mobile, retains an appreciation of family but views it from a transnational perspective.

Yasien doesn't have much to say about his father. It is evident that they get on very well and spend time easily together. But he doesn't see his father (or anybody else) as a role model.

RM: And what would you say about your dad?

Y: My dad, ja, I …I'd like to take after him but, you see, my father told me, I mustn't use him as a role model. I must try to be better than him. Because, you see m…my parents are the…they don't want me to end up like them.
RM: Hmm!
Y: …they want me to be better than them. Let's say every five minutes I sleep, "Go study! Go study!"

Mandla

Mandla is 18 years old. He lives with his mother and father in the local township. He has two brothers. There are many members of his extended family living in the same township and he visits them often. Both parents are unemployed. They used to farm on the South Coast but political violence forced them to move. Members of the family were killed. Some family members have remained and he visits them when he can. He is an avid member of the Apostolic church. He wants to be an accountant. He is an active member of the school debating team at Dingane Secondary. He helps with housework and is dutiful and respectful. He cooks but his father does not – he looks for work.

Mandla has traditional views about many issues. He believes that corporal punishment is right, that chiefs and traditional leaders are important and that respect is central to good living. "It is good to respect other people … People will not mourn for you if you do not respect them. It makes you respected when you humble yourself among other people." These views are reflected in his attitude to fatherhood and fathers.

On the question of role models, Mandla includes both of his parents.

Mandla**:** For now it's my mother because she does the best for me and she gives good advice to me.
RM: And your father?
Mandla: Him too is my role model.
RM: So you are saying that both your parents are your role models?
Mandla: Yes.

Silwane

Silwane lives with his mother and grandmother and siblings in the local township. He attends Dingane Secondary. He is the eldest son of his father's second marriage. He is estranged from his father. His father left his mother and now lives with another woman. He provides no support for his ex-wife and children. Prior to marrying Silwane's mother, his father had a son by a woman in the rural areas. The father did not support this son and he turned to crime, was caught, and is now in Westville prison. His father also had two children by his first wife and these children have received all of his support. They are both studying in tertiary institutions.

….in my life my father has never been supportive to us, we live with our mother and granny, so I had to take responsibility to look after my brothers and sister. …….

I sometimes tell him to support us and I even went to Commercial City to lay a complaint about him, they told me to go to social workers and social workers said that they needed an ID and that is what I am still waiting for right now.

Nzulu

Nzulu was born in Port Shepstone. His parents separated early in his life and his mother moved to Durban, finding work as a domestic labourer. Nzulu lives with his mother, a sibling and a stepfather in the township. He has very little to do with his father. His father has not given him anything but did provide financially for his two older siblings. Nzulu is angry about this neglect, especially as his father has a job and, although he lives with a woman he has had no other children. Nzulu's family is poor and he shares this poverty. He has no bank account or cell phone.

Nzulu's stepfather "is the one who is playing a fatherly figure in my life and he even pays school fees for me". On the other hand, Nzulu's biological father is not willing to support him. "[H]e promises to give me some money, but when I go to his place I don't find him and if I happen to find him he becomes aggressive to me". Consequently, Nzulu only sees his father "when there is a need …. I don't see him often". In fact, Nzulu has "decided to tell myself that I don't have a father". On the other hand, Nzulu is happy with his relationship with his stepfather?

Nzul: Though he is not my biological father, but he does good things for me, he treats me like his biological son.
RM: Does he show affection to you?
Nzul: Yes, because we have never engaged ourselves in an argument.

Virtually all the township schoolboys interviewed expressed the importance of family. Some were disappointed by the failure of their biological fathers to be integral members of this family. Mazwi sums up the importance of family members: "they know me better – they provide for me in times of need. They buy me all important things that I need." He then adds, about his father: "There is nothing good that I can learn from him. He drinks a lot and when he is drunk he becomes a problem to everyone. He shouts, he makes destructive noise."

3 Dreams of the Future, Visions of Fatherhood

The differences in response to questions about fatherhood have been the striking and have resulted in the development of the two organising categories in the previous section. In the first category of schoolboys in middle-class, emotionally and economically secure environments, fatherhood is not a priority or an especially esteemed masculine role. In the latter, it is a dream that organises life narratives and dreams.

For Sibusiso, being a man is "to have a house, a woman and the child and be married. And you also work." But further questioning establishes work as the central feature of Sibusiso's understanding of life. To be a man requires 'work'. "Find work for

yourself. If you can't find work for yourself, try and help at home, things like that." For Jack, the goals are similar. His goal for the future is "Making enough money to be able to satisfy your needs and wants. I don't really think I'll have like bundles of money just to waste. I hope that I make enough money to survive and support my family - if I have one - and to satisfy my needs and wants." "[M]oney plays a great influence in everyone's life" Jack is aware that money needs to be earned and carefully spent. His calculations about earning money, however, are entirely centred around his own needs. They don't involve any sense of responsibility for caring for his own parents or for saving up for a future as a father.

> Well, normally I need money to go out with my friends but if I get a lot of money now I'm gonna take like twenty percent of that to going out. I wanna save up for a video camera with a lens 'cos I also wanna get into filming. 'Cos that way if what I'm working on doesn't work out, I can always have something to fall back on. So I'm saving for a video camera and I'm also trying to save up for a new bike. My old bike is old and it's getting trashed.

Jack's worldview is predicated on an autonomous self. He is at the centre of his own world and he is unencumbered with considerations of or responsibility for family. When he finishes school he plans to spent a year in Mauritius and study information technology or film at University. There is little reason to suppose that he will not be able to do both.

Yasien's view of the future involves travel and the pursuit of his professional dreams. He explains why he wants to leave South Africa, despite enjoying being in the new, non-racial and democratic Republic.

> I'm…living in South Africa, yes but I … I like to live here. I like to travel and I like to look at South Africa before I travel the world. But one thing I don't understand abou…one thing I don't like about South Africa, it doesn't have uh…job appli…uh….job eh…facilities here in South Africa. You can finish I …I know people that finished matric and are sitting for four years still waiting to get a job. They've got …matric certificates, they've got diplomas and medical degrees and stuff like that, they're still waiting for jobs. But uh….now, I don't mean to sound racist, but it seems like the black people are getting the jobs faster than the whites. So, what…that's why I plan on finishing my matric here. I'm going to study in either Australia or Saudi Arabia because here you know once you finish your… your studies, it's easy for you to fall into a job. See, like I'll study and finish over here, one day a chemical engineering I … I could fall into SASOL or _____ or I could go and a…apply for a job…apply for the job there, but I prefer to go to Saudi Arabia because, once I finish my studies in Saudi Arabia I can either go to Australia, continue wi…further my studies there or work

Sibusiso, Jack and Yasien have a number of important things in common. Their parents (single or married) are financially secure and are prepared to support them. They believe that the education they currently get at Oak High and Gladstone Secondary is preparing them for a professional life. The three schoolboys aren't interested in politics and they either feel somewhat alienated by political developments or are uninterested. It is as though their life trajectories will be little affected by national developments. These factors make them confident about the future. This future involves pursuing professional ambitions. They have no need to think of supporting their parents or of building a family. Fatherhood is hardly on their radar screens. I shall call them the new world boys.

Mandla. Silwane and Nzulu all live in working class environments and they all still experience the legacy of colonialism and apartheid in terms of their life prospects. None is particularly optimistic about upward social mobility. For all, money is tight and the future precarious. All are very mindful of being African, and especially, Zulu. They all are engaged in reconciling the new democracy and the hegemonic discourse of human rights with traditions that stress ethnic identity, clan loyalty and the spiritual, social and economic importance of family.

Dingane Secondary is a well regarded school in the township. It has good teachers and a strong climate of work discipline and achievement. This is evident in the dreams of the schoolboys.

Mandla wants to become an accountant. Unlike the dreams of the middle class boys, Mandla's hopes are tied up with family.

> RM: If you become an accountant what do you think will happen in your life?
> Mandla: My life will change for better, I will support my family and take care of them – support them financially and otherwise and then I will pay for my younger brothers' education.
> RM: Do you think you think you would like to have a family of your own?
> Mandla: Yes.
> RM: You want to be a father?
> Mandla: Yes.
> RM: Why would you like to be a father?
> Mandla: Just to be independent and to take responsibilities of my own family.
> RM: Do you want to get married?
> Mandla: Yes.
> RM: Why?
> Mandla**:** I want to do the right thing; getting married is the right thing.
> RM: Will you pay lobola?
> Mandla: Yes.
> RM: What kind of marriage do you want?
> Mandla: I want a traditional one.
> RM: In order to do that you need to earn money?
> Mandla: Yes.
> RM: How many children would you like to have?
> Mandla: Two will be enough.
> RM: Only two, why?
> Mandla: That's what I can afford; remember I still have a family to support.

Silwane's life is already filled with family responsibility. He regularly visits his halfbrother in Westville prison. He lives with his grandparents – his mother left him and his siblings to live with another man when he was in Grade 6. Since then he has had the responsibility of supporting himself and his two younger siblings. He works at the taxi rank and as a gardener on the weekends and in the holidays. Silwane wants to be a farmer and, if possible, study at Cedara Agricultural College. He has already opted to take the newly introduced subject of agriculture at school.

> I wish that one day I would own a land through which I can help my family out of the miserable conditions we live under and I do want to be independent because I don't want to

leave my family like that I won't do it. Everything will change only after getting my certificate.

But Silwane also realizes that there are considerable obstacles in the way. Asked whether he has a plan to help achieve his goal, all he can mournfully conclude is that his plan is a 'dream'. Nevertheless he intends to build a family once he has his farm.

RM: Would you like to get married?
Sil: Sometimes.
RM: Would you like to have children?
Sil: Yes, but only two.
RM: Why two?
Sil: Many children require a lot of attention and they are expensive and I have seen that it not easy to raise children.
RM: So that means you would like to be a father?
Sil: Yes.
RM: And when you are a father, what kind of father would like to be?
Sil: I don't want to be a strict father who will be feared by children. I want to be able to sit down with them and talk about issues and give them advice if there is a need.
RM: What is the importance of being strict?
Sil: That teaches children to have respect for other people.
RM: Do you want to be a different kind of father from the one your father has displayed to you?
Sil: Yes.
RM: Did your father pay ilobolo for your mother?
Sil: Yes he paid.
RM: And will you?
Sil: Yes I will, and I hope I will be rich by then.
RM**:** Why do you think paying ilobolo is important?
Sil: I think to avoid problems like sickness and when your in-laws want to take their daughter, I would be able to stand and say she is my wife and continue staying with her. Just to formalise things and to agree with ancestors as well.

Nzulu would like to be a businessman. He takes commercial subjects at school and has already started a very small business with his cousin. They sell icecreams. He relies heavily on the support of his aunt and her daughter for the success of this enterprise. A few years ago, Nzulu got into trouble. He drank heavily and was involved in petty crime and violence. He ended up being arrested.

RM: If you look, Nzulu, into the future, tell me what you think. Would you like a family, a car, a business or a house?
Nzul: I wish my mother dies after I got a house and I want to marry after my first child is born.
RM: Do you want to be a father?
Nzul: Yes.
RM: What kind father would like to be?
Nzul: I want to be a good father to my family, supportive and admit when I am wrong and to agree with my family in many things.

Despite in many cases not having supportive or engaged fathers, the township schoolboys unanimously expressed the desire to have a family and be a husband and father. "Yes I would love to have a family because of my mother's behaviour and I would like to be a father to a woman who will be just like my mother to my kids and

encourage them to do good things and I tell my kids when they are young not to do bad things", says Bigman. There was also understanding about the importance of family planning. "I don't want many children, …. it is difficult to afford them", said Mazwi. And, like most of the township schoolboys, he added, "I do not want to cohabit, to stay with a woman not having paid ilobolo".

The prospects for township boys to escape lives circumscribed by limited resources are not good. Ulrich Beck (1992) describes the challenges of living in what he calls 'the risk society' where uncertainty has displaced the certainties provided by tradition, the state's social security apparatus and institutions like the family. In this new world, the precariousness of life is profound. Fluidity and disruption are constant. If one adds to this vision the unequal effects of globalisation on developing countries such as South Africa, the value given to family, fatherhood and tradition makes sense. Whereas the new middle class have some opportunity of joining the global labour market, the township boys are unlikely to gain admission. Their security is better secured by investing in the family, recreating it if necessary. The masculinity of middle class boys can be constructed around work and professional identity. For township boys, identity will most strongly be founded on family and fatherhood.

4. Risk, Relationships and Sex

Studies of risk behaviour, particularly sexual risk behaviour, have proliferated in the era of AIDS. Prior to this, a body of literature primarily generated to analyse so called youth delinquency, demonstrated causal relationships between 'broken' families (including single-parent and poorly resourced families) and criminal behaviour, though a rival literature has questioned whether masculinity is not forged in young men as they challenge authority in class specific ways which render working class boys more readily identifiable as delinquent (and criminal) (Messerschmidt, 1993).

Other factors which have been identified as contributing to hetero-sexual risk have been gender inequalities (Abdool Karim, Abdool Karim and Zondi, 1995; Harrison, Xaba, Kunene and Ntuli, 2001), violence (Pendry, 1998), particular constructions of masculinity (Campbell 2003), the failure of education and prevention measures (Morrell, Unterhalter, Moletsane, Epstein, 2001, Campbell, 2003) and the inability to negotiate sexual intimacy (Morrell, 2003). The importance of race and class issues have consistently been highlighted in the South African context and exacerbating factors (eg Adams and Marshall, 1998).

Research on constructions of masculinity has begun to provide detail on the decision-making processes and explanations which inform sexual practices. Particularly in well-resourced, non-African contexts, research has begun to analyse the underlying psychological structures (Seal and Erhardt, 2003) and beliefs or rationalisations which impact on sexual practice (Flood, 2003).This literature has not investigated the connection (if any) between childhood experiences of fatherhood and risk behaviour although the delinquency literature suggests that there may be some link.

The hypothesis which this paper sets out to explore is that boys who have or have had healthy childhood relationships with their fathers are more likely to have positive visions about the future and particularly about themselves as fathers, and will thus either refrain from having sex altogether or choose to have protected sex with only

one partner. The reason why sexual risk-taking might be avoided is in order to realize a vision of the future that depends on the construction of a responsible, forward-looking masculinity.

The middle class boys with highly individualised senses of themselves seem to vest less of their masculine identities in heterosexual relationships than do the township boys.

Not one of Sibusiso, Jack or Yasien had a girlfriend. Nor did any of them express an interest in becoming involved. Sibusiso clarifies his position regarding girls. “Girls? No. Not friends. I just know them.” Jack says that he doesn’t have a girlfriend and doesn’t care what people think about this. “It’s none of their business what I’m doing so...”. But he does have friends who are girls. Three of them. “I met them when I moved down here. ‘cos all my friends that are new, they were friends with them so I kind of like entered the circle of friendship and like won them over.” He describes his relationship with the girls. “They are friendly to me. No, um, we chat. We go out and we just like listen to music together and we just spend lots of time together.” Yasien’s life is so full of family commitments and work that he doesn’t have time for a girlfriend even though he admits to the allure of having a girlfriend.

The lives that the middle class boys are choosing are not dominated by excitement, looking for kicks and danger. The boys don’t smoke or drink although Sibusiso had an experimental phase of drinking. They have a small number of friends and tend to stick with these friends. Jack describes his friends as ‘sensible people’. “They know how to have responsible fun”. And yet the boys are aware of the danger of HIV/AIDS. Sibusiso knows about AIDS from his mother. He thought about becoming a nurse but “now I’m scared of this AIDS and those diseases. I don’t feel I can touch blood this age…or now.” Jack and Yasien know about AIDS but it does not engage them. Yasien intends to miss the next AIDS workshop at school as he has been to many of them and he feels that his time would be better spent studying.

The new world boys all to some extent take religion seriously. Sibusiso is probably the most serious. His life is strongly focused on the church and he devotes huge amounts of time to attending, preparing for and performing at the church. He describes his life in terms of ‘making sacrifices, making choices’. It is notoriously difficult to interpret self-reported statements of risk and sexual behaviour but it appears as though the new world boys do not place themselves in risky sexual situations. They appear all to be sexually abstinent.

The township boys have girlfriends. Mandla has had a girlfriend for two years. Silwane has had a girlfriend for eighteen months. She is ‘the only one’ and he hopes to marry her. Nzulu also has a girlfriend and they have been going steady for two years. He wants to marry but anticipates that this will only happen when he is 27. By this time he hopes to have enough to pay the bridewealth. The boys describe their relationships as monogamous. They all want to become fathers and starting a family is very much part of their calculations. But there are other reasons for having girlfriends. “after a hard long day at school I need someone to talk to and that is my girlfriend”, says Mandla. Silwane has a similar, though more reciprocal view: “Yes, we do help each other, I tell her of my problems especially at home and we talk together.”

All the boys are very aware of AIDS. Responding to my observation that many children at the school were sexually active and this meant that they the call to abstinence was not taken seriously, Silwane replied: “There are those who take it seriously and there are those who decide not to take it serious.” According to Mandla, this is because many people “believe that when they are in love they need to do sex.”

The township boys are aware of sexual risk and HIV. Nzulu harbours a lingering doubt about his status because before his current girlfriend “there was another one but we quarreled and parted”. Observing that few young people take adequate protection measures, Mandla says that he has opted for abstention. “I do not do sex”. Silwane acknowledges that AIDS as his biggest concern. “I’m not fearful of this AIDS thing, but I know that I need to protect myself”.

This research cannot offer any categorical opinion about the sexual practices of the township boys. Do they have sex? Do they use condoms? In the context of their lives, however, it seems likely that they are careful to avoid risk. But risk is more present in their lives. And constructions of masculinity emphasize the importance of girlfriends and sex. Sex is dangerous. AIDS is a real presence in the school and learners attend many funerals in the course of a year. One of the respondents has already lost a brother and sister in law to AIDS. Some learners have become ill and left and the rumour is that they had AIDS. But sex is not the only risk Many of these boys live in poverty and many have already had scrapes with the law and experimented with alcohol and smoking. But many seem, as they consciously approach the status of manhood, to be accepting life responsibilities. And this includes being sensible. The township boys are committed to strong and clean bodies. Many go for runs and work out. Silwane’s view of drinking suggests that there are many factors that contribute to this maturity. His father was a drunkard. “There is nobody at home who drinks, if I can start that will be a huge humiliation to my family.”

5. Discussion

In a study such as this one cannot definitively establish the reasons for the choices that the boys make. What can be done is to identify certain social and historical forces that impact on life choices and give these explanatory weight. This may contribute to broadening the frame of enquiry currently used to explain HIV/AIDS and risk behaviours.

The hypothesis set out at the beginning of this paper has not been proved. There appears to be no direct link between family form (the presence of a father) and ideas of fatherhood and risk-taking. The presence of a devoted and loving mother is often more important than the mere presence of a father (Barbarin and Richter, 2001, 260-1). There is a compensatory element here, a commitment to put right some past disappointment, which meshes with discourses that validate family and fatherhood, especially among African schoolboys. Unsatisfactory and unhappy experiences of fathers spur the boys to develop positive attitudes towards fathers.

Wishing to become a father does seem to have some impact on attitudes towards risk-taking. Among the township boys who aspire to becoming fathers and who are already invested in relationships with girlfriends, there is an awareness of risk and a commitment to avoid it. The concern here is driven by a desire to enact a future

scenario in which having a family is central. This pattern has been observed in other contexts, for example, among black and Hispanic men in the US (Kaufman, 1997). Here the considerations are of having someone to love and security for old age. Among the new world boys the presence of a father does not seem to impact on risk-behaviour. The presence of a secure and well resourced family environment provides the boys with a secure material environment. Their involvement in church may also be important. A study in South Africa shows that Pentecostal church membership significantly reduces extra and premarital sex rates (Garner, 2000). It is the finding of this paper, however, that the particular constructions of masculinity which are invested in a global work future are critical.

The major finding of this paper is that there are significant differences between two groups– the new world and township schoolboys. The former prioritise a future in the global world of work, while the latter, without easy or obvious access to this world, concentrate their energies on securing their futures through constructing families.

For the new world, middle class, upwardly mobile schoolboys global possibilities, the lack of family responsibility and financial concern allows them to focus on themselves and on the short-term. They don't put much store on becoming fathers or concern themselves much with securing the futures of their own parents. Their gender identities are highly individualised and contain a strong sense of agency. The stability of these families seems to reduce the need for heterosexual or peer affirmation and this in turn reduces the HIV risk of the boys who tend to find affirmation in religion or other supra-family activities or institutions.

In working class, under-resourced and precarious family contexts, there is a strong sense of family location. This an investment in the role of the father (understood primarily as provider, but with expectations of dependability and constancy) and an understanding of familial inter-dependence. This converts into the appreciation of the role of fatherhood and into the desire to create families and to look after dependents (both own children and aged parents). This may have something also to do with the stress on the family in 'Zulu culture' which partly resists the impact of globalization which, for these families, is experienced as the closing down of opportunities and of looming poverty, rather than of the opening of vistas of global opportunity. Nationally, 1997 figures found youth unemployment to be 28-29%. Offering an analysis of the situation facing youth, David Everatt suggests that "[t]he myriad youth cultures share one attribute: hostility to adults and their rules, or at best a disregard for the adult way of doing things" (2000, 35). This study suggests a much more optimistic situation and shows how the township schoolboys have responded positively to the difficult conditions in which they find themselves.

The experience of having to deal with unstable circumstances – shortage of money, insecure employment, the possible absence of fathers, the possibility of not finishing school, the likelihood of encountering violent crime, all impact on understandings of fatherhood. Insofar as risk behaviour is concerned, other factors however are important. The need for peer recognition may promote risk-taking sex; the oppressive conditions of life may lead to crime as an escape. Where the prospect of being a family head seems remote there may be no vision of a future.

Changes to the national and global worlds of work have a differential impact on the schoolboys and on the construction of masculinities (Connell, 1998). Expectation of a professional work identity in adult life makes it less important for a hyper heterosexualised masculinity to be developed among the new world boys. In the case of the township boys with non-existent or very limited prospects of including a work identity as a central feature of their masculinity, the tendency for heterosexual activities to be central to masculinity are much greater (Wood and Jewkes, 2001).

Conclusion

The presence of a father – whether affectively involved in parenting or not – does not appear to be, by itself, a determinant of positive attitudes to life (including fatherhood) or of avoidance of risk-taking behaviours. This is not to say that the attitudes and practices of children are unaffected by their parents and care-givers. In this paper, however, the particular life position of schoolboys allied to material contexts provide the parameters for understanding differing constructions of masculinity. The schoolboys are in their final phase of school and are oriented towards finishing school and the future. This involves work to develop an identity appropriate to that of an adult man. But class location affects the way in which boys understand their own masculinity and manhood. For the new world boys, the responsibilities associated with manhood do not press powerfully upon them. They have the chance to defer to assumption of 'manhood' [Lit check on MANHOOD – Gilmore etc]. For some township boys, the responsibilities of manhood have already been thrust upon them and the challenges of the future require engagement. In this study, a flight from responsibility often associated with young and desperate working class men is not the chosen course. The townships boys instead have grasped the challenge and utilised the cultural resources available to them for constructing a masculinity based on fatherhood and family. In so doing, they are in a better position to take decisions that reduce risk to themselves and other people.

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Appendix 1

Status of fathers in the lives of the 21 School informants

	Living with father and mother	Living with father only	Living with mother only	Living with father and step or other father	Not living with either mother or father	Sees father fre-quently – more than 2/month	Seldom sees father (not more than 4 times per year)	Doesn't know or never sees father (no more than x1 per year)
Dingane Secnd'ry 1			x				x	
DS 2			x					x Father =dead
DS 3	x							
DS 4	x							
DS 5			x					x
DS 6	x							
DS 7	x							
Gladstone Sec 1			x					x
GS 2					x			
GS 3		x						
GS 4	x							
GS 5			x			x		
GS 6					x (with grandpa rents)			x
GS 7			x				x	
Oak High 1	x							
OH 2				x (is a boarder to avoid living with s/father)				
OH 3	X							
OHN 4	x (but father violent and dale has run away on occasio n)							
OH 5	x							
OH 6	x							
OH 7	x							