Exploring Masculinities – the Sequel:
An examination of the views and attitudes of Irish parents and a sample of journalists towards
the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle

Name: Orla McCormack
Supervisor: Dr. Jim Gleeson

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Abstract

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The Exploring Masculinities Programme (EM) was developed and piloted in 19 boy’s schools in Ireland during 1997-1999, with funding from the European Social Fund. The programme aimed, amongst other things to investigate different perceptions and experiences of masculinity and to promote equality among and between the sexes. Following the launch of the programme, EM was the subject of a considerable amount of media coverage, which was mainly critical of the programme. Amongst the most vocal critics of EM were certain parent groups and a number of journalists. In this context, the Minister for Education and Science commissioned the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to conduct an examination of, amongst other things, the media reaction to EM. The planned dissemination of the programme lost its momentum and in 2005, EM was only being used as a resource in a small number of schools.

The current study aims to establish the views and attitudes of Irish parents and a sample of journalists towards the treatment of masculinity related issues with young men at senior cycle. There were four phases to the research. Phase one consisted of a survey of a national sample of parents. Phase two involved interviews with twenty-four of these parents. Phase three consisted of surveys with representatives of the five national parent associations in Ireland. The fourth phase of the research involved interviews with four journalists who had participated in the media debate on EM, together with the Project Coordinator of the programme.

The study found that the majority of parents (both the national sample of parents and members of the various parent associations) viewed the primary purpose of education as the holistic development of the child rather than the attainment of Leaving Certificate points. The majority of parents were in favour of the inclusion of EM topics on the school curriculum due to the fact that EM issues were of relevance to young men, with parents suggesting that schools currently are not doing enough to deal with issues such as homophobic bullying. While support for the inclusion of EM issues was high, concerns were expressed by parents. These concerns related to, for example, whether lessons on EM issues would be based on Catholic values; whether teachers had received sufficient development on such issues and whether young men were mature enough to deal with these issues at senior cycle.

While two of the journalists viewed the school as playing an important role in the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle, the remainder questioned such involvement. Concerns were raised by the journalists in relation to the ideologies underpinning EM, particularly in relation to the concept of gender as a social construct and the perceived underlining feminist ideology. Based on this, the journalists viewed the programme as selective in nature and imbalanced in its treatment of certain issues. Additional concerns related to the lack of consultation with relevant agencies and individuals during the development of EM. The project coordinator of EM, Peadar King, supported the journalists’ views that the writing group were too narrow in their focus and did not engage sufficiently with other agencies or personnel. However, he questioned their perception of EM as anti-male and tendentiousness in nature.
Both parents and journalists advanced some possible suggestions on how EM issues could be examined in the future. Possible suggestions included the adoption of a cross-curricular approach and the inclusion of a positive discourse on masculinity. It was proposed that such issues would be best addressed by an expert external to the school and through the use of active learning methodologies. The importance of related teacher development and adopting a consultative process when developing curriculum for social and personal programmes were also stressed. The findings from the study raise a number of questions in relation to Irish post-primary schooling. For example, how can the differing views of parents be accommodated in relation to whether school-based social and personal programmes are taught within a Catholic framework? What alterations can be made to the current process of curriculum development in Ireland so that new curriculum initiatives do not experience as much controversy as EM and how can the specific social and personal needs of young men be met within senior cycle education?
Declaration

I, Orla McCormack, declare that this thesis is my own work.

______________________________
Orla McCormack, May 2010
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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, John and Emily, in acknowledgement of their continuous love, support and friendship throughout my life. I wouldn’t have gotten this far if it hadn’t been for you and while I will be indebted to you forever, I assume that this dedication now puts the debt back to €0.00!

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Abbreviations

ASTI: Association of Secondary School Teachers of Ireland
CAO: Central Application Office
COMPASS: Co-operation of Minority Religion and Protestant Parents Association
CORI: Congress of Religious in Ireland
CPD: Continuous Professional Development
CSPA: Congress of Catholic School Parent Associations
DES: Department of Education and Science
EM: Exploring Masculinities
ESRI: Economic and Social Research Institute
EU: European Union
FEDCBS: Federation of Parent Councils in Christian Brothers and other Catholic Secondary Schools
GEU: Gender Equality Unit
GLB: Gay, lesbian bisexual
GLBT: Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender
GNP: Gross National Product
GOI: Government of Ireland
LCE: Leaving Certificate Established
NCCA: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NPAVSCC: National Parents Association for Vocational Schools and Community Colleges
NQT: Newly Qualified Teachers
OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PACCS: Parents' Associations of Community and Comprehensive Schools
PSHE: Personal, Social and Health Education
SES: Socio-Economic Status
SPHE: Social, Personal and Health Education
TALIS: Teaching and Learning International Study
TY: Transition Year
UN: United Nations
Chapter One: Introduction

The current study, *Exploring Masculinities – The Sequel*, investigates the views and attitudes of parents and a number of journalists towards the role of the school in the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle, ten years after the launch of the Exploring Masculinities (EM) Programme. It examines the attitudes of parents towards the inclusion of EM issues on the school curriculum and any concerns they have in this regard. The study investigates the journalists’ views towards the Exploring Masculinities Programme and the changes they would have made to the programme. Suggestions regarding how EM issues could be successfully explored in the future are also examined.

Within this introductory chapter the impetus for the study is outlined, the Exploring Masculinities Programme and the background to the programme are introduced. The controversy surrounding the programme is described, as are the main criticisms of EM. The rationale for the research is identified, followed by an examination of the significance of the study. The chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis.

The origins of the Exploring Masculinities Programme

Since Ireland joined the EU (in 1973), gender issues have attracted increasing levels of interest here (O’Sullivan 2005). For example the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) have produced a number of research reports on gender topics, which featured prominently in both the Education Green and White papers during the 1990s. The Education Act (DES 1998, Section 9) added to this by making provision for the promotion of ‘equality of opportunity for both male
and female students and staff’. As a result of this increased interest, Lynch and Lodge (2002, p.91) concluded that gender has become one of the most intensively researched subjects in education. However, up until the late 1990s the term gender equality within Irish educational discourse usually referred to equality for young women with gender equality being synonymous with the equality of women (Lynch and Lodge 2002, p.92). This is reflected in the number of initiatives developed to explore issues of female equality with, for example, such school based programmes as Futures1 (DES 1992) being devised in order to challenge career stereotyping amongst young women. Also, a Joint Oireachtas Committee on Women’s Rights, established in the 1980s, produced a number of publications exploring various aspects of women’s lives.

The Equality Committee of the Department of Education and Science was established in 1983, following the publication of the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) study entitled Schooling and Sex Roles (Hannan et al 1983). The Equality Committee was charged with making recommendations based on the ‘Hannan Report’, which found that boys in single sex schools held the most ‘traditional sex role expectations’ (Hannan et al 1983, p.319) and were offered less opportunities to explore social and personal issues. Following the development of Futures (DES 1992), attempts were made to involve all boys’ schools in examining issues of sex stereotyping. However, such attempts failed, as these schools appeared reluctant to participate in such programmes (Gleeson et al 2004). A similar situation arose when a series of seminars on Equal Opportunities were offered to teachers in single sex boys schools and ‘at the last moment the Gender Equality Unit had to open it to all teachers due to the lack of interest by teachers in those schools’ (Project Director of EM in Gleeson et al 2004, p.46).

At this stage, an increasing awareness of ‘male issues’ such as high levels of depression, increasing numbers of deaths by suicide and concerns regarding young men’s communication skills, along with the findings of the study by Hannan et al (1983), highlighted the need for

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1 A programme that aimed to challenge sex-stereotyping in the choices girls made for their careers
specific attention to be paid to the social and personal needs of young men. These concerns were reflected in, for example, the comments of Kathy Sheridan (1998, p.11) in the *Irish Times*, who set the scene for the Exploring Masculinities Programme when she stated ‘no, things do not look good for young men. They are three times more likely to kill themselves than young females; they commit up to 95% of all crime; they trail behind girls in academic performance’. While the number of concerns regarding young men continued to grow, attempts to deal with issues of specific relevance to them remained absent with the majority of attention given to exploring gender issues of relevance to young women.

When funding was made available from the European Social Fund under the Equal Opportunities Actions Measure in the Human Resources Development Operational Programme, the Minister for Education and Science at the time, Niamh Bhreathnach, requested that this be used to work specifically with teachers and boys in single sex schools (Gleeson *et al* 2004). This ultimately led to development of the Exploring Masculinities Programme.

**The development of Exploring Masculinities**

The ‘Exploring Masculinities’ (EM) programme was developed from 1996-1997. The programme was developed against a background of research, referred to previously, that indicated the need for a specific social, personal and health education programme for boys in single sex schools (Hannan *et al* 1983). Based on this, there were ‘at least two guiding rationales presented for the development and introduction of EM. Firstly, the absence of opportunities for boys in single sex schools to reflect on issues of gender’ (Mac an Ghaill *et al* 2004, p.9) with the result that ‘girls in single-sex schools and boys and girls in co-educational schools had opportunities to reflect on issues of gender equality, whereas boys in single-sex schools did not’ (Mac an Ghaill *et al* 2004, p.11). Secondly, a specific social and personal programme for single sex boys’ schools was needed
due to ‘the relatively low provision of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) in boys’ schools’ (Mac an Ghaill et al 2004, p.9). It was believed that EM would meet both of these needs (Mac an Ghaill et al 2004, p.9).

EM was developed by a writing group of seven experienced teachers from seven different single sex schools, working with the Project Director (a Senior Inspector in the Department of Education and Science (DES)) and the Project Coordinator, with support from the Association of Secondary School Teachers of Ireland (ASTI). The seven schools involved in the development phase (phase one) included three Christian Brother Schools (CBS), two diocesan schools and two non-diocesan schools (under religious management). The core writing group of teachers was made up of three women and four men whose motivation arose out of their participation in the ASTI Gender Equality Committee and their own personal beliefs and school experiences (see Gleeson et al 2004, p.49-50 for more details). The group were entrusted with the task of devising curriculum materials and a resource pack, a task the group felt ‘provided a focus’ for them (ibid, p.49). At this stage, members of the writing group tried out different resources in their own classroom in order to determine whether the content and activities the writing group were selecting were suitable for use with young men at senior cycle. According to the Project Coordinator, the writing group met regularly, worked very well together and adopted a democratic process when selecting material. ‘They were a very innovative and enterprising group of teachers. They were great to work with. There was a lot of energy around the table’ (Project Coordinator in correspondence with author 2010). The Coordinator was viewed as the lead of the group and following each session he was the person expected to deliver on the work plan that had been developed. He would

2 Twenty single sex boys schools were approached at this time in the hope that ten would be willing to participate. However, a number of schools were reluctant to volunteer, with principals being slow to release teachers.

3 The Project Coordinator, Peadar King, is a former post-primary school teacher, working as an independent research consultant. He first became involved in the writing group when he was asked by the Project Director to facilitate a workshop with the seven teachers. Following this workshop, he was invited to be the coordinator of EM. However, this arrangement was never made official. He was never given an official title and never received a letter detailing this role or formally inviting him to be part of the team (Views of Peadar King in correspondence with author 2010).
then bring these materials to the next meeting of the group where it was decided whether to include them or not. The writing group produced a resource pack that was to be piloted in schools.

The stated aims of the pilot programme were to (DES 1997)

a) Promote tolerance, understanding and respect for all
b) Investigate and challenge concepts of masculinity leading to positive and meaningful understanding of male roles
c) Raise awareness of the centrality of choices, feelings, sexuality and relationships in boys' present and future lives
d) Help boys realise their worth as individuals
e) Promote a sense of personal and social justice.

**The piloting of EM**

The second phase of the development of EM consisted of piloting the programme at senior cycle in 19 single-sex boys’ post-primary schools, during 1997-1999. Recruiting schools for this phase proved problematic, with the Project Coordinator indicating that engaging schools took ‘a lot of work and persuasion’ (Gleeson *et al* 2004, p.51). Some schools resisted getting involved in the piloting of the programme because they ‘were a points school’ or were ‘academic institutions’ (*ibid*, p.51). A positive response was received from an advertisement on EM in ASTIR4, with nineteen teachers attending the induction day in March 1998. During the induction day, the EM materials were examined and teachers were encouraged to select a particular topic that they would teach during the summer term of 1998.

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4 Publication by the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (the largest post-primary teacher unions in Ireland)
The External Evaluation of the piloting of EM was conducted by Gleeson et al (2004) during this phase. The External Evaluation report, submitted to the DES in 1999, highlighted a number of issues in relation to the piloting of the programme. For example, the study found that teachers in general were quite positive towards EM: ‘they saw the need for the programme and a value in what it was offering them’ (ibid, p. 131). There was a belief that EM was worthwhile and was of relevance to young men, who were in general positively disposed towards the programme.

As with a number of curriculum reforms different perceptions and understanding about the purpose of the programme were in existence (Fullan 1991). For example, the Project Director viewed EM as being about ‘empowerment’ while members of the writing group had ‘various interpretations of the programme depending on their own perceptions of masculinities, their philosophies of education and their degree of commitment to and knowledge of the EM programme’ (Gleeson et al 2004, p.133). Differences were also evident in the views of teachers in the pilot schools, who often had different perceptions on what the title and content of the programme was about. While this may be deemed a positive (due to individual schools having a certain degree of freedom to ‘make their own’ of the programme), different actors having differing perceptions on the meaning of the programme prevents effective curriculum change from occurring (Fullan 1991).

A further finding from the External Evaluation related to the lack of school support offered to teachers of EM, reflected in the fact that the teacher who attended the induction day was often the only teacher involved in the programme within the school. This was referred to in the Evaluation as the ‘solo flight syndrome’. Teachers of EM were slow to share and discuss EM with colleagues for fear that it would not be taken seriously and as a result the programme was rather invisible in schools, reflective in the fact that some school principals did not appear to have a clear understanding of the programme, with some being unaware that it was even running in the school. Lack of involvement of parents and the community in the development and piloting of EM was
highlighted as an issue, as was the impact of school culture and ethos on the implementation of EM, with all boys schools not providing the ‘most hospitable environment for this sort of thing’ (Gleeson et al 2004, p.139). The sensitive nature of some EM topics was viewed as problematic for teachers.

An additional study conducted on the level of usage of EM in pilot and writing group schools (Gleeson and McCormack 2006, p.55) highlighted alterations individual teachers would have made to EM e.g.:

The American type influence in the design of the programme was not suitable for the Irish setting, especially rural Ireland.

Some of it was good; some of it was silly and immature. It attempts to be cool with some of the lingo and believe you me, attempting cool with adolescent boys can fall flat on its face

Following the piloting of EM, the programme was revised and changes made. The published EM resource pack stated that the aims of the programme were to:

- Explore different perceptions and experiences of masculinity
- Promote understanding and respect for diversity
- Promote equality among and between the sexes
- Provide opportunities for young men to develop enhanced interpersonal and social skills

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5 EM was aimed for boys in senior cycle e.g. in Transition year (a one year optional programme between the junior and senior cycle), first year Leaving Certificate (also referred to as fifth year) and second year Leaving Certificate (also referred to as sixth year).
• Promote healthy lifestyles
• Raise awareness of life choices, changing roles in society, work (paid and unpaid), relationships, health and sexuality, violence against women, men and children, and sport
• Help boys realise their worth as individuals
• Explore concepts of masculinity that encourages a positive and meaningful understanding of male roles.

(DES 2000, p.vi)

The published resource pack (DES 2000) consists of the following seven themes:

1. Starting Out (looking at, for example, communication and listening skills)
2. Men Working (looking at, for example, paid and unpaid work)
3. Men and Power (questioning, for example, who holds most power in society)
4. Relationship, Health and Sexuality: (looking at, for example, mental health and testicular cancer)
5. Violence against Women, Men and Children (looking at, for example, domestic violence and sexual harassment)
6. Men and Sport (looking at, for example, experiences in the sports dressing room and the consequences of ‘win at all costs’ mentality)
7. Wrapping It Up (looking at, for example, male role models)

The programme was launched in September 2000, at which stage in-service provision was made available for Transition Year co-ordinators and participating teachers.

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6 Transition Year is a one year programme offered between the Junior and Senior cycle and it is taken by some 40% of a year’s cohort. Social class differences emerge in relation to the provision of TY, with, for example, Jeffers (2002) finding that ‘patterns of
The media debate on EM

The Exploring Masculinities programme received an unprecedented amount of media attention during its development and launch with few gender projects receiving such media attention before. Numerous journalists, academics, members of organisations and parents discussed aspects of EM in opinion columns and letters to the editor, with, for example, the following journalists all contributing to the media debate on EM: John Waters, David Quinn, Breda O’Brien and Kevin Myers. The Project Director described the extent of the media attention in an interview with the External Evaluation team:

Morning Ireland, an editorial in the Irish Times, the Pat Kenny radio programme…I could never get publicity like this for the various gender projects I directed in relation to girls issues.

Gleeson et al (2004, p. 61)

In 2000, the Minister for Education and Science, Michael Woods, announced in Dáil Eireann that he had commissioned the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to conduct an in-depth study into the media reaction and coverage on the EM programme. This announcement was made as a result of the large amount of media attention surrounding the programme and following a number of queries during ministerial question time in Dáil Eireann.

The NCCA study, conducted by Mac an Ghaill et al (2004), examined the EM resource material, the views of teachers and issues around the media debate on EM. The study found that

uptake suggest that schools designated disadvantaged are less likely to offer a Transition Year than schools not so designated’ (p.60).

7 According to the Education Act (DES 1998), the NCCA will conduct, from time to time, curriculum reviews on behalf of the Minister of Education and Science
there were 96 mentions of EM in the printed media between 1998 and 2001. The initial coverage was positive, with for example, ASTIR publishing a news feature entitled ‘Exploring Masculinity in schools a great success’ (ASTI 1999). However, the coverage soon became more critical with approximately two thirds of the overall media debate expressing negative views on the programme e.g.:

Masculinity under threat from new school programme (Cleary 2000, Letter to Editor)

Let young men tackle growing pains on their own (Byrne 2000, Article)

Design of boys programme intrinsically flawed (O’Brien 2000, Opinion Column)

The main criticisms presented in the media debate (and identified in Mac an Ghaill et al 2004) centred on the alleged feminist ideologies presented within the programme (e.g. ‘Big mac feminism on the education menu (Waters 2000)), the teaching methodologies used (referred to as ‘touchy feely talk’ (Byrne 2000)) and the perceived imbalanced treatment of some aspects of the programme (e.g. ‘Bending facts to prop up myth about male violence’ (Waters 2002)). Some critics believed that there was an overemphasis on homosexuality in comparison to heterosexuality. The founder of AMEN\(^8\), Mary T. Cleary, expressed particular concerns regarding the portrayal of domestic violence in an imbalanced manner, arguing that the programme portrayed domestic violence as something men did to women without sufficient attention being provided to the use of various forms of violence by women.

\(^8\) AMEN is a ‘voluntary group providing a confidential helpline, information and support service for male victims of domestic violence and their children’ (AMEN publicity information cited in Mac an Ghaill et al 2004, p.107)
Criticisms were advanced in relation to the idea of using the classroom as a ‘therapeutic arena’ and the portrayal of masculinity as a social construct. It was argued that EM was anti-male, designed by feminists to make boys more feminine:

EM’s explicitly feminist and left liberal agenda, its propaganda, its attempts to shape boys to suit a perception of the world which sees men as the problem, and most particularly mainstream heterosexual men, its failure to understand what it is to be a young male, its “all prevailing message that power by definition is bad”

Mac an Ghaill et al (2004, p.115)

The lack of official involvement of parents was questioned, with some parents feeling excluded from the process e.g. ‘Give parents a better say in children’s education’ (O Gogáin 2000, Letter to Editor). Some parents feared that EM may have a detrimental effect on the family unit with the programme failing to portray marriage as a normal acceptable life choice.

While there were a large number of contributions to the media debate, a high proportion of these were made by a small number of contributors, with the majority of the media coverage only briefly referring to the Exploring Masculinities Programme. For example, out of 79 articles, less than 12 related specifically to EM as an education programme, whereas the remainder discussed issues around gender or sexuality and made ‘only passing reference to EM’ (Mac an Ghaill et al 2004, p.132). This led Mac an Ghaill et al (2004) to conclude that the media debate on EM was limited, with the programme itself and the associated concerns not being debated and discussed sufficiently ‘as all the main criticisms were introduced early on and repeated over time, the debate did not develop conceptually over the duration’ (ibid, p. 142). It was suggested then that the use of the term ‘public debate’ did not reflect what actually happened and was better represented by the phrase ‘sustained media attention’ (Mac an Ghaill et al 2004, p.132).
Concerns of members of CSPA

While a small number of parents participated in the media debate on EM, the main parent body that criticised aspects of the programme was the Congress of Catholic School Parent Associations (CSPA). CSPA is a national parent association formed in 1975 to ‘promote the interests of parents and their children in the Catholic voluntary secondary school sector at local and national level’ (CSPA undated a). The Association had concerns with certain aspects of the programme, which they highlighted in a special report.

CSPA (undated b) highlighted the important role played by the home in social and personal education, with the Association arguing that schools should be supporting the home in the social and personal development of their children and not the other way round. With this in mind, the Association was alarmed by the lack of communication and consultation with parents during the development of EM. Questions were raised by CSPA members in relation to the moral messages portrayed within the programme, messages they feared would be at odds with what was taught in the home. The programmes failure to portray marriage and the family as a possible life objective was an issue for CPSA. It was feared that the messages taught within EM would contradict those of Catholic schools, with CSPA stating that a Catholic school should ‘not be expected to neutralise its principles in order to deliver a programme such as EM’ (CSPA undated b, p.3).

Particular aspects of the content of EM were viewed as problematic by CSPA. For example, they believed that the programme portrayed negative stereotypes of men e.g. ‘some of the materials appear to be based on an underlying basic assumption that men are generally violent,

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9 The report also highlighted some aspects of the programme the association viewed positively. CSPA believed that anything that draws attention to violence in the home and in sport is important when dealt with in a suitable setting. Also the report indicated that encouraging young men to see and appreciate that masculinity is not purely related to sporting prowess is a positive thing.
and women are not. Portraying men as more insensitive and more violent than women is totally unacceptable to the many parents of teenage boys’ (CSPA undated b, p.3). The presentation of masculinity as a social construct, as outlined in the first sentence of the Execute Summary of the External Evaluation report, was, according to members of CSPA, ‘difficult to accept’ (ibid, p.3).

The Association had particular concerns about bringing private and sensitive matters into a public domain and demanded the withdrawal of EM on the basis that it ‘undermined young boys by asking them to disclose their feelings about private and personal matters in the classroom, offered group therapy and overemphasised homosexuality’ (Mac an Ghaill et al 2000, p.123). This is effectively what has happened insofar as very few schools have provided EM, as a stand-alone module over recent years (Gleeson and McCormack 2006). The level of usage of EM is now explored.

Usage of EM

In total, seven schools were involved in the Writing Team and 19 schools piloted EM. A study conducted by Gleeson and McCormack (2006) during the 2004/2005 school year (see Appendix one for more details on level of usage of EM) found that of the pilot and writing group schools, five were still using the programme with one school offering EM as a stand-alone module. Reasons advanced for the discontinuation of EM in pilot and writing group schools included issues relating to staffing (with the main teacher involved in EM moving position or school), time pressures, changes to timetable and lack of provision of related continuing professional development (CPD). Parental objections and media reaction impacted on the continuation of the

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10 It is important to note that, according to the Project Director, EM was ‘always intended as a resource, not as a curriculum programme’ (in correspondence with author 2009). This is reflected in the fact that out of a small number of schools that were using EM in 2004/2005, the majority of these did not offer EM as a stand-alone module but instead used the resource pack in other subjects/programme e.g. Leaving Certificate Applied (Gleeson and McCormack 2006).

11 Please note that one writing group school was also a member of the pilot group. This brings the total number of schools involved in writing group and piloting of EM to 25.
programme in a very small number of schools with the majority of parents expressing satisfaction with the programme. Parental concerns and the media coverage of EM did impact on the running of the programme in a small number of cases. For example:

Understandably the prolonged media debate made the school management nervous about providing and supporting EM

It created a negative perception of what the programme stood for

A parent who was not directly involved in the programme took a legal action against the school. This was intimidating and worrying

Gleeson and McCormack (2006, p.61)

Of the schools that ordered copies of the EM resource materials from the DES, the majority never used the programme and did not intend to do so in the future. Reasons for non-usage included time pressure, with for example one respondent arguing that ‘there are too many programmes available – many gathering dust on shelves’ (Gleeson and McCormack 2006, p.57). Lack of provision of related CPD was again highlighted as a barrier to using EM in schools while the media controversy surrounding the programme did impact on the level of usage of the programme in a small number of schools. For example:

I was under the impression that there were problems surrounding the use of the programme in schools; a lot of negative comments in the media and the DES cooled in its attitude towards EM

Gleeson and McCormack (2006, p.65)
Rationale for the current study

The intention of this section is to provide a rationale for the current research project. This will be achieved by revisiting the views of parents and journalists towards EM at the time of its development and by questioning whether the views presented at the time of EM reflect those of a larger cohort of parents.

Individual parents and certain parent groups were critical of the Exploring Masculinities Programme. As stated previously, a number of parents participated in the media debate on EM, with for example, requests being made for schools to ‘give parents a better say in children’s education’ (O Gogán 2000, Letter to Editor). Additionally, one father challenged the introduction of EM into schools and attempted to bring the DES to court on the grounds that EM ‘contravenes Article 42 (of the Irish Constitution 1937) that the ‘primary and natural’ educator of the child is the family’ (Oliver 2001 News Piece). The response produced by CSPA highlighted their fears regarding EM, with the Association demanding the withdrawal of the programme from schools.

The reaction of parents and parent groups to EM and their participation in the media debate contributed to the Minister for Education and Sciences decision to commission the NCCA to conduct an investigation of the media controversy around EM. While an examination of parental views was beyond the remit of this investigation, Mac an Ghaill et al (2004) found that over half of the schools involved in the study did not involve or inform parents in any way during the implementation of the programme. The External Evaluation report (Gleeson et al 2004) identified the lack of inclusion of parents in pilot schools as a problem, particularly due to the controversial and sensitive nature of the subject matter. Both studies acknowledged the importance of involving and informing parents in school based social and personal education.
While the views and opinions of members of CSPA and parents who participated in the media debate are known, the majority of parents in the schools that piloted EM did not make any comment, either positive or negative, about the programme (Mac an Ghaill et al 2004, p.162). While this may indicate that ‘the programme was not a major concern’ for them (Mac an Ghaill et al 2004, p.162) the fact remains that it is still unclear what the views of parents who did not participate in the media debate are and whether the published views represent those of a larger cohort of parents. The External Evaluation report (Gleeson et al 2004), referring directly to the legislation governing parental involvement in education (namely the Education Act 1998), questioned ‘how can parents be informed and involved?’ and suggested that a more in-depth study of parental views was required in order to engage ‘parents… in debating the issues’ (ibid, pp. 166-168). This was supported by Mac an Ghaill et al (2004), who believed that the role of parents in SPHE merited further research. To this end the study recommended that research on parental views on social and personal education should be conducted. The report suggested that:

While recognising the significant sampling difficulties of such an endeavour, we recommend that, as part of the development of SPHE, such a study be undertaken, particularly given the acknowledged importance of parents and the wider community in the area of SPHE

Mac an Ghaill et al (2004, p.159-160)

It was suggested that this investigation would provide a greater understanding of parental attitudes towards the role of the school in addressing ‘EM’ and other social and personal topics with young men.
A number of journalists were instrumental in the media debate relating to EM (see Mac an Ghaill et al 2004 for full list of published articles, letters etc). In fact, journalists made the most substantial contribution to the media coverage on EM (37 contributions were made by journalists). However, eight journalists were responsible for 57% of these contributions (ibid). It has been ten years since the controversy surrounding EM has occurred and outside of the published articles and subsequent responses to these articles, further exploration of the concerns and views of contributing journalists has not taken place. Therefore, while the published articles identified the journalists’ concerns regarding EM, there is currently limited understanding of the alterations they would have made to the programme or their ideas on how social and personal issues could be addressed with young men in the future. As previously noted, the media debate on EM ‘did not develop conceptually over the duration’ (Mac an Ghaill et al 2004, p.132), with the main criticisms being identified early on and merely repeated in subsequent articles. As a result the concerns that were raised were not debated sufficiently (Ibid). As is evident in the experiences of the Exploring Masculinities Programme, journalists, like parents, proved to be a powerful lobby group, whose reaction to EM resulted in the Minister for Education and Science, Michael Woods, requesting the NCCA to conduct a review of the programme. This ultimately precluded the planned dissemination of the programme. Therefore, if an attempt is to be made to explore issues of masculinities with young men in the future, the views and attitudes of a number of influential journalists may help ensure that such programmes do not meet the same fate as EM.

Members of the writing group did not contribute to the media debate on EM. While the Project Coordinator participated in the External Evaluation of EM, his reactions to the main criticisms advanced in the media in relation to EM were not sought. At this remove, it was deemed

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12 Lack of teacher development and lack of time were additional factors that impacted on the dissemination and usage of EM (Gleeson and McCormack 2006)
important to include his views in order to provide an alternative perspective to the journalists’ opinions.

Since the publication of the External Evaluation report (Gleeson *et al* 2004) and the NCCA report (Mac an Ghaill *et al* 2004) no further attempts have been made by subsequent Ministers for Education and Science to reopen the debate on these issues or to re-examine/re-launch the programme. This is reflected in the fact that since the publication of the NCCA report in 2004, commissioned by Michael Woods in 2000, ‘no subsequent Minister has made any statement on the programme and despite a recommendation in the National Men's Health Policy to update the programme in the light of the NCCA report, nothing has happened’ (Project Director in email correspondence with author 2009). It is hoped that the current study, *Exploring Masculinities – The Sequel*, will allow for an in-depth understanding of the views and attitudes of a large cohort of parents towards the involvement of the school in the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle and will provide a greater understanding of the views of journalists (along with the Project Coordinator) towards the Exploring Masculinities Programme. It is envisaged that this research will rekindle the debate on the role of the school in the exploration of masculinities with young men, a debate which ended prematurely nearly a decade ago. Increased awareness of the views of parents and a sample of journalists will hopefully ensure that progress can be made in terms of the exploration of masculinities with young men in the future.

**Significance of the current study**

Within the following section the author will highlight the importance of the current study by examining the significance of the Exploring Masculinities Programme, by discussing issues relating to the media debate on EM, by identifying a gap in the existing literature pertaining to parents, by exploring the complexities of the change process and by highlighting the benefits the
study will have in relation to the implementation of Social Personal and Health Education at senior cycle.

The significance of the Exploring Masculinities programme

While gender has become one of the most intensively researched aspects of education, the majority of gender initiatives developed in Ireland, prior to EM, were ‘approached from the female viewpoint, aiming to rectify recognised historical imbalances and inequalities experienced by women in Irish society’ (Gleeson et al 2004, p.24). While numerous school-based programmes and resources had been designed to address gender issues and to encourage students to examine gender stereotypes (with support from the Gender Equality Unit of the Department of Education and Science\(^\text{13}\)), most of these were designed to address inequality as experienced by young women. This resulted in the situation where inequalities among males and gender issues of particular relevance to young men went unheeded (Lynch and Morgan 1995). Coupled with low levels of provision for social and personal education in single sex boys schools, this meant that boys in single sex schools had fewer opportunities to explore social and personal issues of particular relevance to their lives.

As already mentioned, the development of EM was strongly influenced by the emergence of a number of concerns relating to young men such as the increasing number of young men dying by suicide and the increasing number of male perpetrators of crime (Gleeson et al 2004). Hannan et al (again made back in 1983) suggested that a ‘change in male education [was needed] to meet changing demands of work-family-parental roles’ (p.308-309). Within this context the significance of EM, which was the first real ‘serious attempt to address certain fundamental men’s issues in the context of Irish post-primary schooling’ is clear (Gleeson et al 2004, p.8).

\(^{13}\) These included such programmes and resources as ‘Futures’ (DES 1992) and ‘Balance: Who cares?’ (DES 1997)
It has now been over ten years since EM was developed. The programme is no longer being used in schools, with the majority of pilot and writing group schools discontinuing the programme (Gleeson and McCormack 2006). In the interim, concerns regarding the social and personal needs of young men have persisted (Geary and Mannix McNamara 2003) and calls for changes to male education remain unanswered. A number of Irish-based studies, published since the development of EM, have highlighted concerns regarding the education (including the social and personal education) of young men, particularly within single-sex settings. For example Lynch and Lodge (2002) concluded that the perception of masculinities within single sex schools continues to be equated to physical strength, heterosexuality and sporting prowess, with young men holding more gender-stereotyped views than students in other schools types and being less likely to pay attention to issues of gender equality. Boys in single sex schools continue to be provided with fewer opportunities to explore social and personal issues than students in other school types (Norman et al 2006).

The current study places emphasis on the particular social and personal issues of relevance to young men in Ireland. This has not occurred since the time of the Exploring Masculinities Programme and since the publication of the External Evaluation report (Gleeson et al 2004) and the NCCA review (Mac an Ghaill et al 2004). Through examining parents’ and journalists’ views on how issues of masculinities can be best explored within a school context, it is hoped that progress can be made in this regard in the future and as a result of this research, additional ‘serious attempts’ can be made to address issues of masculinity within the context of Irish post-primary schooling (Gleeson et al 2004, p.8).
Lack of conceptualisation of media debate

While the level of media attention afforded to EM was unprecedented in Ireland, Mac an Ghaill et al (2004) concluded that concerns regarding the programme were not debated and discussed sufficiently. While the main concerns with EM were outlined early on in the media coverage they were merely repeated over time with the result that the debate on EM did not ‘develop conceptually over the duration’ (ibid, p. 142). Therefore, what was ‘initially thought of as a ‘public debate’ came to be seen as extended attention to particular [segmented] aspects’ (ibid, p. 133) such as domestic violence, male suicide and homosexuality. This resulted in Mac an Ghaill et al (2004) concluding that the term ‘extended media coverage’ was more fitting than the phrase ‘media debate’. While the initial media discussion on EM gave grounds for believing that such debate could become ‘critical’ in nature (Carr and Kemmis 1986), the debate ended prematurely and did not develop as it progressed (Mac an Ghaill et al 2004). Until the current study, no additional research, outside of the External Evaluation report (Gleeson et al 2004) and the NCCA Review (Mac an Ghaill et al 2004) has been published on EM or the issues surrounding the programme.

Due to the fact that the debate on EM did not develop conceptually over time, the views and concerns of journalists and parents were not explored in any great detail and until the current study the views of these groups towards the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle were not fully understood. Therefore, the current study permits the views of parents and some journalists towards EM to be teased out and debated further. This will provide a greater understanding of their concerns, which will be beneficial if attempts are made in the future to explore gender issues or issues of masculinities within a school context.
Paucity of research into parental involvement in education

While the Irish Constitution (1937) identifies the family as central to the development of the child and guarantees to respect the rights of parents as the primary educators of their children, levels of parental involvement in their children’s formal schooling remained low until the mid-1980s. Ireland lagged behind other developed countries in making formal provision for parental involvement in education (OECD 1991), with parents being viewed as playing a minimal role in their children’s education. This resulted in Irish ‘families traditionally playing little part in their children’s formal schooling’ (OECD 1991, p.143) with education being left to the experts. While levels of parental involvement have improved in recent years through, for example, representation on parents’ councils and Boards of Management, the majority of parents continue to play a minimum role in their children’s education (this issue is developed further in chapter three). Within the current study, continued low levels of parental involvement are reflected in the fact that parents were not officially involved in the development and piloting of EM.

In addition to low levels of parental involvement in their children's formal schooling, levels of research examining parental views on education remains small with Hanafin and Lynch (2002) indicating that the involvement of parents in education has received minimum research attention. While a number of recent Irish studies have explored various aspects of school based social and personal education (see for example Morgan 2000; Geary and Mannix McNamara 2003 and 2007; Norman 2004; NCCA 2005b; Ferguson and Hogan 2007; Mayock et al 2007), the studies conducted by Mayock et al (2007), is the only one to include the views of parents. However, even in this instance, the level of parental involvement was miniscule. While internationally a number of studies have examined parental views on school based social and personal education, these have
tended to focus primarily on attitudes towards sex education\textsuperscript{14} rather than on broader social and personal issues. Furthermore, these studies did not focus exclusively on parents who had sons in post-primary school.

A possible reason for such low levels of research into parental views could be the inaccessibility of parents and the inherent difficulties this creates (as acknowledged by Mac an Ghaill \textit{et al} 2004, p.159-160). Nonetheless lack of research into parental views on school based social and personal education becomes significant in view of the fact that the Irish Constitution (1937) identifies parents as the primary educators of their children. The Constitution guarantees to respect their right to provide ‘for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children’ (Article 42.1). Parental views need to be considered when examining social and personal issues in schools for if their views are not known, how then can parental rights be respected? Within the context of EM, the views of the Congress of Catholic School Parents Association (CSPA) on the role of the school in EM related issues is known (CSPA undatedb) however the views and concerns of a national sample of parents and those of the remaining national parent associations remain unclear.

This study provides, for the first time within an Irish context, an understanding of the views of a national sample of parents and members of the various parent associations towards the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle. In this respect the current study is unique, as no other Irish based study has explored parental views on aspects of their sons’ education to the depth that the current study has. It helps fill a gap in the limited on parental views on education that currently exists in Ireland, in this case in relation to the social and personal education of their sons.

\textsuperscript{14} See for example Steele 1987; Beavet and Thompson 1996; Beavet 1996; Blakey and Frankland 1996; Walker 2001 and 2004; Walker and Milton 2006.
A greater understanding of factors that impact on the process of change

Change is a complex process, with a number of different factors impacting on whether new curriculum initiatives are successfully implemented or not. While the implementation of change is complex, levels of understanding of the factors that impact on this process have improved dramatically with the publication of a number of research studies by, for example, Hord (1987), Sarason (1990), Fullan (1991; 1993), Goodson (2001) and Gleeson (2010), all of which offer various insights into the fraught area of curriculum change. It has been acknowledged that change has a higher chance of being implemented if it is needed and relevant to schools (Fullan 1991) and that new curriculum initiatives are more likely to succeed if they have been developed in partnership with teachers and other invested bodies (see for example Trant 1998; Goodson 2001). The level of teacher development provided, the level of consultation adopted and the attitudes of those external to the school all impact on the sustainability of new curriculum developments.

The views of those external to the school are instrumental in determining whether such innovations last the test of time or fail to be implemented fully. The external environment (community, parents and journalists etc) can encourage and support changes within the school, or can prevent such changes from occurring. This is the case because schools can only change to the extent and in the direction to which the external surroundings allow (House 1974). Therefore, support and agreement from the wider community is important if reforms are to be successful adopted and implemented into schools. If all parties are in agreement over the need for a new initiative and the form that initiative should take, the change has a greater chance of being implemented fully. A hostile environment, however, can have a detrimental effect on the implementation of new developments, which is clear when one acknowledges the critical reaction of certain parent groups and journalists towards the Exploring Masculinities Programme. A
number of studies have shown the impact external forces can have on new curriculum initiatives. Take for example the pressure placed on Countesthorpe College (Watts 1977) and Durant school (Goodson 2001) by their external environment and the detrimental impact this had on the school. Coming from a purely curriculum perspective then, the current study provides an understanding of some of the factors that need consideration when implementing curriculum changes/reforms and explores how the process of curriculum change in Ireland is influenced by external forces. This increased understanding could be of relevance when new curriculum initiatives, for example SPHE at senior cycle, are implemented in the future.

Proposal to introduce Social, Personal and Health Education at senior cycle

Irish society is changing. Ireland is no longer a homogenous country that is based on the values of the family and the Catholic Church. As a result of ‘loosening bonds within the family and a decline in social trust and relationships within communities’ (O’Brien and O Fathaigh 2005, p.67) we can no longer assume that ‘young people have a coherent set of values instilled in them by family and Church’ (Trant 1998, p.8). Sugrue (2002, p.312) argues that as traditional family structures fade, schools ‘are increasingly being asked to be more caring and nurturing, rather than maintaining a more traditional and exclusive focus on cognitive development’. As a result schools nowadays have a greater role to play in promoting and developing values and an overall sense of well-being amongst their students.

This greater role is reflected in the increasing involvement of schools in the social and personal education of children, with the State introducing a number of social and personal programmes at both primary and post-primary level, such as The Stay Safe Programme, Relationship and Sexuality Education and Social, Personal and Health Education (these are
discussed in greater detail in chapter two). SPHE at senior cycle is due to be introduced in the near future.

As with any new curriculum initiative, as outline above, the views of those external to the school are instrumental in determining whether such innovations last the test of time or fail to be implemented fully. Prior to the implementation of SPHE at senior cycle (which contains a section called Gender Studies), the current study provides, for the first time, a clear understanding of the attitudes of a national sample of parents and a sample of journalists regarding the role of the school in the social and personal development of young men. If SPHE at senior cycle is to be implemented in an effective manner, a greater understanding of these views and concerns is needed, particularly as the NCCA (2005b) have acknowledged the importance of a supportive whole school environment including parents and the external community, in the implementation of SPHE at senior cycle. The current study will be beneficial to policy makers, schools and parents when SPHE at senior cycle is being implemented.

**Summary of significance**

The current study is unique as for the first time within an Irish context it provides an in-depth understanding of the views of a national sample of parents, members of the national parent associations and a sample of journalists towards the role of the school in the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle. A similar study has not been conducted to date within an Irish context.

While the media coverage surrounding EM allowed for discussion and debate to occur, this debate did not develop in any critical way, resulting in a number of important issues not being explored or discussed fully. The current study revisits this debate and will provide a greater understanding of the issues that were advanced during the time of EM.
While the Exploring Masculinities programme is no longer being used in schools, concerns regarding the social and personal needs of young men remain. The current study places emphasis on the particular social and personal issues of relevance to young men in Ireland today and, by providing an understanding of the views of those external to the school and by exploring some of the factors that impact on the change process, the current study will assist with the implementation of SPHE at senior cycle.

**Outline of thesis**

The thesis is set out in seven chapters. Chapter one identifies the background and significance of the study. Chapter two sets the context by exploring contextual factors of relevance to the current research project. In chapter three the author will explore literature pertaining to masculinities, the school, attitudes towards school based social and personal education, parents and curriculum issues. Chapter four identifies the research questions, outlines the methodologies used to conduct the research and highlights the main limitations of the study. Chapter five portrays the research findings in response to the research questions as outlined in the previous chapter. Within this chapter, the views of the national sample of parents are outlined, as are those of the various parent associations, the Project Coordinator of EM and a number of high profile journalists who were involved in the media debate on EM. Chapter six discusses the main findings of the research, relating it to published literature. The final chapter draws conclusions from the study.
Conclusion

The Exploring Masculinities Programme was introduced into all boys’ schools in the late 1990s. The programme aimed, amongst other things, to explore perceptions and experiences of masculinity and to help boys realise their worth as individuals. The programme received a large amount of media attention, the majority of which was negative. Certain parent groups and journalists were critical of various aspects of the programme resulting in the Minister for Education and Science requesting the NCCA to conduct a review of the programme and the media debate. This, amongst other things, hampered the planned dissemination of EM resulting in the programme only ever being used in a small number of schools.

The current study is significance on the basis that it provides for the first time in Ireland an in-depth understanding of the views of a national sample of parents, members of the national parent associations and a sample of journalists towards the role of the school in the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle. The current study places emphasis on the particular social and personal issues of relevance to young men in Ireland today and revisits the debate that ended prematurely around the time of EM. The current study provides a greater understanding of the issues that were advanced during the media debate on EM. By providing an in-depth understanding of the views of various groups external to the school, the current study will assist with the implementation of SPHE at senior cycle.
Chapter Two: Setting the context

Introduction

Curriculum does not exist in a vacuum and to be properly understood it must be placed in its social, cultural and political context. This is due to the fact that curriculum is ‘contextually shaped’ (Cornbleth 1990, p.6). The Irish context includes, for example, a ‘prevailing anti-intellectual bias’ (Lee 1989) and a conservative political framework where ideological issues have not been discussed in any great depth. Other contextual factors of particular relevance to the current study include particular values that are evident in Irish society and post-primary schools; the involvement of the Catholic Church in education; social and personal education programmes in Irish schools and legislation governing parental involvement in education. These four issues are discussed under the relevant headings below.

Values evident in Irish society and post-primary education

Within this section, the author will brief explore some of the values apparent within Irish society, that of consensualism, and in Irish post-primary education, namely Classical Humanism and Human Capital theory.

There is a tendency within Ireland to view society as an ‘undifferentiated whole’ (Lynch 1989, p.103), a view Lynch (1989) coined as consensualism. Within this ideology, all members of
society are perceived as having the same needs and desires for their educational experiences. This ideology assumes that all sectors of society agree on what is meant by the collective or public interest in education and in doing so ignores variations in values and viewpoints that arise as a result of, for example, differences in gender, sexuality and religious beliefs. Arising from this, issues of class or gender are rarely referred to in analysis of education and are not presented as ‘potent forces determining the direction of the educational system’ (ibid, p.103). The dominance of consensualist thinking has prevented critical debate on the Irish education system from occurring, for if all individuals have the same educational needs, then contestation is unnecessary. According to Gleeson (2003, p.135) ‘there has been a noticeable loss of interest in curriculum debate’, with contestation on the purpose and the values underpinning education going unchallenged in Ireland (ibid). With the existence of a consensualist ideology, dissonance is unlikely to occur when curriculum and broader educational issues are discussed.

Post-primary education in Ireland is a derivative of the Classical Humanistic model of education. The pursuit and acquisition of knowledge is paramount and the development of the cognitive domain is emphasised often to the detriment of the affective. There is a preoccupation with coverage of course material and preparation for final examinations. Lynch (1982) concluded that the majority of pupil’s time was spent on covering content designed for assessment in public examinations. The Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 1991) found that within Irish classrooms there is an absence of non-instructional forms of learning, an emphasis on competitive assessment and structuring of lessons around textbooks. More recently, a study conducted by the OECD, found that Irish teachers valued direct transmission teaching approaches more than teachers in the other OECD countries (e.g. Poland, Austria and

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15 One could argue that a Classical Humanism ideology is obvious when one acknowledges the effort and emphasis placed on devising resource material within the EM writing group.
Danish). Irish teachers were less likely than teachers in other OECD countries to hold constructivist beliefs on teaching and learning (OECD 2009).

The terminal state examination dominates teaching, learning and assessment influencing such aspects as pedagogy, student-teacher relationships, resources, time allocations and approaches to assessment in schools (see for example Callan 1995). This terminal assessment serves the sole purpose of allocating places to students in further or higher education institutes (see OECD 1991, p.66). Consequently, getting the grade and meeting the examiners expectations become the most important aspect of education and a number of important activities ‘are ignored because the system places undue pressure and stress on students [and there is] a narrowing of the curriculum arising from the tendency to teach to the examination results and an undue focus on the attainment of results’ (Government of Ireland 1998, p.108). Within such a context, it can be difficult for teachers, irrespective of their knowledge and interest in other areas of education, to stop focusing on knowledge and teaching towards the exam and to move away from the prescribed curriculum (McCormack and O’Flaherty 2010).

Focusing on the extrinsic rewards of education can threaten or displace the intrinsic aspects of education, with Lynch (1989) finding that within the Irish education system ‘one works for extrinsic gain rather than for intrinsic value’ (p.44). The tangible rewards become the desired end, and all other aspects of education are secondary. As a result of overemphasis on academic knowledge, forms of education not assessed within these terminal exams, such as, for example, social and personal education, are deemed secondary. As O’Brien (2008) argues, an over-emphasis on academic achievement has an ill-being effect on young people and results in them experiencing increased stress and pressure to perform academically (see for example Smyth 1998 and 2007).

This approach to schooling promotes what Lynch (1989) referred to as a ‘competitive individualism’ as it is the individual who must acquire the ‘knowledge’, egocentrism is rewarded and altruism is punished. As a result students are continuously competing against one another e.g.
for places within a school, within a class, within a subject and for college places. According to Fr Peter McVerry SJ (2006) ‘our society has, without meaning it, without intending it, educated many of our pupils to the values of ‘make sure you beat the other or you’ll go under yourself’’. The result is that ‘education has in a sense gained the world, but in doing so, has lost its own soul’ (Dunne 1995, p.80).

While the Classical Humanistic ideology is still remnant in Irish post-primary schooling, the past few decades have seen an increase in a reconstructionist view of education, with more attention being given to gaining knowledge for the betterment of the economy. Since the publication of the Investment in Education report (1967) economists and economic thinking have influenced educational policy (see for example Lee 1989; O’Sullivan 1991). Prior to this ‘no society could afford to have more than a small minority devoted to the pursuit of knowledge through education; for it needed as many hands to the wheel as it could muster’ (Dunne 1995, p.65). However since the 1960s increased links have been made between education, business, technology, science and work (Hargreaves 2003, p.5) resulting in increased investment in education along with greater emphasis placed on curriculum control, covering the course and achieving objectives.

Investment in education for economic growth has resulted in greater emphasis being placed on curriculum control, covering the course, achieving objectives, competition between schools and, in some countries, the publication of school league tables. Such an approach, which is prevalent in Ireland, is characterised by an increased emphasis on the external measurement of product, on accountability, standardisation and increased regulation of teacher’s work. Such emphasis on accountability and achieving objectives has become a common feature of many education systems in recent years, for example in Australia (Kleinhenz and Ingvarson 2004), as governments seek increased control over teachers’ work. In Ireland increased measurement of product is evident in the increase in the number of Whole School Evaluations and individual
subject inspections taking place (Gleeson and O Donnabháin 2009) and the continued reference to parents and students as ‘customer’ and ‘consumers’. The OECD has played an influential role here with the establishment of comparative performance indicators for measuring and comparing outputs from various OECD countries.

Once the connection between investment in education and increased economic productivity was formed in Ireland, education was viewed as one of the most important factors in economic recovery and growth (O’Connor 1986). Educational decisions were, and continue to be, heavily influenced by the Department of Finance (see for example Lee 1989). O’Sullivan (1991, p.464) stated that in order ‘to be given an audience within the policy community it was necessary to operate within the human capital paradigm’ e.g. one had to prove that investment in education would result in individuals becoming more productive members of society who would ultimately pay more taxes, resulting in a more efficient and productive economy. According to Field (1999, p.238) ‘at the heart [of Human Capital theory] is the idea that when individuals, organisations and nations invest resources in new skills and knowledge, they expect and measure returns on their original investment in financial terms’. Therefore, putting money into education was viewed as an investment rather than expenditure.

The influential role of the economy on post-primary schooling in Ireland is reflected in the representation of the economic sector on Leaving Certificate syllabus committees and also the influential role played by the World Bank, the OECD and the European Union in the Irish education system. Fuller (1990, p.192) argues that economic thinking and policy have strongly influenced the subjects that are selected for inclusion on post-primary curriculum with, for example, the Confederation of Irish Industries playing a significant role in redefining what is viewed as worthwhile knowledge. Emphasis on the economy has resulted in a ‘noticeable shift away from the humanities towards technical and scientific subjects’ (Gleeson 2010, p.34). Increased importance is now placed on technology and scientific subjects. This is evident in the
fact that in comparison to other EU countries, Ireland now offers a large number of science and technology subjects to students but a limited selection of the major social sciences.

Over emphasis on the economy and human capital may result in a situation where a country is doing very well but the people living there don’t feel very well (Healy and Reynolds 1996). According to O’Brien (2008, p.171) the pendulum has swung too far in the direction of human capital education in Ireland and greater emphasis needs to be placed on well-being. Bourdieu (1986) believes that individuals need both human and social capital (along with cultural capital) to become participative members of society. So while economic thinking and human capital theory have dominated education for the past fifty years, the concept of social capital theory has gained ground in recent times.

Social capital theory focuses on the promotion of values and behaviours that encourage social cooperation and relationships (Fukuyama 1995, p.27). Social capital focuses on the development of social norms and shared values (such as trust and assistance) that holds a community together; on social networks (connections and relationships that are economically valuable); on civic engagement and on a community’s capacity to tackle social and economic problems such as unemployment (Putman 1993 and 1995). Social capital seeks to develop ‘positive norms of behaviour for everyone’s mutual benefit’ (O’Brien et al 2005, p.67). Coleman (1994) views social capital as the set of resources that exist in family and community relations. These resources are useful for the cognitive or social development of an individual (Coleman 1994, p.300). Increased social capital should result in increased community involvement, social networking and civic engagement. The promotion of social capital is important if there is to be a healthy civil society (O’Brien 2008) and for citizens to experience a ‘successful life and well functioning society’ (Rychen and Salganik 2003).
The Catholic Church and Irish post-primary schooling

The Christian Churches, particular the Catholic Church which is the dominant Church in terms of population, have played an influential role in Irish education, at both primary and post-primary levels. This provides an important context for the current study. Prior to looking at the Catholic Church in Ireland, the international context is established by exploring the role played by the Catholic Church in education in the United States of America, Poland and England. The role of the Catholic Church in Ireland is then explored in relation to Church-State relations in terms of ownership and trusteeship of schools, the role of the main Churches in health related issues and single-sex schooling.

An International perspective on relations between the Catholic Church and State

Prior to looking at the Irish context, it may be beneficial to examine the interplay between the Catholic Church and State in terms of education in America, Poland and England.

By comparison to Ireland, ‘a secularist view of state schooling….has widespread public acceptance in Australia and New Zealand, Canada, the USA and most of continental Europe’ (Johnson 2000, p.120). In America, Church and State are separate, as per the First Amendment of the Constitution (1791). Parents can send their children to a public school or if they want a religious education for their children, they can send them to a religious school. However, the funding of religious run schools has been a contested issue within the USA.

In the late nineteenth century the Catholic Church in America pushed for Catholic schools for Catholic students. This demand occurred as a result of the rise of Catholic immigrants arriving
from mainly Ireland and Germany. However, this created conflict between those who wanted schools specifically for Catholics and those who did not want State money used in this way. For example, Lazerson (1977, p.302) argues that debate on this issue in New York was ‘the single most discussed event in American Catholic educational history’. This conflict ultimately resulted in the Blaine Amendments (1875), which forbade the usage of any public money to fund religious run schools. The Amendment states that:

No money raised by taxation in any State for the support of public schools, or derived from any public source, not any public lands devoted thereto, shall ever be under the control of any religious sect, nor shall any money so raised or land so devoted be divided between religious sects or denominations

However, this Amendment came under criticism in the 1990s, resulting in the introduction of a school voucher system. Within this approach financial support was provided to parents rather than to schools, resulting in a situation where parents were free to send their child to whatever school they wished and they would be supported irrespective of which they choose (Heytens 2000). This approach was reviewed by some (Lupi 1999; Greene 1999) as in breach of the First Amendment to the Constitution (separation of Church and State).

In 1952 the new Polish Constitution established the separation of Church and State, with religious education being banned from public schools. Although the Constitution stated that Church and State were independent of each other, the relationship between the two appeared to be symbiotic, with the State using the Catholic Church to quell any uprising or unease amongst the people and the Church willingly responding to this request with the hope of increasing its power (Eberts 1998). As a result of this relationship, ‘the Church emerged from the communist period not
only as the highest moral authority but also as the most powerful institution in the country’ (Eberts 1998, p.820). The State was then put under pressure to reintroduce religious education into public schools, which it duly did in 1990, even though the Constitution still acknowledged that the Church and State were separate entities. Despite numerous complaints that such a move was unconstitutional, that action was upheld with the result that religious education was introduced into all public schools and kindergartens. A new Statute of Education was introduced in 1991, which states that Christian values are to be respected in education, with public schools permitted to use prayer and place religious symbols throughout the school building. Despite opposition, the Education Minister at the time insisted that ‘the rights of the minorities must be guaranteed, but a situation cannot arise where a sensitivity towards minorities paralyses the rights of the majority’ (Minister Stelmachowski cited in Eberts 1998, p.822). While the Catholic Church continues to play a role in education in Poland today, questions have been raised about this involvement, reflected in the fact that 70% of people involved in a survey conducted by OBOP believe that the current involvement of the Catholic Church in education in Poland is too high (OBOP 1996).

In England, despite falling membership of religious institutions and increasing secularism (Brierley and Wraight 1995), religious or faith schools remain popular, with one-third of schools in the country being faith schools (total of 6955), the majority of which are Christian faith schools. Jewish schools, Muslim and Sikh schools have also been established. In 1996, three quarters of a million children were educated in Catholic run schools (Catholic Education Service 1996). Faith schools in England (e.g. Catholic, Church of England, Muslim, Sikh, Jewish) have received State funding since as far back as 1833 (Johnson 2000). While some groups (e.g. Free Churches Council) in theory oppose State funding of religious run schools, they still ‘seem quite pleased that [these schools] are there as a Christian presence in the education system’ (Johnson 2000, p.127). Others in comparison have argued against the funding of faith based schools. Groups that oppose the use of public funds to finance religious schools indicate that religion is a private matter and
that the establishment of individual religious schools ‘would not be in [the] long term interests’ of minority groups (Commission for Racial Equality 1990). A poll conducted in England in 2005 by Guardian/Institute of Commercial Management (ICM) found that two thirds of the public opposed State funding of faith schools. Responding to the findings, a spokesperson from Commons Education Select Committee questioned whether the State wanted ‘a ghettoised education system’. According to this spokesperson, Barry Sheerman, ‘schools play a crucial role in integrating different communities and the growth of faith based schools poses a real threat to this’ (Taylor 2005). This was supported by Johnson (2000) who indicated that the strongest opposition to faith schools in England is on the basis that such schools ‘are socially and radically divisive and undermine the possibility of a truly comprehensive education in which all share basic values of tolerance’ (p.128).

Looking at these three examples, it is clear that the difficulties around the involvement of Church and State in education are not unique to Ireland alone. The Irish context will now be explored.

**Church-State relations in Ireland: ownership and trusteeship of schools**

Until relatively recently, the main churches have exercised strong control over education in Ireland with the Catholic Church viewing such control ‘as its prerogative’ (Coolahan 1981, p.72). Prior to the establishment of the Irish Free State and following the relaxation of the Penal Laws, a number of religious congregations founded Voluntary Catholic Secondary Schools, which were managed by members of religious bodies without any State funding. Church of Ireland schools (Church of Ireland is the main minority church in the Republic of Ireland) had already been in existence as the majority of members of the Protestant community were able to afford secondary
education, even before free education was introduced\textsuperscript{16}. Due to the fact that the majority of schools established were religious run (rather than lay schools) children had to attend either a Catholic or a Protestant school (Considere-Charon 1998, p.15).

On the establishment of the Irish Free State, the new, largely inexperienced, Irish government did not consider education to be a major priority and welcomed the continued support of the Churches in this regard. While the Catholic and Protestant Churches continued to provide education, the State did not provide financial support to them until the 1960s. According to Tussing (1978) the continued provision of education by the Churches ensured that Ireland ‘by a long chalk the poorest country in the EEC, [could] afford such a highly developed [education] system’. It wasn’t until the 1960s that the State, on increasing the school leaving age to sixteen, introduced the Free Education Scheme and provided funding to all schools\textsuperscript{17}.

The current situation is one where all teachers’ salaries are paid by the State, irrespective of the type of school they teach in. Support is also provided for the upkeep and maintenance of school buildings. Religious schools are protected in the Irish Constitution in that ‘legislation providing State aid for schools shall not discriminate between schools under the management of different religious denominations’ (Article 44.2.4.). Therefore in a similar manner as the approach in England, all second level schools, irrespective of ownership, receive financial assistance from the State (whether they are non-denominational schools, Catholic, Church of Ireland, Jewish or Muslim and so on). In addition, a ‘block grant’ is available to ensure that parents of minority Christian denominations are able to send their children to an appropriate secondary school. The grant is paid directly to the school and aids in the payment of fees (Lynch and Lodge 2002, p.210). This grant supports the constitutional right of parents to have their children educated in schools of a particular denomination (Glendenning 1999). It has been argued that this grant provides a

\textsuperscript{16} The majority of Church of Ireland schools were and continue to be fee paying schools

\textsuperscript{17} At this stage the state set up fully funded comprehensive and community schools (Vocational schools has been established under the Vocational Education Act of 1930).
disproportionately high level of State aid to these schools in comparison to free scheme secondary schools (Woulfe 2002).

Ireland has a pluralistic post-primary education system consisting of:

- Catholic Voluntary Secondary School (privately owned and held in trust for the provision of Catholic Education, catering for almost 55% of all second level students)
- Comprehensive Schools (State schools, run by management boards with representatives of different interests groups)
- Community Schools (State schools, run in accordance with a Deed of Trust by management boards representative of different interests groups, including Church and local authorities)
- Vocational Schools/ Community Colleges (State schools under the control of local authorities, the VEC)
- Church of Ireland schools (normally under the trusteeship of the diocesan bishop. There are 25 such schools in Ireland)

While in the 1980s, 494 voluntary secondary schools out of 548 were owned and managed by Catholic agencies (O’Buachalla 1988), the number of secondary schools managed and controlled by members of Catholic congregations declined in recent years. The trusteeship of schools refers to the ‘moral and legal responsibilities of those entrusted with the provision of education according to a particular ethos’ (Reynolds 2009, p.3). School trustees are responsible for ensuring that school ethos remains in line with the founders intentions and the trustees are also responsible for the ownership of school buildings and land. Decline in Catholic vocations has resulted in the establishment of Boards of Trust responsible for maintaining and promoting the same philosophy of education in Catholic secondary schools as the previous religious trustees did.
(Reynolds 2009, p. 4). These Trust boards include Loreto Trust, Catholic Education and Irish schools Trust (CEIST), Edmund Rice School Trust (ERST) and Le Chéile Trust.

The State supports a diversity of school types through its funding of all schools. This is reflected in the Education White Paper (DES 1995), which states that the education system should ‘respect the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society’. However, particularly at primary level, the majority of schools still remain denominational and Catholic. What’s more, there are representatives from the Catholic Church on the Board of Management in Vocational Schools and Community Schools and the rules for these schools were designed to be acceptable to the Catholic Church (Williams 1999, p.322).

Educate Together schools are now gaining popularity in Ireland, but mainly at primary level – the first Educate Together post-primary school is currently under development. These schools operate under the Educate Together Charter and are funded by the DES. The patron of these schools is a company, whose members are local supporters of the school. Educate Together schools, as the name suggests, are multi-denominational schools, where ‘all children have equal rights of access to the school, and children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds [are] equally respected’ (Educate Together Charter as outlined in Rowe 2000). Through its core curriculum, these schools aim to foster pluralist values in students (Mulcahy 2000, p.91). Within these schools differences are ‘recognised, endorsed and welcomed’ (Rowe, 2000, p.173). Precedence is not given to any one religion and students in all years participate in a subject of ‘ethical education’, as well as SPHE at junior and senior cycle (Geraghty 2008, p.25).

The Christian Churches in Ireland, particularly the Catholic Church, have not only provided education for students but have traditionally played an influential role in health related issues both in terms of their work in hospitals and school based health related programmes. This issue is explored in greater detail below.
The role of the main Churches in Ireland in health related matters

The main Churches in Ireland (Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland) concerned
themselves with the health and care of people, largely through their work in hospitals and schools.
A number of charitable organisations were established by the Church of Ireland and the majority
of hospitals, long into the 19th century, were Protestant run. This resulted in a situation where
Catholic doctors were trained by Protestant doctors in Protestant hospitals. This was one of the
main reasons for ‘the urge to have a specifically Catholic system of health care’ (Inglis 1998,
pp.126-127). It was mainly nuns (Irish Sisters of Charity and the Sisters of Mercy), working with
Catholic doctors and nurses, that began to develop Catholic hospitals e.g. Mater Misericardiae and
St.Vincent’s both in Dublin. As a result of this, by the 1970s ‘religious personnel either owned or
had charge of 46 private hospitals, 25 nursing and convalescent homes, 32 geriatric homes, 35
homes for mentally handicapped, 11 homes for the physically handicapped, 31 orphanages’ (Ryan
1979 p.15). Hospitals that were under the control of the Catholic Church followed a Catholic code
of medical ethics (Inglis 1998, p.62), with spiritual care deemed on par with medical care (Wren
2003). However, as an industrial society developed, the State was concerned with maintaining the
health of its people in order to ensure economic growth and stability. The increasing role of the
State in the area of health resulted in conflict between the Catholic Church and the State (Inglis
1998, p.61), representing the first real clash between the two. The Catholic Church’s main concern
regarding the involvement of the State in health related to women and motherhood and in ensuring
that Catholic teachings on issues of morality were maintained.

Due to the high level of involvement of the Churches in hospitals and medical care, the
main Churches were able to exert considerable control over the practice of medicine. One example
of this is the reaction of the Catholic Church to the *Mother and Child Scheme* of 1951, where Dr.
Noel Browne proposed the introduction of free maternity care for mothers and free healthcare for children up to the age of sixteen. The scheme was strongly opposed by members of the Catholic Church (for example Bishop McQuaid) and by members of the medical profession. The Catholic Church feared that the introduction of such a scheme was a ‘threat [to] public morality’ (Wren 2003, p.27) and would ultimately lead to the promotion of abortion and birth control amongst Irish women. The Catholic Church was ultimately successful in their endeavour as both the scheme and Noel Browne were dropped (see Whyte 1984, p.196-272; Wren 2003, p.33-39). A more recent example was the reaction of certain groups following the establishment of a vasectomy clinic in Letterkenny general hospital in 1997. The clinic was picketed by members of the Pro-Life campaign and Family Solidarity along with members of medical staff working in the hospital. After only six days in operation, the facility was shut down (but was later re-established by the Health Board).

The main concerns of the Catholic Church regarding health did not only relate to aspects of the medical profession but also related to health education programmes within schools. The Catholic Church expressed reservations any time the State attempted to intervene in school based health related areas. They feared that the introduction of such programmes would encroach on ‘important moral questions on which the Catholic Church has definite teaching’ (O’Donoghue 1999, 50). Prior to State involvement in this area, moral and health education fell under the umbrella of Religious Education, with power given to schools to devise and implement their own religious programmes. When sex and sexuality was discussed, it was in relation to scientific information or the teachings of the Catholic Church. Such ‘moral’ lessons, as with all aspects of Irish post-primary schooling, prioritised knowledge and information transfer ahead of the development of feelings and emotions (Hannan et al 1983, 33), while critical debate and questioning were stifled (OECD 1991).
The first example of Church-State tensions in relation to school based health education programmes was the introduction of the Stay Safe Programme in 1991. The Stay Safe Programme aimed to teach children about personal safety e.g. getting lost, inappropriate touching etc. The Catholic Church opposed the programme on the basis that it did not advance the teachings of the Catholic Church in relation to issues of morality. In line with recent thinking on dealing with controversial issues in the classroom (Stenhouse 1971) right or wrong was not defined by the teacher, parents or the teachings of the Catholic Church but was left up to individual child to determine, with the teacher adopting a neutral position. A study by Gilmartin (cited in Inglis 1998, p.57) found that in the Sligo-Leitrim and Kerry area the implementation of the Stay Safe programme was affected by the negative disposition of the local Catholic bishops towards the programme.

Since the introduction of the Stay Safe programme, the State has continued to increase its role in school based health education programmes with Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) being made mandatory in schools (RSE in primary school and SPHE in post-primary school. RSE forms part of the SPHE curriculum in post-primary schools). The development and piloting of the Exploring Masculinities Programme is further evidence of the increased involvement of the State in social and personal education and the continued attempt to present such issues in a secular manner. The suggested pedagogy and content of EM differs from the traditional teachings of the Catholic Church with, for example, homosexuality given equal attention as heterosexual relationships. Also, EM aimed to develop young men’s critical capacities and opinions, with teachers encouraged to adopt a facilitative approach where they are ‘non-judgemental in their attitudes’ (DES 2000, p. ix). This mirrors the approach adopted within the Stay Safe programme. Such an approach is at odds with the methods traditionally adopted by the Catholic Church in relation to sexual morality and behaviour (see for example Inglis 1998; OECD 1991).
Single sex schooling and the culture of all boys’ schools

Reflecting traditional Catholic thinking, there has been a strong tradition of single-sex schooling in Ireland. One-third of all post-primary schools are privately owned and single sex (DES 2003). While single-sex schooling is gradually on the decline, 42% of Irish second-level students attended a single-sex school in 2002, the majority of whom were girls (Lynch and Lodge 2002, p.89). Any attempt at amalgamating the sexes was challenged by the Catholic Church and perceived as undesirable for Catholic children.

In the past, it was found that Christian Brother Schools, the largest single body of male religious orders involved in education, were mainly ‘concerned with imbuing in their pupils a knowledge and respect for formal religious faith and doctrine, but, like most boys schools, are less likely to place such religious teaching within a ‘personal development’ framework’ (Hannan et al 1983, p.33). This is reflected in the emphasis placed on cognitive development in all boys’ schools with more time allocated to ‘academic subjects’, such as Mathematics, English and Irish than is the case in other school types e.g. single sex girls, community school, community college etc (Hannan et al 1983). Boys in single sex schools tend to be offered a narrower range of subjects and are less likely to be offered music, home economics or social and personal programmes in comparison to students in other school types (Looney and Morgan 2001). What’s more, single sex boys’ schools have traditionally been more likely to stream their students (Hannan and Boyle 1987).

The culture of all boys’ school in Ireland, as identified by Lynch and Lodge (2002) tends to be based on ‘peer regulation and sporting prowess’, where physical strength, agility, height and sporting ability are held in high esteem by students and teachers. There is often strong pressure on students to conform to the prevailing hegemonic masculinity that exists within the school, which
can be based on power and heterosexuality with high levels of prejudice shown to males who are gay and weaker (see also Norman 2006). It was found that boys in single sex schools paid little attention to issues of gender equality and hold more gender stereotyped views than students in other school types (Hannan et al 1983; Lynch and Lodge 2002)

**Social and personal education programmes in Irish schools**

Within the past two decades schools have increasingly been perceived as important sites for social and personal education with the result that, of late, the State has become more involved in the education of children on issues normally considered the remit of the home and the Church. Increased levels of substance misuse, teenage pregnancies, self harming, increased number of deaths by suicide, bullying and increased levels of risk taking have all added to the need for second level schools to play a part in social and personal education (Inglis 1998).

The Education Act (DES 1998) places an obligation on schools to promote the social and personal development of students and to provide health education for them. Over the past fifteen years a number of school based programmes have been introduced which focused on the social and personal educational needs of Irish primary and post-primary students – namely the Stay Safe programme, Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). The introduction of SPHE at senior cycle is currently underway. The Stay Safe programme was established on account of concerns expressed on the increasing number of children experiencing sexual abuse (Inglis 1998: p.53). The programme was introduced, on a voluntary basis, in primary schools in 1991. The aim of the programme is to teach children personal safety skills so they can take care of themselves in situations that could potentially be upsetting or dangerous e.g. being bullied or getting lost. The Stay Safe programme teaches children how to protect themselves from physical and sexual abuse. The programme runs from Senior Infants until sixth class.
Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) was introduced in the 1995/1996 school year, as a result of the earlier maturation of students, the increased sexual activity among young people and the associated health risks (Inglis 1998). The RSE programme is intended for fifth and sixth class students in primary school and aims to ‘promote the overall development of the person’ including ‘the integration of sexuality into personal understanding, growth and development’ (DES 2008, M4/95, 2.1). At post-primary level, RSE is addressed within the wider context of SPHE. The programme is made up of two strands: ‘Myself’ and ‘Myself and Others’. ‘Myself’ aims to deal with issues relating to self-esteem, growing and changing, feelings and emotions, keeping safe and making decisions. ‘Myself and Others’ addresses relationships with family, friends and others. RSE was developed in partnership with parents, teachers and management. In the development of the programme, the home was recognised as the primary and natural setting for such forms of education but it was acknowledged that most parents look to the school to acquire some assistance in addressing issues relating to relationships and sexuality with their children. The school is seen as ‘playing a supportive and complementary role to the home in this task’ (DES 2008, M4/95, 6.1). It was recommended that the programme be developed based on partnership between parents, teachers and school authorities. Parents are entitled to remove their child from RSE class and provide such education in the home.

Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) at Junior Cycle was introduced on a phased basis in 2000 and was compulsory for all Junior Cycle students by September 2003. It is envisaged that SPHE at junior cycle ‘will build on the experience of all children at primary level’ (SPHE Support Services, undated). The programme encompasses ten sections: Belonging and integrating, self management, communication skills, physical health, friendship, RSE, emotional health, influence and decision, substance abuse and personal safety.
SPHE at junior cycle aims to:

- Enable students to develop personal and social skills,
- Promote self esteem and self confidence,
- Enable students to develop a framework for responsible decision making,
- Provide opportunities for reflection and discussion,
- Promote physical, mental and emotional health and well-being.

The introduction of a new Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme at senior cycle is planned for the future. The inclusion of SPHE at senior cycle aims to ‘provide dedicated space and time for students to further develop knowledge and understanding, values and attitudes and the life skills they need to live healthy lives and to contribute positively to the health and wellbeing of other people and their communities’ (NCCA 2005b, p.3). It is proposed that SPHE at senior cycle will build on the junior cycle programme and prepare students for further education and training, for the world of work and for personal and family life in five main areas, namely mental health, gender studies, substance abuse, relationships and sexuality education and physical activity and nutrition. Each of these areas encompasses three main learning outcomes based on emotional and social health and wellbeing, physical health and wellbeing and personal and group health and wellbeing. It is designed as a ninety hour course, preferably offered in a double period over the two years of senior cycle.

It is planned that students will play an active role in the selection of materials in SPHE at senior cycle. Furthermore, teaching and learning will adopt a student centered approach. A supportive learning environment is viewed as key to the success of the programme. The new
programme will employ assessment for learning approaches, such as self-assessment and ongoing reflection, and assessment of learning approaches, with students completing a Personal Reflection Task Report (NCCA 2005b).

Levels of and legislation governing parental involvement in education

In Ireland, levels of parental involvement in education have been marginal until relatively recently – parents were merely expected to send their children to school on time, keep them fed and ensure they had suitable attire and equipment for the school day. As a result their role has tended to be a passive one (Mc Dermott 1995). Parents were not perceived as having any role in the running and organisation of the school or in curriculum decision-making, with education viewed as solely the domain of the ‘experts’. They were not expected or encouraged to play any part in their children's education, with signs in schools such as, No parents beyond this point being a clear indication of the perceived role of parents.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 1997) noted the slow pace at which parental involvement in education began in Ireland in comparison to other OECD countries, with Germany introducing legislation on parental involvement as far back as 1948, France in 1968, Italy in 1973 and England and Wales in 1980. In Ireland, however, ‘families traditionally played little part in their children’s formal schooling (OECD 1997 p. 143), resulting in the OECD (1997) recommending that Irish schools need to ‘develop a more outward-looking stance, and for their walls to become, as it were, more permeable’ (p.15).

While the importance of the home in the education of children is stressed in the Constitution of Ireland (1937), wherein parents are recognised as the primary and natural
educators of their children, it was not until the 1980s that steps were taken to formally involve parents in their children’s education. One such step was the establishment of the National Parents Council post-primary (NPCpp) in 1985. The NPCpp is an umbrella group, which consists of delegates selected by the various associations. It has the same rights to consultation as management and teacher unions and is made up of the following constituent parent bodies:

1. The Congress of Catholic School Parents Association (CSPA)
2. Parents Association for Vocational Schools and Community Colleges (PAVSCC)
3. Federation of Christian Brothers and other Catholic Schools Parents Councils (FEBCBS)
4. Parents Association for Community and Comprehensive Schools (PACCS)
5. Co-operation of Minority Religion and Protestant Parents Association (COMPASS)

The mission of the National Parents Council post-primary is ‘to co-ordinate the energy and ideas of its constituent bodies to promote the spiritual, intellectual, physical, social and psychological education of the nation's children’ (National Parents Council post-primary undated). To this end, NPCpp enables the further education and personal development of parents to foster the growth of their children and the council aims to:

- Involve parents actively in all aspects of their children’s education
- Promote and protect the role of the parents as the primary educators of their children
- Provide an effective voice for parents in the development of an elected parents groups in each school
- Monitor educational development and educational opportunities

National Parents Council post-primary (undated)
It also runs the *Leaving Cert Results Helpline* every August and publishes a Year Book. The NPCpp was also the driving force behind the establishment of the *Post-Primary Education Forum* in 2007, which aimed to bring the various education partners together in order to highlight important educational issues relevant to all partners.

Since its establishment, the NPCpp has given parents a say in ‘decision making on educational issues at a national level’ (DES Circular M27/91, part 4) resulting in the OECD (1997) concluding that the council has ‘markedly increased the level and quality of parental input into policy-making, both at national level and in terms of individual schools’ (OECD 1997, p. 142). As a result of the establishment of the NPCpp, parents now comprise a powerful lobby group at national level. Parental involvement in parent associations is also recommended at local level, as the DES strongly encourages individual schools to establish their own parents association (DES Circular M27/91, part 2).

The role of parents in their children’s education is protected by various forms of legislation. For example, their right to play a role in selecting an appropriate school for their child is protected by the Irish Constitution (GOI 1938), which pledges that the State will not require parents to send their children to a school whose ethos goes against that of the home. This is mirrored in the European Convention on Human Rights and the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights which indicate that:

> No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the

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18 It is important to note that changes to Article 41 and 42 of the Irish Constitution have been proposed and will be put to a referendum in the near future (no date has yet being established). If these proposed changes are agreed, the emphasis will change from parents rights to the rights of the child and any decision regarding children will be made based on their rights and interests (Kilkelly, 2010). The title of section 42 will also change from Education to Children.
right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own
religions and philosophical convictions’

Council of Europe (1952, Article 2 of the first protocol)

Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children

United Nations (1948, Article 26.3)

The Education White Paper (DES 1995) noted the right of parents to play a central role in the
education of their children, to be represented on the Board of Management in schools, to access
their children’s school records as well as requiring schools to put specific policies in place to
ensure the involvement of parents in the school. The Education Act (DES 1998) reinforced the
rights of parents by giving them the statutory right to participate in their children’s education,
giving them the right to appeal against exclusion and suspension from school and to be involved in
the formulation of the school plan. The OECD (1997) suggested that, once the White and Green
Education Paper were fully implemented, Ireland would “have one of the most parent-participative
systems in the world” (p.141). Therefore, as a result of these various legislations:

Parents can readily be consulted in the clarification of the school's mission,
vision and aims, the review of the school's current reality, the establishment of
priorities, and the development of policies on issues such as discipline or
homework.

DES (1999, p.28)

However, despite attempts to improve levels of parental involvement, ‘empowerment of
parents on a wide scale is still far from the reality’ (Mc Dermott 1995, p.16). While some parents
have become actively involved in their children’s education through participation in parent
associations (either nationally or within individual schools) or on Boards of Management, the majority of parents remain in ‘a shadowy position on the margins of the educational process’ (Atkins et al 1988, p.3). Differing levels of parental involvement will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

**Conclusion**

The Irish education system is based on the Classical Humanism model, where emphasis is placed on the acquisition of knowledge. While Classical Humanism is still evident, the education system in Ireland is ‘becoming increasingly coterminous with the theme of education and the economy’ (O'Sullivan 1992, p. 464), resulting in the economy and the desire for economic growth having a direct impact on education.

In a similar manner to other countries (e.g. Poland, USA, England) the Catholic Church has played a significant role in education in Ireland. The Catholic Church considered its role to encompass the promotion and maintenance of the morality of people and the involvement of the State in health education (and hospitals) was a significant concern for them in this regard. They feared that the involvement of the State would result in the use of contraception and abortion and as a result reservations were expressed when social and personal programmes were introduced by the State. However, in more recent times, the State have introduced a number of social and personal education programmes into schools, such as Stay Safe, RSE and SPHE at junior cycle. The implementation of SPHE at senior cycle is currently underway.

While Ireland was slow to introduce legislation governing parental involvement in education, the Green Paper on Education (DES 1992), the White Paper on Education (DES 1995) and the Education Act (DES 1998) have helped improve levels of parental involvement.
Chapter Three:

A view of some relevant literature

This chapter is comprised of five main sections that explore some of the literature that is of relevance to the current study. The first section examines the literature relating to issues of gender and masculinities, exploring some of the theoretical perspectives on the construction of male identities. This is followed by an examination of literature relating to the role of the school in the formation of male identities. Literature relating to school based social and personal education, from the perspective of young men, parents and schools is outlined in section three. Reasons for involving parents in their children’s education are then explored. Due to the fact that EM was a curriculum initiative, the fifth and final section of the chapter explores some of the issues relating to curriculum, with particular attention being provided to the influence of external factors (e.g. parents, media etc) on new initiatives.
Section One: Masculinities

During the last decade interest in issues relating to masculinities has developed considerably. This new interest is reflected in the growth of international research in the area with, for example, Mac an Ghaill (1994), Connell (1995), Salisbury and Jackson (1996), Gilbert and Gilbert (1998), Epstein et al (1998) and Renold (2004) all researching various aspects of masculinities. As a result of this the untraversed frontier has become gold rush territory (Newton 1998).

The following section examines literature pertaining to issues of masculinities. The piece begins by examining a number of theoretical perspectives on how gender differences occur. The concept of hegemony in relation to masculinities is then explored as is the influence of peer culture on the formation of male identities.

Differing theoretical perspectives on gender

Three main theories on how gender differences occur are discussed below. These include: essentialism, sex-role theory and gender as a social construct. The author draws on various theorists to explain each concept and then identifies, where relevant, some of the criticisms presented in the literature in relation to each theory\(^{19}\).

\(^{19}\) Due to the fact that the focus of the current study is on masculinities, the author will use examples that relate specifically to men and masculinities. The author is aware that these issues also relate to women and femininities.
Essentialism

Essentialist theory perceives human beings as being either male or female based on their biological sex. Differences between the sexes occur as a result of biological differences at birth and as a result are ‘innate’ and ‘natural’. Consequently, male behaviour is predetermined by the presence of male genitalia and male hormones at birth.

Within this theory certain characteristics are viewed as distinctly male or female. It is reasonable, within an essentialist theory, to separate out male and female characteristics into different distinct categories. It follows then that within the male category, we can argue that all men are, for example, ‘logical’ and ‘physically strong’ whereas women are ‘illogical’ and ‘physically weak’ and so on. This can explain the usage of the term ‘opposite sex’ (see for example Pilcher and Wheleham 2008). Essentialism views men and women as two homogenous groups and believe that there is only one particular way of being male and female. It is feasible, within this theory, to lump all men together in one category and argue that ‘all men are…’

Some theorists have argued that this view is inappropriate. For example, one of the main criticisms of essentialism is that if differences between the sexes are innate and intrinsic then inequalities cannot be challenged nor behaviours altered. So, ‘if we accept that boys and men act in the way they do because ‘its in their hormones’ then the possibility of personal and social change in boys and men is wiped out’ (Salisbury and Jackson 1996, p.2).

The argument that the presence of testosterone affects male behaviour has also been deemed inappropriate (see for example Connell 2008) as varying levels of testosterone and oestrogen have been found in both men and women. At times in the female life cycle, women can have more testosterone in their bodies than men and while high levels of testosterone has been advanced as a reason for the existence of so-called ‘male-dominated’ societies, Kemper (1990)
argues that increased levels of testosterone occur as a result of dominance rather than as a precursor to it.

Connell (2008; see also Butler 2006) argued against an essentialist viewpoint on the grounds that it does not acknowledge the influence society has on ones behaviour. It assumes that ‘biological causation is independent of society’ (Connell 2008, p.32).

**Sex role theory**

Sex role theory argues that biological sex differences can not be used to explain all of the idiosyncrasies between men and women. Within sex role theory, it is acknowledged that society influenced a person’s behaviour. The concept of gender, as distinct from sex, was therefore advanced. Gender was perceived as being reflective of societal influences on ones behaviour while sex was used to denote biological differences.

Sex role theory believes that children are socialized into behaving in certain ‘gender’ appropriate ways. Hargreaves (1986), for example, showed how people tend to behave in ways that are socially prescribed. This socialisation occurs through the transmission of acceptable social norms and expectations to children from a very young age. For example, the moment a boy is born, following the announcement ‘it's a boy’, the child is labelled as such for the remainder of his life. From then on his parents/guardians dress him in clothes and buy him toys deemed appropriate for a boy. As a result society treats him as male. He is then expected to act in certain ways and is rewarded and punished in relation to this e.g. if he acts in a manner appropriate to a boy he is praised. As a result of being rewarded and punished, the boy internalises his understanding of the ‘male role’ and eventually this role will become a part of who he is. If this boy becomes a father himself, he will continue the process of socializing his children in gender appropriate ways.
One of the benefits of sex role theory, as identified by theorists, is that if this theory is true, differences between the sexes could be lessened. All that is needed for change to happen is that society alters the way it treats boys and girls. Therefore, change, for example, in levels of domination/subordination is possible, if society allows this to happen.

It is believed that ‘sex role theory’ occurs as a result of ‘top down transmission from the adult world’ (Connell 2008, p.12) wherein the child is viewed as an actor, merely acting out prescribed roles that he has no control over. Herein lies one of the main criticisms of ‘sex role theory’ - the child is viewed as passive in the process of socialisation. He merely absorbs, like a sponge, the messages portrayed to him. Such a view ignores the pleasure people can gain from participating in gendered behaviour. It also ignores those who actively resist and reject such socialisation.

What’s more, sex role theory, in a similar manner to essentialism, separates males and females into two distinct groups: men’s sex roles and women’s sex roles. Critics argue that having only two roles does not acknowledge the complexities of gender formation (Connell 1985; Stacey and Thorne 1985; Mac an Ghaill 1994). This does not account, for example, for a feminine man or for men who take on what are perceived to be female roles (see for example the early work of Mead 1935 on sex and temperament in three primitive societies). This concept is further contradicted by the findings of, for example, Thorne (1993) who found that children don’t always take up specific traditional male or female roles (see also Mac an Ghaill 1994). Some theorists argue then that sex role theory relies too heavily on biology to explain difference between men and women.
Gender as a social construct

Gender (in this case masculinities), as a socially construct, like sex role theory, assumes that boys, while born physiologically different, are not born with an innate ‘fixed’ understanding of what it means to be male. Masculinity as a social construct believes that boys think and act in certain gendered ways based on the concepts of masculinity they experience and adopt from their culture (Pleck et al 1994). Therefore, boys are not born with specific masculine characteristics such as logic, power and strength; rather they realise, as a result of the messages they experience from their culture and society, that these are important characteristics for a young man to have (Jackson and Salisbury 1996). As DeBeauvoir states (1989) one is not born [a man], but becomes one.

Each culture portrays what are considered acceptable gender norms and these cultural influences supersede biological ones. Notions of what it means to be male are tied up with and are deeply embedded in society (Archer 2003) and a boy will construct his masculinity differently based on the different cultural and societal conditions in which he finds himself (Totten 2003, p.71).

As a result:

Young boys become men by responding to situational demands and social pressures. Surrounded with expectations about how they, as men, ought to behave, boys have to sift through various demands placed upon them by their culture, their associates, their teachers, their friends, and their family to construct their own gender identities. Each man constructs his own identity in relation to specific gender notions deeply embedded in his culture

Harris (1995, p.9)

Social constructivism differs from sex role theory in that social constructivism acknowledges that individuals are active participants in constructing their own gender identity (see
for example Mac an Ghaill 1994; Courteney 2000; Archer et al 2001; Renold 2004; Butler 2006; Connell 2008). So rather than being passively socialized, young men ‘sift’ through these gendered demands and select behaviour they deem appropriate to them. Gender is then constructed based on ones actions, choices and interactions with others. Children are not merely viewed as actors following a script (as per sex-role theory), but are seen as constructors of their own script. Masculinity as a social construct acknowledges that an individual may gain pleasure from constructing their gender identity and also that some may reject or resist certain gender norms.

In comparison to sex-role theorists, who identify two distinct roles (male and female), social constructivists believe that there is a plurality to masculinities. This plurality occurs because of differences in cultural and sub-cultural norms. Therefore young men in Western Europe may construct their masculinity differently to young men in East Asia. But also, young men living in the same country may construct their masculinity differently based on, for example, their social class, ethnicity or religion. This occurs because these young men view masculinities ‘through different lenses’ based on the messages they receive from their culture and sub-culture (Harris 1995, p.10). These different lenses result in ‘different masculine identities [being] produced from differential locations within and across social divisions’ (Archer et al 2001, p.432). Therefore, statements that argue that ‘all men are…’ become obsolete as there are numerous ways of being male (Jackson and Salisbury 1996, pp.107-108).

This plurality of masculinities occurs in two main ways. Firstly, various forms of masculinity are present amongst a cross section of men based on cultural and sub-cultural norms as previously described. Secondly, plurality can be found within young men as they can be comprised of a number of different male identities, which they can draw on and enact ‘differently in different contexts’ (Courtenay 2000, p.22). Therefore, ‘from the classroom to the home, teenage boys negotiate their gender identities, changing their performance of masculinity depending on the places and spaces that they inhabit from one moment to the next’ (Krenichya 1999). For example,
the way in which a young man may construct his masculinity within his peer group may differ from the way he constructs it within a family setting and so on. As there are various different forms of masculinity, some forms are deemed more powerful and ideal (hegemonic) in comparison to others. The concept of hegemonic forms of masculinity is discussed in the following section.

Criticism of social constructivism, where it does exist, relates to the fact that social constructivists completely ignore the influence of biology on an individual’s gendered behaviour. For example, Paglia (1995) argues that ‘feminists grossly oversimplify the problem of sex when they reduce it to a matter of social convention’ (p.2).

Summary of theoretical perspectives on sex and gender

Essentialists believe that differences occur as a result of biological sex differences and are therefore natural and innate. Sex-role theory believes that children, rather than just being born psychologically different, are socialised into acting in different gendered ways. The child is passive in this process. In comparison to this social constructivism argues that boys are not born with an innate understanding of what it means to be male, but rather develop these concepts as a result of the messages they receive from their culture. The child actively constructs his gendered identity, selecting different gendered behaviours in different contexts.

It is important to highlight here that the Exploring Masculinities Programme was developed based on a social constructivism viewpoint, as outlined in the opening line of the Executive Summary of the External Evaluation report (Gleeson et al 2004) which stated that ‘it is a fundamental premise of the programme that masculinity is a social construct’. This ideology was questioned by some critics of the programme e.g. ‘many parents would find the assertion that masculinity is a social construct as difficult to accept’ (CSPA undated b)
Hegemonic forms of masculinity and the subordination of non-ideal forms

According to the literature, the coexistence of various forms of masculinity can result in some forms being more powerful than others (Warin 2006). It is important, therefore, to examine and explore the relationship and positioning of these different forms of masculinities to each other, with some being held in high esteem, while others are excluded and shunned. Hegemonic forms of masculinity and the subordination of other forms are discussed below.

Hegemonic forms of masculinity

While hegemony refers to any group or individual that is dominant, hegemonic forms of masculinity refer to ‘ideal’ forms of masculinities that set the benchmark of what it means to be a ‘real man’. Hegemonic forms of masculinity refers to men that ‘claim and sustain a leading position’ within a culture and embody the ‘currently accepted’ form of masculinity (Connell 1995, p.77). Such forms are viewed as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ (Donaldson 1993, p. 645) and tend to be based on physical strength, emotional neutrality, assertiveness, rationality and competitiveness (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998). This was reinforced by Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997, p.121) who believe that:

At this stage of Western history masculinity mobilises around physical strength, adventurousness, emotional neutrality, certainty control, assertiveness, self reliance, individuality, competitiveness, instrumental skills, public knowledge, discipline reason, objectivity and rationality.

These ‘ideals forms of masculinity’ may not be a reality for the majority of men and boys and may merely exist ‘in fantasy figures or models remote from the lives of the unheroic majority’ (Donaldson 1993, p.646). Therefore, although hegemonic forms are perceived as ‘ideal’, not all men are capable of practicing it. Very few men can live up to the high standards it sets with many
trying to conform but failing\(^\text{20}\). The ‘rules of manhood’ set by hegemony can often be so tight that men can feel restricted by them, with hegemony having numerous negative impacts on men e.g. inflicting, deforming, harming and denying them (Donaldson 1993, p.646). Having to live up to the ‘ideals’ of manhood can often pressurise boys into acting in specific ways and can affect the way they talk, dress and the way they interact with family and friends. They can feel pressurised into selecting gender specific subjects, hobbies, third level courses and jobs (Jackson and Salisbury 1996).

As a result:

Masculinity can be looked on as a badly fitting coat. You bought the coat because there were no better coats on the rack or you thought you would be laughed at in an unusual coat. So you adjust your posture until the coat fits. After some time you come to think it really fits, while you are really just hobbling about

Woltring (1995, p45)

These rules are not only oppressive and destructive to others (such as women and other ‘weaker’ men, which is discussed in greater detail below), but also to men themselves. Herein lies one of the central contradictions of masculinities, that while men, as a group, are powerful, the majority of men view themselves as powerless as they struggle to conform to these hegemonic ideals (McLean 1996 cited in Mills 2000). This is supported by Waters (2004), who argues that while on the surface men may appear dominant, underneath this the male psyche is ‘rapidly disintegrating’ resulting in ‘the hollow appearance of control’ (p.17). Renold (2004) adds to this when she

\(^\text{20}\) While some men may fail at gaining hegemony, they are viewed as being complicit in maintaining the power and control of hegemonic masculinity. This can be due to the benefits of such a system or out of fear of being marginalised due to non-compliance, with the majority of men ultimately gaining from the presence of hegemonic masculinities. These complicit forms may not be what Connell (1995) refers to as ‘the frontline troops’ but they are still active in maintaining the concept of the ‘ideal man’.
indicates that boys rarely feel comfortable or secure in their male identities as they fluctuate between power and powerlessness (p.249).

Hegemony is never absolute, with those who are perceived to embody ‘ideal’ forms continuously having to fight to maintain their dominant position (Connell 1989, p.68). This dominance can be undermined at any given time and ‘must always be won’ (Mac an Ghaill 1997, p.12). Therefore hegemony must be constantly enacted, renegotiated and re-enacted. Renold (2001) found that the majority of the boys in her study were involved in daily performances that ensured they maintained their hegemonic position and were not demoted to the ‘other group’. Therefore, those at the top of the masculine hierarchy must continuously reinforce their dominance by preventing ‘new groups from challenging old solutions and constructing a new hegemony’ (Connell 1995, p.77). These ‘weavers of the fabric of hegemony’ (Gramsci cited in Donaldson 1993) maintain their dominance through the policing, subordination and shaming of those who do not conform. This subordination is discussed below.

The subordination of non-ideal forms of masculinity

Acceptable forms of masculinities can only exist and have power when ‘abnormal’ or ‘unacceptable’ forms also exist. This is the case as ‘notions of normal masculinity’ have neither intelligibility nor power without the contrasting presence of an ‘abnormal gender’ (Boldt 1996, p.119). As a result, boys construct their masculinities not only by attempting to embody the characteristics previously listed, but also by distancing themselves from those that are considered ‘abnormal’. Consequently, hegemonic forms of masculinity are fashioned against what they are most opposite to with one of the ways to learn what you are is to go through the process of ‘othering’ in order to distance yourself from what you are not (see for example Renolds 2004)
A number of different groups are subjected to ‘othering’. For example, the following three categories of men (and sometimes women) are considered as opposite to hegemony and therefore subjected to subordination:

1. Homosexual men
2. Men who are weaker or portray stereotypical feminine characteristics
3. Men who refuse to conform

Subordination occurs through the removal of power from the people who, for whatever reason, do not conform to hegemonic ideals. The subordination of non-hegemonic forms of masculinity is discussed below from these three perspectives.

1. Homosexual men:

Boys develop their masculine identities by distancing themselves from and developing negative attitudes towards homosexual boys with Nayak and Kehily (1997 cited in Norman 2004, p.5) indicating that ‘there appears to be a consensus that young men tend to develop negative attitudes towards homosexuality as a core dimension to achieving a masculine identity’. Negative attitudes towards homosexual men forms ‘the bedrock’ of hegemonic masculinity (Donaldson 1993, p.645) with hegemony pushing heterosexual men to homophobia, and even reward them for doing so (Herek 1984). Strict adherence to a traditional male gender role has been linked to strong homophobic tendencies and fear of homosexual men (Parrott et al 2002). Kehily (2002, p.145) suggests that fear of being labelled homosexual results in young men having negative views of homosexuality and participating in overt displays of homophobia. Studies have found that greater than 4/5th of boys would be very upset if they were identified as homosexual (Woody 2003) and
more than half of the people studied by Fraser (1997 cited in Lynch 1999) would end a friendship if they found out that their friend was homosexual. This was further reinforced by the work of Curtin and Linehan (2002) who found that 70% of young men surveyed would avoid a friend who identified himself as homosexual. According to a parent in a study by McCormack and Gleeson (2010) young men would prefer any label other than homosexual.

Homosexual men are viewed as counter-hegemonic, are deemed to pose a threat to hegemony and as a result are distanced, demonised and subordinated. They tend to be positioned at the bottom of the gender hierarchy, where they are either ignored or subjected to high levels of violence (see for example Lynch and Lodge 2002; Norman 2004). These boys/men can pay high social and emotional prices (Renold 2004, p.249) for crossing ‘socially constructed gender boundaries’ (Courtenay 2000, p.32). The price is often paid through physical violence (Kenway and Fitzclarence 1997, p.122).

It is important to point out that such homophobic behaviour does not just control homosexual boys (or perceived homosexual boys) but also aids in policing and constructing heterosexual masculinities (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998, p.163). With this in mind, homophobia can be understood, not only as a dislike of homosexual people but as a way of enforcing normative masculinity amongst all young men, with any move away from the norm resulting in homophobic bullying. Therefore, when young men refer to others as ‘gay’, ‘queer’ or ‘faggot’ they are normalizing public modes of heterosexuality (Curtin and Linehan 2002, p.71). This is reflected in the fact that the threat of being labelled homosexual can prevent students from moving away from expected gender behaviour (Woody 2003 p.150).

The term gay is frequently used to denote difference, with any boy who is different from the norm being labelled as such. Often the sexual orientation of the person is irrelevant. As a result, boys do not need to be homosexual to be labelled gay, with any deviation from the hegemonic norm resulting in young men being labelled as such. This is discussed below.
2. Men who are weaker or portray stereotypical feminine characteristics:

Boys who are perceived as weaker, smaller or those who portray perceived feminine characteristics (e.g. those who are quiet, ‘soft’, sensitive or caring) are likely to be labelled homosexual and as a result are distanced, ‘othered’ and shunned. Unless boys portray themselves as sporty, sexually promiscuous or tough, they can have their sexuality questioned. They can be ridiculed for getting too close to other boys or for not conforming to hegemonic forms of masculinities (Renold 2002). These groups of boys and men can be forced into this ‘other’ group, where they must take up ‘painful positions’ (Renold 2004, p.249) and pay the price for not conforming. Again this can occur through the use of physical or emotional violence.

3. Men who refuse to conform

Some groups of men (and women) may explicitly challenge hegemony by demonstrating alternative ‘non-acceptable’ forms of masculinity or by challenging the dominant position of hegemonic forms. For example, gay liberation groups and feminist groups attempt to deconstruct hegemony but presenting alternative ways of being male. However, through rejecting contemporary forms of masculinity, a boy associates himself as ‘a girl’ or ‘gay’ and as such is treated in a similar manner to those referred to earlier. As previously stated by Courtenay (2000) and Renold (2004), these challengers often pay a price for taking such a stance as there is ‘little heroism associated with standing outside conventional paradigms’ (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998, p. 82). Again, these men may become victims of violent attacks or may simply be ignored.
The influential role of the peer group in the formation of male identities

The peer group has long been recognised as a salient site in the formation of masculinity, along with the home and the school (Mac an Ghaill 1994). Membership of a peer group is vital for young men, with most investing a lot of energy and time into gaining and maintaining their position within this group. Membership of a peer group gives power to young men for although a boy alone may not have power, a boys group does (Thorne and Luria 1986). Once joined each peer group comes with its own set of rules and regulations that must be adhered to by its members (Mac an Ghaill 1994; Gilbert and Gilbert 1998; Swain 2004). The peer group sets the criteria of what it means to be a ‘real man’ and as a result it can control, for example, behaviour, dress and speech. These rules make it clear to the members what behaviour is considered acceptable.

Status and popularity in the peer group is never absolute, must be constantly reaffirmed and defended, and if any member moves away from the accepted codes of behaviour they risk being demoted or rejected by their peers. One of the main factors affecting a boy’s position in a peer group is his sporting prowess (see for example, Kessler et al 1985; Mac an Ghaill 1994; Connell 1995; Martino 1999; Lynch and Lodge 2002; Swain 2004), with those who are athletic and physically strong being more likely to gain a dominant position within the peer group.

It can be difficult for boys to maintain their position within the peer group and sustain their emotional and intimate relationships and feelings. So while the peer group ‘affirms male power’ it ‘also creates an unsupportive competitive environment that serves to make individuals highly vulnerable’ (Holland 1993 cited in Mac an Ghaill 1994). On this, Cameron (1997) found that interactions within the male peer group were based on discussion of impersonal topics and general information such as joking, sports and insults. Within the peer group young men can be subjected to teasing and pressure to conform to the groups’ expectations, with the group supporting separation from effeminacy and homosexuality (ibid). This can result in young men hiding their
emotions from their friends and family out of fear of being labelled homosexual or being shunned from the group. In contrast to the female peer group, ‘disclosure of weakness among boys is far more likely to be exposed to others through joking or horsing around’ (Thorne and Luria 1986, p.183). So while girls appear to have better support networks in place, boys can grow up in an environment of anxiety and solitude (Walker 2001, p.123). According to a report by Fuller et al (2000), boys are less likely than girls to go to friends for help and advice, they are more inclined to keep problems to themselves and try to solve them on their own and they can find it more difficult to confide in their friends.

As well as this, the male peer group tends to thwart physical contact amongst its members for, as homophobic talk increases, the opportunities for boys to partake in such contact with each other decreases. This is reflected in the following comment:

Kindergarten and first-grade boys touch one another frequently and with ease, with arms around shoulders, hugs, and holding hands. By fifth grade, touch among boys becomes more constrained, gradually shifting to mock violence and the use of poking, shoving and ritual gestures like “giving five” to express bonding. The tough surface of boys’ friendships is no longer like the gentle touching of girls

Thorne and Luria (1986, p.182)

From an early age boys learn that physical contact with peers is ‘taboo’ (Ferguson 2000 cited in Woody 2003, p.156). The one place where physical contact between men is deemed appropriate is on the sports field. However, this physical contact can be more aggressive in nature in comparison to the ‘hugs and holding hands’ previously mentioned.
Conclusion of section

Gender as a social construct, acknowledges that boys develop an understanding of what it means to be a man as a result of the concepts of masculinity they experience and adopt from their culture. Therefore, boys from different cultures and subcultures will have differing perceptions on what it means to be a boy resulting in numerous forms of masculinity being in existence. Some forms are held in higher esteem in comparison to others. Forms that are deemed inappropriate (usually weaker and homosexual boys or anything feminine) are subordinated and demonised.

Section two: Masculinities and the school

The following section explores the role of the school in the formation of male identities and looks at such issues as the maintenance of hegemonic forms of masculinity, heterosexism and homophobia within the school setting.

The role of the school in the construction and maintenance of hegemonic forms of masculinity

Schools are one of the most salient sites in the formation of masculinities and are perceived as complex gendered locations. Schools are frequently referred to as ‘masculinity-making devises’ (Connell 1989), with Epstein and Johnson (1998, p.108) describing schools as important places for the construction and control of gender identities. Jackson and Salisbury (1996) view the school as institutions where masculinities are negotiated. The school playing field, the playground and the changing room are some of the most important locations where boys negotiate and act out their masculinities, often with harmful results (Jackson and Salisbury 1996). Schools play a role in the
formation of hegemonic forms of masculinity, by giving most honour and admiration to a tough and dominant form of maleness (Kessler et al. 1985, p.42). It also aids in the subordination of others, which tend to be marginalised.

Schools can support and encourage acceptable forms of masculinity through its structure, pedagogy and curriculum. According to Capper (1999), the culture and structure of schools can strengthen, reinforce, reproduce and encourage unequal power relations. Norman (2006, p.4) indicated that ‘studies have shown that the daily worlds of our schools teach scripts for what is considered to be appropriate gender behaviour during adolescence and later on into adulthood’. Schools provide a competitive arena for the formation of hegemonic masculinities (Connell 1989) and portray to students what is considered appropriate gender behaviour (Mac an Ghaill 1994; Sheridan 1995 cited in Norman 2006, p.4). Schools portray this through rewarding students for adhering to specific gender stereotypes.

While the structure of schools can support hegemonic masculinities, the messages portrayed through the ‘hidden’ curriculum are often far more powerful than those portrayed through any prescribed syllabus:

There is an unofficial school constructed by the kids themselves that exists in the gaps and crannies of the official institutions. It is in this informal peer group life that much of the politics of gender are worked out

Kessler et al (1985, p. 40)

The messages portrayed to students, both formally and informally, are based on the assumption that students are heterosexual. This issue is discussed below.
Heterosexism and the school

Heterosexism is the belief that heterosexuality is the only natural and existing form of sexuality (Labour Party Manifesto cited in Buston et al 2002, p.95) and assumes that the only way to be sexual is to be heterosexual (Jackson and Salisbury 1996).

Schools are deeply heterosexist places with ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (see, for example Epstein and Johnson 1998; Renold 2000) being the norm. According to Lilley (1985), schools are ‘the most cruel enforcers of heterosexist norms’. Within schools there is a presumption that everyone is heterosexual, with ‘presumed heterosexuality’ being evident in the language used and the practices adopted (Epstein and Johnson 1994, p.198). Heterosexist views are reflected in the opinions of pre-service teacher who ‘unquestionably assume the heterosexuality of their students’ (Robinson and Ferfolja 2001, p.128) and view learning on sexuality as unimportant to their own development as teachers (ibid, p.125). This is further reflected in a number of the practices in schools, with heterosexuality being forced on all young people through, for example, children acting out scenes of matrimony and heterosexual family life (Buston et al 2002). Accordingly, heterosexuality is viewed as the only legitimate sexuality amongst students with issues relating to homosexuality being considered irrelevant to their lives.

Heterosexism can result in the voices, needs and experiences of homosexual students being ignored, because everyone is considered heterosexual, gay and lesbian issues are considered irrelevant to ‘the majority culture’ (Robinson and Ferfolja 2001, p.128). This is reflected in the fact that, for example, almost half of the respondents in a study by Norman (2004) indicated that homosexuality and bisexuality were not addressed within SPHE. This can result in ‘lesbian and gay pupils feel[ing] isolated and marginalised in mainstream classrooms’ (Robinson and Ferfolja

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21 Other reasons for not dealing with relationship and sexuality issues within SPHE include teacher discomfort and fear of parental disapproval (Mayock et al 2007)
2001, p.128). As a result Lynch and Lodge (2002, pp.107-117) concluded that gay and lesbian students are the most invisible people in Irish education.

Denial of the presence of homosexuality and homosexual students is reflected in the stark absence of positive role models or positive messages relating to gay, lesbian and bisexual people (Friend 1993 cited in Woody 2003, p.150) in schools. ‘In an otherwise accepted multicultural curriculum’ (Karp 1995 cited in Woody 2003, p.150) the voices and experiences of gay, lesbian and bisexual (GLB) people continue to be excluded from the official school curriculum. For example, within English classes, the sexualities of playwrights or poets are rarely considered, nor are those of historical figures within history class. Teachers often view themselves as teachers of specific subjects where ‘lifestyle discussions are not written in to their course syllabus’ (Robinson and Ferfolja 2001, p.126). Therefore discussion on sexuality is often perceived as irrelevant to their subject area. Heterosexism is further reflected in the lack of issues relating to homosexuality in school policies (Geary and Mannix McNamara 2003).

Heterosexism is clearly evident across a number of subjects (e.g. the aforementioned English and history), but none more so than within sex education classes where homosexuality is usually examined as an ‘add-on’ issue once issues of heterosexuality have been discussed. Homosexuality is therefore discussed within a heterosexual context and is rarely presented as a conscious life-choice. When GLB issues are discussed, these issues tend to be presented in a negative light. This ‘negative light’ is achieved by, for example:

- Presenting homosexuality as abnormal e.g. ‘the anus is not made for intercourse’ (Buston et al 2002, p.100)
- By linking homosexuality with paedophile (ibid, p.100)
• By equating homosexuality with disease e.g. ‘it was mentioned more like an illness than a way of life’ (Reference) and by only including the voices of GLB people when discussing HIV/AIDS in sex education class (Woody 2003).

Therefore when homosexuality is mentioned, such lessons continue to be viewed as unhelpful by the majority of homosexual students (Eilis and High 2004).

The exclusion of issues relevant to gay, lesbian and bisexual people and the presentation of such issues, when discussed, in a negative light is not a mere oversight as any school found to be supporting ‘these deviant lifestyles’ risks having their marketing potential damaged (Ferfolja 2007, p.151). Attempts have been made to maintain the dominant position of heterosexuality within schools and to prevent issues relating to homosexuality from being included. For example, within the UK, the Local Government Act (1988 Section 28) made it illegal for homosexuality to be intentionally promoted through the publication of related materials or by promoting homosexuality as an acceptable life choice (Epstein and Johnson 1998, p.58). While this Act has been removed ‘its unfortunate legacy of confusion and silencing remains’ (Biddulph 2007, p.3). In the 1990s calls were made for marriage to be promoted within schools in the UK, which clearly mirrors concerns expressed by some critics of the Exploring Masculinities Programme (CSPA undated; Gleeson et al 2004; Mac an Ghaill et al 2004). In Poland, as of 2007, teachers who discuss issues around homosexuality in schools face dismissal, fines or imprisonment (Biddulph 2007, p.3). While laws banning the discussion and promotion of homosexuality have not been passed in Ireland, homosexuality was only decriminalised in Ireland in 1993.
Levels of homophobic bullying in schools

Within a heterosexist context, homosexuality is viewed as dubious and in need of punishment (Flowers and Buston 2001, p.51). Students who identify as or are deemed homosexual can pay the consequences for not conforming to this ‘normalising and regulatory (heterosexual) gendered script’ (Renold 2000, p.324). As a result of heterosexism, homophobia can be legitimatised and normalised within schools (Epstein 1995 cited in Gilbert and Gilbert 1998, 106), with levels of homophobia in Ireland being quite alarming (MacGreil 1996, p.352).

Therefore, as previously outlined, homosexual students are not only ignored but are also often subjected to high levels of homophobic bullying which is reflected in numerous studies conducted in the USA, UK and Ireland. For example, Blumenfield (2000, p.262) found that gay and lesbian teenagers are four times more likely to be threatened with a weapon at school. While a study by Milton et al (2008) conducted on the levels of homophobic bullying on gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) young people in Ireland found that over half of the respondents had experienced bullying in the past three months. On average, while in school, students in the US hear homophobic comments every seven minutes (Carter 1997, p.1). Such bullying was often present at primary level and at times originating from teachers. In the Irish context, Norman (2004) found that 79% of teachers were aware of instances of homophobic bullying in their school, often on a continuous basis.

A number of studies have explored the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youths in schools, which usually makes for unpleasant reading. For example, some spoke of having to continuously go to school in ‘survival mode’ (Bochenek and Brown 2001, p.31) while others described their school experience as being ‘a terrible ordeal, one full of loneliness, anxiety and isolation’ (Lilley 1985, p.20). Ultimately, such experiences resulted in

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‘schools [being] unhappy, painful places for... boys who do not conform... who have to struggle against the macho behaviour of significant numbers of boys’ (Epstein 2005, p.263). Homophobic bullying can affect students in a number of ways. For example, those who are victims of such bullying may experience educational underachievement and negative influences on their social development and health\textsuperscript{23}. Norman (2004) found that such bullying may result in loss of confidence, reduced self-esteem, declining academic achievement and early school leaving. 25% of lesbian and gay students leave school because of such harassment (Hatton and Swinson 1991, p.285) and evidence suggests that gay and lesbian students are high risk for suicides (Beautrais 2000). In addition to this, those who are victims of homophobic bullying may become dependent on drugs and alcohol (Bochenek and Brown 2001, p.31). However, the experiences of homosexual students are not always negative, with some studies finding that having struggled to form their homosexual identity, gay men can exhibit feelings of wholeness, integrity and self-esteem (Flowers and Buston 2001, p.51).

In line with the heterosexist nature of schools previously outlined, a number of studies have found that schools are failing to adequately address and challenge homophobic behaviour (see for example Carter 1997; Woody 2003). According to Mills (2004) there is uncomfortableness in confronting homophobic bullying. Such forms of bullying can often go unchallenged by teachers with Woody (2003) finding that teachers rarely adopted a proactive approach in challenging such issues (see also Mathison 1998; Robinson 2001; Ferfolja 2007). According to OFSTED (2002, p.10) ‘too many secondary schools [allow] homophobic attitudes among pupils [to] go unchallenged’. While a study in the USA, mentioned earlier, found that students hear homophobic comments every seven minutes, the study found that teachers only intervened in 3% of these occasions (Carter 1997, p.1). Not only do these teachers ignore homophobic bullying but they often encourage the victims to do likewise. In doing so, teachers are

\textsuperscript{23} See for example Besner and Spungin 1995; Denborough 1996; Griffin 1997; Irwin \textit{et al} 1997.
reinforcing homosexuality as a negative and as something that should be hidden (Woody 2003, p.154). If homophobic bullying remains unchallenged, students can begin to feel they are entitled to bully homosexual students. For example:

If adults criticise other forms of name-calling but ignore antigay remarks, children are quick to conclude that homophobia is acceptable because gay men and lesbians deserve to be oppressed


This is confounded further by the work of Robinson and Ferfolja (2001, p.128) who found that teachers believed that those who were victims of homophobic bullying merely had to change their behaviour and such bullying would cease.

Also, homophobic bullying can originate from teachers, with some teachers actually being responsible for bullying students they believe to be lesbian and gay (Rivers 1996; Douglas et al 1997). Others have been found to make comments relating to students sexuality, wanting to ‘marry them off’ or asking them to ‘put away their handbags’ (Mac an Ghaill 1996, p. 149). However, it is not just a matter of blaming bad teachers for not tackling homophobic bullying (Mac an Ghaill 1994) or for being implicit in it, as a number of the issues relating to heterosexism and homophobia result from structural and cultural aspects of schooling. This is reinforced by Buston and Hart (2001, p.107) who argue that ‘any attempt to make schools less heterosexist by simply weeding out teachers who have personal objections to discussing gay and lesbian sexuality would ignore structural factors’.
Conclusion of section

The school has been identified as an influential site in the formation and maintenance of hegemonic forms of masculinity. Through the structure and culture of schools, ‘ideal’ forms of masculinity are encouraged, while ‘non-ideal’ forms are punished or ignored. The heterosexist nature of schools has also been highlighted in the literature, with gay and lesbian students being identified as the most invisible people in the Irish education system (Lynch and Lodge 2002). While frequently ignored, gay, lesbian and bisexual students are often subjected to high levels of homophobic bullying (see for example Norman 2004).

Section Three: Social and personal education from the perspective of young men, parents and the school

Research and literature pertaining to views on social personal and health education from the perspective of young men, parents and schools are now explored.

Young men and social and personal education

Studies have shown that boys are reluctant to participate in school based social and personal programmes. In addition to this, young men receive less education on such issues in the home and are also slow to converse with their peers on such issues. This has obvious implications regarding the social and personal education and knowledge of young men. The following section explores young men’s attitudes towards social and personal education in both the home and the school. The piece concludes by examining the issues young men want to learn about in social and personal education classes.
Young men and attitudes towards social and personal education

Research indicates that young men have limited discussion on sexual matters at home in comparison to young women. Studies have found that parents are less likely to discuss social and personal issues with their sons in comparison to their daughters, and they experience greater difficulties in doing so (see for example Farrell 1978; Allen 1987; Frankham 1993; Sharpe et al 1996). Additionally, young men admit that they find discussing such issues in the home embarrassing (Mayock et al 2007, p.36). The role of the home in the social and personal education of young men is discussed in more detail later on in this section.

As well as the difficulties experienced in discussing social and personal issues in the home, additional research suggests that boys are slow to participate in such education when it occurs within a school setting. A number of young men perceive such lessons as having little to do with them (Biddulph 2007) and often prefer to ‘run a mile’ particularly when such lessons relate to homosexuality (Hilton 2007, p.172). From this, it can be argued that boys can still present as a ‘hard to reach’ group in such classes (Walker 2001, p. 123), with boys behaviour during such classes being viewed as ‘counterproductive’. Forrest (1998) found that boys do not take such lessons seriously, continue to mess and tend to portray a lack of interest in sexuality, gender and sexual politics classes (Connell 1989). As a result, Mills (2000) suggests that teachers conducting these programmes have to accept that a number of young men will be unwilling to participate.

Numerous reasons have been advanced as to why some young men are slow to engage in discussion on social and personal issues. Three possible reasons are advanced below.

Firstly, boys participation in such lessons can be influenced by the presumption that boys, by being born male, are ‘holders and creators of sexual knowledge’ (Holland et al 1998, p.59). This results in a belief that knowledge about sex in particular is ‘like driving, you’re expected to
be able to do it’ (student in study by Hilton 2007, p.169). As a result, boys are supposed to know the answers to sexual questions without even asking the question! Secondly, lack of participation and interest has been linked to boy’s inability and ‘lack of ease… in talking about their bodies’ (Head 1999 p.19). Portraying over familiarity with ones body is often perceived as a signifier of homosexuality (Kehily 2002) with heterosexual forms being based on ‘not showing so much interest in sexual health’ issues (Forrest 2007, p.6-7). Furthermore, showing too much interest in such lessons, asking questions, admitting ignorance or fears ‘is simply too risky in the homophobia contexts of schools’ (Epstein and Johnson 1998, p.183). Thirdly, health related issues tend to be linked with femininity with the handling of illness and emotional issues seen as a female preserve, and as such is left to mothers and female partners (Geary and Mannix McNamara 2007).

Due to the fact that young men do not engage in social and personal issues in schools and are offered fewer opportunities to discuss such issues in the home, boys learn about sex and issues around sexuality without really being taught about it (Salisbury and Jackson 1996). For example, Irish men (Ferguson and Hogan 2007) spoke openly about their lack of adequate information on sex and sexuality and found there to be ‘absolute poverty of efforts made to give boys and men good quality attention and information’ (ibid p.8). This ‘poverty of effort’ can result in young men not having any adult involvement in their sex and sexuality education (Measor 2004). As a result boys can become dependent on the peer group, ‘playground gossip’ or pornography for their social and personal knowledge (Hilton, 2001). Such sites can often result in ‘inaccurate and ill-informed advice’ being provided (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998, p.100). Due to lack of structured sex and sexuality education, young men tend to figure out information on sexual issues from their own experiences and through watching pornography rather than receiving education in the home and the school (Kelly 1992). As a result boys receive less and less accurate knowledge on issues around sexual health and contraception (see for example Westwood and Mullan 2007).
What do young men want to learn about in social and personal education?

Despite young men’s reluctance to become involved in school based social and personal education, studies have shown that young people believe that schools should provide such education for students (see for example Mayock et al 2007; Hilton 2007). Mayock et al (2007) found that the young people involved in their study believed it was beneficial to learn about such issues amongst their peers (ibid, p.36). A number of students indicated that they found discussing issues with parents/guardians uncomfortable and embarrassing and ‘the school created a neutral ‘zone’ in which it is possible to discuss a range of issues relating to sexuality and relationships’ (NCCA 2005b, p.36).

A number of studies have investigated the topics young people (the majority of these studies involved both boys and girls) viewed as pertinent to their lives that they would like included in social and personal programmes. For example, as part of the development of SPHE at senior cycle an education officer visited 6 schools to determine the opinions and views of senior cycle students (NCCA 2006). Students identified substance use as the most important topic to address in senior cycle SPHE. RSE was the second most important topic for discussion. ‘RSE – its relevant to people our age – its good to do RSE in school as well as at home as everyone will know then what is going on, they will all have the same information’ (NCCA 2006, p.48). The topic of mental health was only identified by one group of students, encompassing such areas as mental health, mental ill health and mental illness, stress management, study-life balance, self harm, depression/suicide, mental health supports, bereavement including separation and divorce.

As one student in the NCCA study indicated:
Lads need to know where to get help coz one out of four people have mental health issues, they might not know how to get themselves cured and they suffer then all by themselves – like at this time we are under more pressure and if we had lessons about what we could do, lads might be more likely to go and talk to someone, their parents or whoever, there might not be as many suicides especially male suicides

NCCA (2006, p.50)

Other areas considered important by students included discrimination, learning difficulties, coping with cancer, eating disorders, career planning, and relationship violence. Students believed that making SPHE relevant to young people’s lives was the most important consideration in ensuring the successful implementation of SPHE at senior cycle. Mayock et al (2007) found that students wanted to receive accurate information about sex and relationships and they needed to understand the potential negative consequences of uninformed sexual activity.

Internationally, Hilton (2007) conducted a study in the UK, examining what boys want to learn about in sex and sexuality education classes. The study found that boys are interested in finding out more about female bodies and experiences, sexual techniques, feelings, communication, sexuality, peer pressure, pornography and STI’s. Young men in the study also suggested the possibility of offering training for parents on these issues. Hyde et al (2005) found that boys prefer practical guidance and advice in their sex education classes.

Parents and social and personal education

The following section examines literature relating to parents and social and personal education. The section begins by outlining literature relating to parental attitudes towards and experiences of providing social and personal education for their sons within the home. The reasons why parents
want the school involved in such education and some of the concerns they have in this regard are then explored.

Parents’ attitudes towards social and personal education in the home

Numerous studies have found that parents view the home as the most appropriate setting for social and personal education (Blakey and Frankland 1996; Beavet and Thompson 1996; Walsh 1999; Morgan 2000; Walker 2001 and 2004). For example, 88% of parents in a study conducted by McKay et al (1998) identified parents as an appropriate source for such education. Parents play an influential role in the development of their children in social and personal issues e.g. ‘they do take a lot from their parents – you tend to think they don’t take any notice of you, but you can tell as you grow older how influenced you are by your parents’ (Walker 2001, p.140).

Some parents indicated that they conversed easily with their children on social and personal issues, with for example, Morgan (2000) finding that only 8% of Irish parents experienced difficulties in this regard. Walker (2001) concluded that some parents possessed a range of skills and strategies for dealing with such issues in the home, similar to those used by professionals. However, not all parents were capable of such discussion, with Morgan (2000) concluding that ‘there was considerable variation between families in the way in which relationship and sexuality education was dealt with’ (p.73). Some parents talked openly with their children on such issues, while others avoided it (Walker 2001, p.135). Therefore, parental willingness to engage with their children on such issues did not always transcend into action. While the majority of parents wished for the home to participate in such education, ‘many parents felt that they lacked the skills and confidence to play a direct role’ (Blakey and Frankland 1996,

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24 The majority of studies that have examined parental attitudes towards the role of the school in the social and personal development of students have focused on sex education therefore the majority of the studies discussed in this section relate to sex education rather than to gender related issues or to broader social and personal education.
This is reflected in the study by Allen (1987) who found that while the parents in her study believed the home should play a role in sex education, 58% of the boys and 31% of the girls surveyed had never conversed with their parents on such issues.

Numerous studies have highlighted the difficulties experienced by some parents in discussing such issues in the home. For example, Welshimer and Harris (1994) found that nearly half of all parents in their study lacked confidence in their own ability to engage with their children on such issues. While Walsh (1999) found that parents were aware of their own feelings of discomfort, embarrassment and inadequacies when addressing certain sensitive topics with their children. Parents’ own upbringing and poor communication skills hampered their ability to provide sex education for their own children (Allen 1987). Their education on such issues impacted here, with a study conducted by the ESRI (1986) finding that only 35% of parents had received sex education from their own parents. This becomes significant when one considers the work of Walker (2001), who found that the level of education received by parents on sexual issues directly impacted on their ability and willingness to provide such education for their own children. Those that did not receive adequate education believed that they did not possess the necessary knowledge to discuss such issues with their children (Croft and Asmussen 1992).

Further factors limiting parents ability to engage with their children on such issues in the home included uncertainty about what children should know, fear of losing face or having to admit they do not know about certain issues (Walker 2001). Religious views also impacted on levels of parental communication and openness on such issues (Abramson et al 1983), as did parental uncertainties regarding age-appropriateness of certain topics (Klein and Gordon 1992; Geasler et al 1995). As a result of the difficulties experienced by some parents, Mayock et al (2007) concluded that not all homes were disposed to discussing social and personal issues.
Parental attitudes towards the role of the school in the social and personal education of young men

While studies have found that parents believed that social and personal education in the home was important (Morgan 2000; Walker 2004), a number have found that parents viewed the school as playing a similar role (Weavaer et al 2002; Mayock et al 2007). For example Mayock et al (2007) found that the majority of parents welcomed the involvement of schools in such education. A study conducted by the ESRI (1986) found that 96% of parents felt that the school had a role to play in providing what was referred to as ‘education for living’, while 98% indicated that second level schools should provide sex education to students. This was supported by the work of Allen (1987), who found that the majority of parents favoured the inclusion of sex education in schools. Verby et al (1992), Langille et al (1996), McKay et al (1998) and Weaver et al (2002) found that 98%, 95%, 95% and 94% of parents respectively supported the involvement of the school in sexual education. Similar supportive views were found in a study by Berne et al (2000), with removal from these classes being rare (ibid). This study found that parents would like the school to be involved so that their own children would be more informed on such issues than they were.

Additional reasons advanced for involving the school in the social and personal development of young men (and children in general) follow:

- Young people need accurate knowledge about sex and relationships, and without school based RSE there is a risk that they will depend on friends and other unreliable knowledge sources (Mayock et al 2007, p.35)
- The more information young people receive the more capable they are at making informed decisions (Berne et al 2000)
• Relationships and sexuality issues may not be openly discussed in the homes of all children (Mayock et al. 2007, p.35)
• It may be best to discuss such issues amongst ones peers and under the trustee of trained personnel (Mayock et al. 2007, p.35)

Parental concerns regarding the role of the school in social and personal education

While the majority of the studies mentioned above found that parents supported the involvement of schools in their children’s social and personal education, some concerns were raised. Two main concerns are discussed below.

Firstly, some parents expressed concern relating to the level of information parents receive on school based social and personal programmes. For example, Beavet and Thompson (1996) found that ‘the primary concern for parents is that they receive regular and accurate information on the programme and that they can readily access an appropriate member of staff should they have a query’ (p.13). At present such information is not adequate, with Mayock et al. (2007) finding that some schools provide “vague” information at a parents’ night, some discontinue these nights or provide no information at all. The study suggested that parents need to be provided with more information regarding the schools policy on RSE and on the content of the SPHE/RSE programme (ibid).

A second concern related to the values and morals advanced within these school based programmes. For example, Robinson and Ferfolja (2001) found that ‘the voice that most often dominates classroom resistance on this topic tends to be those who position themselves within moral and conservative religious discourses’ (p.130). There tends to be a ‘strongly conservative, organised laity, opposed to the introduction of sex education in schools’ (Mac an Ghaill 2004,
p.136 drawing on the work of O’Carroll and Szalacha 2000). Within an Irish context, the NCCA report on the consultation of SPHE (2006) drew attention to the concerns of parents whose children attended Catholic schools with one questionnaire respondent commenting that ‘some parents in some schools may be uncomfortable with these outcomes and consider them inappropriate and not in keeping with a Catholic ethos’ (NCCA 2006, p.22)

**The school and social and personal education**

Within chapter two an outline of some of the social and personal education programmes that have been introduced into Irish schools to date was provided. In this section, the author will focus on the literature pertaining to schools and social and personal education. Within the literature a number of issues have been raised in relation to school based social and personal education. These include issues relating to the approach teachers should adopt when dealing with controversial issues in the classroom, issues around low levels of teacher development, levels of teacher discomfort and embarrassment; teachers being forced to teach social and personal programmes; social and personal teachers being viewed as the person solely responsible for such issues and the reluctance of male teachers to become involved in affective education. These six areas are discussed below

**Dealing with controversial issues in the classroom**

Controversial issues are issues for which ‘society has not found a solution that can be universally or almost universally accepted’ (Stenhouse 1971, p.154) and are deemed controversial on the basis that people hold different values on the issue, attach different priorities to the same values or have different interpretations of values (see Bridges 1986, p.21). Issues that may be viewed as controversial include, for example, sexuality, pre-marital sex, gay adoption, abortion and war.
According to Bridges (1986) the way a school deals with controversial issues can cause disagreement and may provoke ‘statements from political platforms, angry pamphleteering and letters to the newspaper or to the head-teacher’ (p.21).

Various suggestions have been made as to how controversial issues can be dealt with in the classroom. For example, an agreed position could be transmitted, wherein certain views are presented as correct, while others are deemed inappropriate. This could, for example, result in a situation where pre-marital sex and abortion are presented as inappropriate. Within this approach, reflective of the technical paradigm (Carr and Kemmis 1986) knowledge is deemed to exist ‘between the covers of an official textbook’ (Rudduck 1986, p.6). However, difficulties may arise in relation to whose definition of an agreed position is advanced, with it being likely that contrasting values would emerge when this position was being agreed (this relates to the idea of curriculum as a selection from the culture, which is discussed in detail at a later stage in this chapter).

Secondly, teachers might be encouraged to advance their own point of view. Within this approach, the correct answer is deemed to ‘exist in the teachers mind’ (Rudduck 1986, p.6). This would result in teachers ‘using the classroom as a platform to promote their own views’ (Stenhouse 1971, p.155) and could result in students being indoctrinated into an individual teachers way of thinking. With the adoption of such an approach, conflict could occur if a teacher put forward their own personal view and such a view was at odds with the ethos of the school and the home. It has been suggested that this method is inappropriate seeing as ‘teachers should not use their authority as a platform for promoting their own views’ (Rudduck 1986, p.8).

A third approach, and one that has been advocated within such programmes as RSE and EM, is where teachers are encouraged to adopt a neutral ‘non-judgemental’ position (DES 1999, p.ix), wherein they do not force students into accepting one particular view over another. Bridges (1986) argued that teachers should either present both sides of the argument or refrain from getting...
involved in the argument in the first place. The overall goal of the teacher, within such an approach, is to encourage students to enhance their level of understanding of an issue and to develop their critical thinking skills, rather than ensuring they adopt a ‘correct’ opinion. Instead, ‘pupils should come to understand the nature and implications of his point of view and grow to adult responsibility by adopting it in his own person and assuming accountability for it’ (Stenhouse 1971, p.157). This was supported further by Rudduck (1986, p.6) who believes that ‘pupils should be helped to approach controversy not with the expectation that authority figures can resolve issues for them but with a recognition of their right to arrive at their own judgement’.

Such an approach, reflective of the critical paradigm (Carr and Kemmis 1986) would empower students to think for themselves, would develop critical thinking and independence of mind in students and would acknowledge the plurality of opinions present, both within society and within an individual. These teachers must create a learning environment where students are encouraged to form their own views on such issues, yet sensitivity needs to be shown to all students and the views of minorities must be respected. Boundaries must be established between encouraging students to share aspects of their social and personal lives yet ensuring privacy is maintained. Mac an Ghaill et al (2004) referred to these multi-layered roles of teachers of affective education as ‘teacher as dilemma manager’. Creating such an environment is not an easy task and, without adequate teacher development, can be difficult to achieve. It can be difficult for teachers to adopt such an approach (Bridges 1986). If teachers are to utilise such an approach, they need to be prepared during their teacher education programmes.

‘Fundamental assumptions about teaching’ (Bridges 1986, p.29) need to be challenged if teachers are to become capable of encouraging their students to form their own views on these issues. Related teacher development plays an important role in challenging these assumptions. However, reflective of the technical paradigm and the subject focused nature of teacher development, ‘many teachers in their period of professional training have not acquired the
intellectual tools they need in order to view knowledge as problematic’ (Rudduck 1986, p.6). This is further reflected in a study by Oulton et al (2004) who found that few teachers could recall participating in any teacher development on dealing with controversial issues in the classroom as part of their pre-service or CPD. Levels of teacher development relating specifically to social and personal issues are discussed below.

**Teacher development on social and personal issues**

While Norman (2004) found that 64% of teachers saw the school as an appropriate setting where GLB (gay, lesbian and bisexual) issues could be provided, they believed greater training and policies were essential (Norman 2004). A major concern relating to school based social and personal programmes is the low levels of teacher development in the area of social and personal education, at both in-service and pre-service level. Mayock et al (2007) identified the ‘virtual absence of pre-service SPHE training’ (p.136). With this, concerns were expressed about the ‘one off’ approach to the development of SPHE teachers and the report recommended that ‘the support services provide a balance between out of school in-service and in-school support’ (ibid, p.44).

Survey respondents agreed that expanding the SPHE support services and increasing in-service provision would help improve the implementation of RSE in post-primary schools (Mayock et al 2007, p.23).

Geary and Mannix McNamara (2003) found that over half of all SPHE teachers and co-ordinators had received greater than 21 hours of CPD and the study concluded that ‘the level of teacher training received by those involved in the programme appears to be quite high which reflects very positively on the dedication and work of the support services’ (ibid, p.25). However, 38% of teachers believed that this in-service was not sufficient to enable them to teach the programme effectively (Geary and Mannix McNamara 2003, p.28). Teacher development emerged
as an obstacle to implementing an effective SPHE programme with such comments as ‘no training – all teachers have 1 period per week except year heads – just handed a book’, ‘training needed for new teachers’, and ‘teachers feel that they are not properly trained to teach/deal with specific areas of the course’ (ibid, p.29).

An analysis the SPHE Support Services found that:

- 45.9% of teachers teaching SPHE at the time of the research had no specific training
- Over half of the schools believed information sessions should be provided for school principals. Three-quarters of schools indicated that information seminars were required for the whole staff
- Over 90% of respondents stated that there should be personal development training for new teachers

Millar (2003, pp.3-7)

Internationally, calls have been made for greater teacher development, at both in-service and pre-service, to develop teachers ability, confidence in discussing such issues and knowledge base (Milton et al 2001; Buston et al 2002; Walker et al 2003, Walker et al 2006). For example Walker et al (2006) highlighted the need for greater teacher development on such issues in both the United Kingdom and Australia. This is supported by the work of Ferfolja (2007) who found that there was a lack of teacher development on homosexuality and ways of challenging homophobic bullying. However, gay and lesbian issues are often viewed as irrelevant to pre-service teachers (Robinson and Ferfolja 2001, p.121) and therefore are not included in such courses. The study by Robinson and Ferfolja (2001) concluded that examining gay and lesbian
issues is imperative to teacher development. The study also concluded that teacher educators ‘do not adequately prepare their students to incorporate issues of difference into their pedagogical practices’ (Hatton 1996 cited in Robinson and Ferfolja 2000, p.122). Low levels of teacher development in social and personal issues resulted in teachers of social and personal education feeling like ‘fraudsters’ due to the disparity between the experiences gained while in initial teacher education courses and what was expected of them once they were qualified teachers (Evans and Evans 2007, p.46).

Deficient levels of teacher development could impact on levels of teacher confidence to deal with certain issues in the classroom. Low levels of confidence, according to OfSTED (2005), could result in teachers resorting to ‘the more tangible aspects of programmes and conventional teaching methods….failing] to explore what pupils think or to challenge existing attitudes (p.5).

Issues relating to teacher discomfort and embarrassment are discussed in the following section.

**Teacher discomfort and embarrassment**

A significant factor that may hinder the successful implementation of social and personal education (which is linked with levels of teacher development) relates to teacher discomfort in addressing certain aspects of the course. Mayock et al (2007) found that 71% of teachers believed that discomfort prevented them from discussing certain aspects of social and personal programmes. In particular, teachers tended to avoid the relationship and sexuality section of SPHE, ‘teachers who are maybe not comfortable with it shy away from RSE within SPHE. So they can say, ‘Yes we’re doing SPHE’ but they never quite get around to the RSE section’ (Mayock et al 2007, p.25). Gleeson et al (2004) had similar findings, with a number of teachers avoiding specific EM topics due to feelings of inadequacies in their own abilities to address such issues effectively e.g. ‘particular difficulties emerged in relation to the facilitation of shared
conversation between students where group discussion of sensitive issues such as power, bullying and homosexuality was personally painful for participants (ibid, p.163).

High levels of teacher discomfort in addressing relationship and sexuality issues were found by Mayock et al (2007). Teacher discomfort was based on the following concerns:

- Level of personal embarrassment and discomfort
- Concerns about parents views towards the topics being addressed on the school curriculum
- Ability of the teacher to discuss the issues with teenagers
- Concerns over what topics are considered ‘safe’ to address
- Reluctance to implement experiential teaching approaches.

Staff inexperience at addressing certain social and personal issues could hinder certain issues from being explored, as could pupil and colleague disapproval (Norman 2004, p.10). Geary and Mannix McNamara (2003) found that 45.5% of principals believed that feelings of inadequacy hindered the implementation of SPHE with some commenting that ‘all teachers not willing…feeling incompetent to teach’ (p.28). Importantly, the child's experience of social and personal education appears to depend, to a certain extent, on the level of teacher comfort in addressing such issues.

**Selection process of SPHE teacher**

A third issue that may inhibit school based social and personal programmes is the fact that often teachers do not have a choice in whether they want to teach the subject or not, with many merely being told they were teaching the subject. This becomes important when one considers the
work of Mayock et al (2007) who indicated that teachers needed to be suited to address social and personal issues. Unfortunately, timetabling constraints does not always permit a careful selection process to be adopted but instead allows no option but for teachers to be selected at random. Geary and Mannix McNamara (2003) found that approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of all SPHE teachers to junior cycle had no choice in teaching the subject and suggested that ‘a more collaborative approach to teacher selection may have more impact on the success of SPHE than authorities selection’ (p.36).

**Lack of male SPHE teachers**

A fourth issue that may impact on school based social and personal programmes is the reluctance of some male teachers to become involved in affective education. The SPHE support services saw this as one of their greatest challenges. Factors that prevented male teachers from getting involved in social and personal programmes are:

- Stereotyped views of male and female behaviour
- Insecurity about personal sexuality
- Lack of health consciousness
- Fear of rejection
- A sense that talking about RSE and similar issues was deeply threatening
- Constraint about the degree of personal disclosure involved in teaching RSE
- Messages communicated widely about gender norms and the sense that breaking these norms would attract negative reaction from colleagues
- The impact of the media on young people’s attitudes towards sex and relationships

Geary and Mannix McNamara (2007, p.v)
The importance of male involvement in such programme has been stressed in a number of studies. For example, Geary and Mannix-McNamara (2003) commented that male teachers should teach SPHE while the NCCA (2005b) saw it as imperative that SPHE would not be seen as women’s work. Similar findings have been found internationally with Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) outlining that ‘the lack of male teachers involvement [may be] seen as a sign that the programme is irrelevant to male concerns’ (p.240).

Social and personal issues considered the sole remit of the social and personal education teacher

Finally, the social and personal development of students can often be viewed as the sole responsibility of the SPHE teacher. For example, Beckett (1996) found that teachers perceived sexuality issues to be only relevant to the social and personal teacher, and not to teachers of other subjects. Robinson and Ferfolja (2001) found that pre-service teachers held similar views. This can result in the sustainability of such programmes hinging on the enthusiasm and effort of one teacher. This was highlighted in the External Evaluation of the Exploring Masculinities Programme. The evaluation expressed concerns relating to the ‘solo run’ syndrome of the teachers with ‘individual teachers carrying the burden of running the programme’ (Gleeson et al 2004, p.158).
Conclusion

While young men have been deemed a ‘hard to reach group’ in terms of social and personal education, research has found that they deem the school an important site in which to explore these issues. Similarly, parents, while viewing the home as important, acknowledge the influential role played by the school in social and personal education, with some parents expressing reservations in dealing with such issues in the home. While the majority of studies have discovered a high level of consensus amongst parents in terms of the involvement of the school in social and personal education, a number of concerns have emerged in relation to this. For example, parents feared that schools would not inform them adequately on such forms of education and would present values that would contradict those of the home. Since the introduction of social and personal programmes into schools, numerous studies have identified factors that impact on the running of these programmes. For example, it was found that teachers experienced high levels of discomfort in discussing issues relating to sexuality. Despite efforts at improving the level of continuous professional development offered to SPHE teachers, concerns remain regarding the extent to which such development adequately prepares them for dealing with certain controversial and sensitive aspects of these programmes.
Section Four: Parents and Education

The following section examines the literature in relation to the role of parents in education, examining the benefits of involving parents in their children’s education and differing levels of parental involvement across social groups.

Benefits of involving parents in their children's education

Numerous studies (see for example Epstein 1987; Epstein and Dauber 1991; Munn 1993; Schoon and Parsons 2002) have shown the benefits of involving parents in the education process. For example, children whose parents actively participate in their education are more likely to succeed academically (see for example Epstein and Dauber 1991; Wang et al 1993; Munn 1993; Epstein 1996). These studies have found that ‘the more involved parents are with their children’s schooling, the greater it seems are the chances of their children doing well’ (Munn 1993, p.1). A longitudinal study, conducted in the 1960s, found a direct relationship between student’s attainment and levels of parental involvement in education (Douglas 1964), with Douglas concluding that parental attitudes towards education are crucial for educational success. It appears that parent’s who are involved in the education process, focus their children’s attention on the importance of schooling and ultimately increase their motivation (see for example Jaynes and Wlodkowski 1990; Gonzalez-Pienda et al 2002). So ‘if parents value schooling and think it is important, then kids take it seriously’ (Lareau 1987, p.81). This was further reflected in the work of Sacker et al (2002) who found that parental involvement was positively related to increased retention rates, increased college enrolment, students choosing more challenging courses and ultimately having higher aspirations for their career. While ‘schools do matter’ (Smyth 1999)
Consistent evidence that parents’ encouragement, activities, interest at home and their participation in school affect their children’s achievement. Students gain in personal and academic development if their families emphasise schooling, let their children know they do and do so continually over the years, Epstein (1987, p. 120).

So not only does increased parental involvement impact on children’s academic success it also impacts positively on their personal development (Epstein 1987).

Increased involvement in their children’s education can also have a positive impact on parents themselves. For example, it can result in parents experiencing feelings of empowerment; particularly those who are usually marginalised within the education system (see for example, Delgado-Gaitan 1991; Coleman 1998). Empowerment occurs because parents gain in self-esteem and self-confidence as a result of engaging in their children’s education and their ties to social, support and resource networks increase as a result (Kellaghan et al 1993). In addition to this, involved parents tend to have more positive attitudes towards and greater respect for teachers in comparison to those who are not involved (Westergard and Galloway 2004). Active parents also tend to have a higher level of satisfaction with their children’s education. Increased awareness of the reality of classroom life, results in parents developing a greater understanding of the complexities of teaching, ultimately resulting in parents becoming more impressed with teacher’s ability (ibid, p.190). This increased parental confidence can result in improved teacher self-esteem (Rosenholtz 1991). By working more closely with parents, teachers can gain a greater
understanding of their students personal circumstances, which ultimately means they are more aware of and better prepared to meet the needs of their students (Westergard and Galloway 2004).

Parental involvement in the education process can also help improve school effectiveness, with studies showing that parental involvement emerged as a characteristic of the education process in the most successful schools (Westergard and Galloway 2004, p. 190). Schools where students ‘do well’ tend to be characterised by effective home-school relations (Brighouse and Tomlinson 1991), with these schools putting structures in place to ensure parents were involved in their children’s education (Rosenholtz 1989).

Differences in levels of parental involvement in education

While attempts have been made to improve levels of parental involvement in education, with some success, not all parents have become involved in their children's education. So while some have moved from a shadowy position to one ‘nearer the centre of the stage’ (Atkins et al 1988, p.3), this is not true of all parents.

Studies (see for example Hansen 1988; Lareau 1987) have identified social class differences in relation to levels of parental involvement in their children’s education. Research suggests that parents of higher socio-economic status (SES) tend to be more involved in the education of their children in comparison to parents of lower SES. Studies have found that social class has a direct impact on parental involvement in their children's education with parents of lower SES being less likely to participate in schools (Dauber and Epstein 1989 cited in Unger and Sussman 1990). Parents tend to be more actively involved in regions of higher SES in comparison to parents in lower SES localities (Arfwedson and Lundman 1980). While research has shown that increased involvement results in increased levels of satisfaction with their children’s education,
Westergard and Galloway (2004) found that parents of lower SES were more likely to be disillusioned with their children’s education than any other group in the study.

Various reasons have been advanced as to why these differing levels of parental involvement exist. Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) suggested that levels of parental involvement vary as parents of different social classes have different values (p.126) with some studies arguing that working class parents do not value education as much as middle-class parents (Deutsch 1967). Nechyba et al (1999, p.62) referred to this as a ‘culture of poverty’, with Lareau (1987) indicating that some staff members believed that working-class parents ‘don’t value education as much as they could, they don’t put those values and expectations on to their kids’ (p.81). Such a view was dismissed by Lareau (1987), who found that irrespective of social class, parent’s valued academic achievement and wanted their children to be successful within the education system. ‘One characteristic which parents share is that virtually all of them want the best for their individual children’ (OECD 1997, pp 16). Where parents did differ however, was in relation to the level of cultural resources or cultural capital they had at their disposal (Bourdieu 1977). The availability of cultural resources (i.e. level of knowledge, experience and social connections) influences the extent to which parents feel capable and comfortable participating in their children’s education, with parents who possessed sufficient and appropriate cultural resources being more likely to be involved in their children’s formal schooling. Middle-class parents tend to possess educational skills, have more money and time at their disposal and tend to be more flexible in terms of employment in comparison to working class parents. Families of high SES tend to have more cultural resources available to them in comparison to those from low SES. This lack of cultural capital inhibits working class parents from participating in the education process. So while all parents may have high expectations for their children’s education, ‘lack of resources may constrain how parents are able to translate their interest into concrete action’ (Muller and Kerbow 1993, p.14).
Parents who lack cultural capital (usually working-class parents) often feel incapable or uncomfortable being involved in their children’s education. This is reflected in a number of studies, which have found that because of this, middle class parents tend to be more active in their children’s formal schooling. For example, Hannan and Boyle (1987) found that middle class parents are more informed and less intimidated by the education system in comparison to parents from lower social economic groups. As a result they are ‘far more demanding, …..and less intimidated by school authorities than working class parents’ (Hannan and Boyle 1987, p.170). This is also portrayed in the work of Lareau and Shumar (1996) who showed how differing levels of educational attainment, occupation flexibility and access to social networks helps some parents to the detriment of others. This results in some parents being unable to afford ‘investment in terms of books, visits, time’ (Heywood-Everett 1999).

Additionally Lyons, Lynch et al (2003) categorised parents as ‘Insiders’, ‘Outsiders’ and ‘Intermediates’. The study found that ‘Insiders’, due to their experience and knowledge of the system, tended to have the skills and confidence necessary to contact and consult with school personnel, and therefore were more likely to have their views heard by school/education personnel. ‘Outsiders’, on the other hand, did not feel they had the right to contact teachers in relation to their children education and are less likely to have their views heard. As a result middle class parents ‘are well positioned to have their interest defined as the public interest in education’ (Lynch 1989, p.124).

While all parents, irrespective of social class, possess different forms of cultural capital, these are ‘not all equally valuable’ (Lareau 1987, p.83). Those possessed by working class parents are rarely recognised or valued by the schooling system (Lareau 1987, p.83). Therefore, the

25 ‘Insiders’ were described as parents who had a high level of education, had an in-depth knowledge of the education system and had a high level of intervention in their children’s education. ‘Outsiders’ were described as parents who possessed less knowledge of the education system, tended to have a lower level of education and had very little intervention in their children’s education. ‘Intermediates’ were those in the middle, but they resembled outsiders more than insiders. They possessed some but a limited level of understanding of the education system and did not possess the same skills as insiders, which enabled insiders to take control of their children's educational situation.
cultural resources available to middle class parents tend to be held in higher esteem in schools. Based on this, some studies have indicated that schools tend to be more welcoming to middle class parents than they are to those from lower social classes (see for example Lightfoot 1978; Hoover-Dempsey et al 1987). These researchers ‘accuse schools of their highly discriminative policy, making middle-class families feel more welcome than working-class families’ (Shun-Wing 2000, p.38). This could go some way to explaining why social class impacts on levels of parental involvement in their children’s education.

**Conclusion**

Numerous studies have shown that parents of high socio-economic status are more likely to be involved in their children's education, as they tend to have a greater understanding of the education system and possess the necessary skills to have their voices heard. The lack of valued ‘cultural capital’ of parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds can result in them being disadvantaged within the system. Benefits of involving parents in their children's education include increased academic achievement, increased personal development for the child and increased confidence on the part of the teacher and the parent.
Section Five: Curriculum and factors that impact on the implementation of curriculum initiatives

Exploring Masculinities was a curriculum initiative planned for use at senior cycle in all boys’ post-primary schools. It is important then to examine issues around curriculum and factors which impact on curriculum initiatives. Within this section, various definitions of curriculum are outlined. This is followed by an examination of a number of factors that impact on the implementation of new curriculum initiatives in to schools, with particular attention paid to the impact of external forces on curriculum reform.

Definitions of curriculum

Numerous contrasting definitions of curriculum exist. For example, the Education Act (DES 1998) views curriculum as the subjects to be offered, the syllabus of each subject, the amount of instruction time to be allotted to each subject and the guidance and counselling provision (Section 30). However, curriculum is more than mere content and is comprised of content, pedagogy and assessment. Such a definition is reflected in the White Paper on Education (DES 1995) which defines curriculum as being ‘concerned, not only with the subjects taught, but also with how and why they are taught and with the outcomes of this activity for the learner’ (p. 18).

Some long established definitions of curriculum include curriculum as a selection from a culture made on the basis of ideologies (Lawton 1975) or curriculum as ‘the story we tell our children about the good life’ (Trant 1998, p.8). According to Lawton (1975) ‘certain aspects of our way of life, certain kinds of knowledge, certain attitudes and values are regarded as so important that their transmission to the next generation is not left to chance in our society but is entrusted to
specially-trained professionals’ (p.6-7). Of course, it isn’t possible to transmit all of today’s culture on to the next generation. Therefore, a selection must be made. What gets selected for transmission to the next generation are aspects of a culture that are deemed most important and are viewed as essential for our children and our children’s children to have.

If one accepts this definition of curriculum, one must question who decides what merits selection? Individuals from different cultures and subcultures will have different ways of perceiving and viewing the world around them (Helu Thaman 1993, p.249) – therefore these differences will impact on what individuals deem important and ultimately on the way they select curriculum. When debate on this issue occurred in international curriculum circles in the 1960s and 1970s, questions were raised in relation to why particular forms of curriculum were selected over others. At this stage, it was acknowledged that a person’s upbringing, philosophy, political standing and values would influence and impact on what they deemed important and necessary to pass on to the next generation.

According to Helu Thaman (1993) ‘whatever is selected would depend to a very large extent upon the experiences and ideologies of those involved in the selection’ (p.250). This is likely to create difficulties as what gets selected may not be representative of the values of the entire population. It tends to be the values of the most dominant groups that are selected while the values of less dominant groups tend to be ignored. This is reflected in Ireland through the lack of inclusion of, for example, the culture of the Travelling Community in post-primary curriculum, therefore curriculum may be of limited relevance to students who are members of the Travelling Community. The author will now explore two international examples of curriculum as a selection from the culture.
Some International examples of curriculum as a selection from the culture

In order to explore the issue of curriculum as a selection from the culture in an international context, the author will briefly discuss two controversial examples of this – one in relation to the curriculum in Russia and the second in relation to curriculum in the United States of America (USA).

Within the Russian education system the representation of a Marxist-Leninist ideology was viewed as important and curriculum was selected based on developing ‘a ‘New Soviet Man’. The emphasis was placed on promoting ‘communism through the correct interpretation of worthwhile knowledge’ (Holmes and McLean 1989, p.108). Through prescribed curriculum young people were encouraged to ‘love socialism, their local region and their motherland’ (ibid, p.109). Forming a socialist consciousness was seen as the main priority. Curriculum was selected based on achieving these aims and as a result curriculum that contradicted these values was not selected. This was reflected in the selection of content for a number of subjects. For example, the history syllabus was selected on the basis that it portrayed ‘the main principles of the historical struggle of the working classes’ (Holmes and McLean 1989, p.117). Similarly, the geography syllabus was selected based on portraying the impact of geographical conditions on socialist production levels.

Another, perhaps more controversial example, is the ongoing debate in the USA in relation to the inclusion/exclusion of creationist theory within the science curriculum in public schools. Creationists do not want the role of God demeaned or removed from the creation of the species and based on this a number of organisations have pushed for the removal of evolutionary theory from the school science curriculum. Those who believed in creationism called for ‘intelligent design’ theory to be taught either alongside or instead of evolutionary theory (intelligent design provides an alternative to Darwin’s theory of natural selection and ultimately argues for the existence of God and his involvement in the creation of life). Numerous attempts have been made
to add disclaimers to science books indicating that the theory of evolution is not a certainty. However, others (for example Richard Dawkins) view the teaching of creationism as being on par with child abuse (ibid 2006). These contrasting views have resulted in considerable debate and numerous legal, political and religious battles (see for example Aguillard 1999; Good 2003). Although the US Supreme Court deemed the inclusion of an exclusively creationist viewpoint on the science curriculum as unconstitutional (as it goes against the First Amendment to the Constitution), the debate is still on-going and support for and against creationism continues.

These two examples portray how curriculum can be used to advance particular ideologies within society. But this raises questions regarding those whose views are not selected in this process. For example, what about those who did not want a socialist view presented within curriculum in Russia or those who wanted the concept of creationism included in the science curriculum in public schools in the USA. Whenever a selection is made certain values will go ignored and as a result the selection that is made will not be representative of the values of the entire population.

**Factors that impact on curriculum initiatives**

The majority of attempts to alter the structure of schooling have failed to make it past the classroom door permanently (Cuban 1988). While schools may initially alter their practices in response to new curriculum developments, these generally fail to radically challenge the structure of schooling. Take for example, the cases of the Blue Mountain School in Canada (Hargreaves 2005) and the Durant school in England (Goodson 2001), where attempts to offer alternative approaches to schooling were stifled by increasing external expectations to meet the demands of state assessment and standardisation. These schools ended up readjusting their structure and approach to schooling and conforming to the educational norm.
Changing schools can be equated to punching a pillow, schools ‘absorb innovative thrusts and soon resume their original shape’ (Boyd 1988 cited in Marsh 1997, p.175). As a result, the majority of attempts to change schools continue to be ‘cosmetic and not fundamental’ (Sarason 1990, p.5). Many reasons have been advanced as to why curriculum ‘reforms are destined to fail’ (Sarason 1990). The author will briefly outline a number of these reasons below, and will pay particular attention to the influence of external forces on new curriculum initiatives, which will be dealt with under a separate heading.

For curriculum initiatives to be effective it is imperative that the beliefs and values of those responsible for implementing reforms are altered (Fullan 1991). The embrace of change can only truly take place once an inner change has occurred to a person’s beliefs and values (Sheehy 1981). Goodson (2001), highlighting the importance of the personal dimension of change, stresses that personal change must be deemed as central to the change process. It has been acknowledged that change is made by individuals and ‘is a highly personal experience’ (Hord 1987, p.94). For beliefs and values to be effected, those responsible for bringing about change need some form of ownership and say in the development and implementation of these new initiatives. Ideally, the internal (e.g. teachers) and external players (e.g. government agencies) in curriculum development need to be ‘integrated and harmonized’ (Goodson 2001, p.46). This would mean that when externally mandated changes are implemented teachers (and other relevant personnel) must be consulted, must be allowed time to react to, form their own views on and respond to the body responsible for the new initiative. This process is important, for, as stated above, a person’s beliefs and values must alter if successful curriculum change is to occur (see for example Fullan 1991; Goodson 2001).

Neither centralized nor decentralized approaches to curriculum development work, both are fundamental dimensions of the change process. The adoption of an inclusive approach, wherein teachers (and others who have vested interest in curriculum) work with external agencies
responsible for change, would ensure an effective and sustainable approach to curriculum reform. The usage of such an approach would result in the adoption of a partnership model, where curriculum is ‘defined in partnership by both central and local bodies and interpreted by the schools’ (Trant 1998, p. 7). Trant (1998) suggests that successful curriculum development in the future must come about as a result of partnership ‘in defining, planning, implementing and assessing the curriculum’ (p. 7).

A centralist model of curriculum development is most prominent in Ireland, resulting in the continued failure of educational reforms. Therefore, the distance between top-down reformers and the teachers who are expected to implement these reforms (Eisner 1992) continues to be too great for effective change to take place. Government agencies and Ministers responsible for education continue to dictate and control any new initiative that is implemented (reflective of the centralist model as outlined by Trant (1998)). Within this context, the needs of teachers, schools and students are pre-empted by external groups, where teachers become responders to, rather than initiators of, change (Goodson 2001).

The culture of a school is one of the most important factors in determining whether new curriculum initiatives are implemented successfully. The context within which externally mandated change is introduced impacts on whether the change is taken on board or not e.g. the beliefs of staff members; the school ethos; the customs and the ‘way of doing things’ in the school; the dominant approaches to teaching and learning and the philosophy of education held by staff members; the leadership styles; the relationships; and the environment in which the school exists. School and teacher culture (encompassing beliefs and values) may impact negatively on externally mandated change and rather than the school/teachers changing, the externally mandated change may be altered to fit in with this culture e.g. ‘if reforms change schools – as some have – so do schools clearly change innovations’ (Cuban 1998, p. 471). The importance of school culture is highlighted by Stoll and Fink (1995) when they argue that ‘any attempt that does not address the
underlying organisational conditions can be viewed as doomed to tinkering’ (p.80). Therefore, prior to implementing curriculum reforms, there is a need to acknowledge the idiosyncrasies of individual schools and to focus on developing the culture of schools. If differences in the school context are not acknowledged, ‘the new change forces may be shipwrecked in the collision with the hard sedimentary rocks of existing school contexts’ (Goodson 2001, p.52). Such collisions have continued to occur in Ireland, as the school factor remains largely ignored (OECD 1991). Within an Irish context, emphasis tends to be placed on ‘fixing the parts’ (Sashkin and Egermeier 1983), wherein new programmes are continuously introduced into schools, without due consideration being given to the culture of the school or to the people involved in bringing about the change.

Inadequacies in teacher development have been advanced as a possible reason for the failure of educational reforms, with, for example, teacher development tending to focus on updating teacher content knowledge, rather than focusing on the meaning of educational change. Nor does teacher development tend to explore or successfully challenge teachers’ beliefs and values (see for example Fullan 1991; Granville 2005). The majority of CPD tends to be provider driven, where an expert, who has never seen the teacher teach and who isn’t aware of their strengths or weaknesses, provides advice to them on their teaching. Eisner (1992) equates this to ‘a voice coach giving advice to a singer whom he or she has never heard sing’ (p.614) – the effectiveness of which is limited. The importance of teacher development for the successful implementation of curriculum is reflected in the fact that curriculum development cannot occur without teacher development (Stenhouse 1975). Issues relating to teacher development are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.

The attitudes of the community and personnel external to the school towards the proposed change play an instrumental role in determining whether the initiative is taken on board or not. The impact of external forces on curriculum initiatives is now discussed.
The impact of external forces on curriculum initiatives

Due to the fact that the implementation of EM was influenced by forces external to the school (e.g. the reaction of some parents and journalists to EM resulting in the Minister for Education and Science commissioning the NCCA to conduct a review of the media coverage surrounding the programme), the author felt it was important to explore the literature pertaining to curriculum reform and the impact external factors can have on whether reforms are successfully implemented or not. Within this section the author will explore what is meant by external factors, why external factors are important in curriculum reform and what is likely to happen when external factors do not support reforms. The author will then draw on examples to illustrate the influence external forces can have on curriculum initiatives.

Numerous factors impact on whether a curriculum reform is successfully adopted and implemented in schools (please see Fullan 1991 for more details). The views of the external community are one such factor. The external community encompasses, for example, parents. The views and attitudes of parents portray to schools and teachers what they deem appropriate and important (see for example Cornbleth 2001, p.8). An additional external factor, which is of relevance to the current study, is the media. According to Cohen (2010) the media can play an influential role in determining public opinion towards educational initiatives (Cohen 2010) and as a result ‘cannot be dismissed as a site of public debate about education’ (Cohen 2010). The influential role of the media is also supported by Cornbleth (2008).

Consideration of the external environment is important due to the fact that the views and attitudes of the community have an instrumental impact on schools. For example, Sarason (1990) argues that what happens in schools cannot be viewed in isolation from its external environment.

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26 ‘The process of putting into practice an idea, programme, or set of activities and structures new to the people attempting or expected to change’ (Fullan 1991, p.65)
This is supported by Cornbleth (2007, p.1) who believes that ‘what happens in the community-society-world does influence what happens in school classrooms’. This results in a situation where schools are dependent on support from external forces ‘as if it was a life-support system’ (Hanson 2001, p.646). As a result of the influence of the external environment on schools, schools can only change to the extent and in the direction to which their surroundings allow (House 1974). Therefore, support from the wider community is important if reforms are to be successful adopted and implemented into schools.

However, if the community external to a school does not support particular initiatives, it is unlikely that such reforms will be long-lasting. As a result, the external environment can act as a ‘network of constraints’ that ‘trap[s] schools in their places’ (Hanson 2001, p.647). Such constraints can limit schools ability to change (ibid, p.647). This is particularly true of middle class communities (Smith and Keith 1971; Gold and Miles 1981), who tend to want to maintain the status quo (Lynch 1989). Communities can have conservative expectations of the function of education (Eisner 1992, p.614) which can prevent radical alterations to the practice of schooling from taking place. As a result, schools have been referred to as ‘frozen institutions’ (House 1974), which tend to remain the same.

One of the main reasons that change is unlikely to be successful if support from the community is lacking is due to the fact that schools and policy makers tend to want to avoid controversy. According to Henry (1963) the dominant community school relationship is based around minimising and avoiding disagreement. As a result, ‘administrators, teachers, and other school personnel [tend to] withdraw to presumably safer, traditional subject matter, materials, and activities in order to avoid’ any unwanted attention (Cornbleth 2001, p.11). As a result ‘a team leader might say that his school is not using a particular novel or reader because of the uproar it caused in a neighbouring district’ (Cornbleth 2008, p.2160). This is also reflected in a study conducted by Adler (1993), who found that the majority of administrators in the study were
influenced by the experiences of other districts (particularly where disagreements occurred) and most of the administrators in the study indicated that they planned curriculum in such a way as to avoid controversy.

The impact that the community (parents and media) can have on new initiatives is evident in the case of Countesthorpe College which was established in the UK in the 1970s. The school was viewed as highly controversial, mainly due to the high level of autonomy given to students. For example, with parental permission students were permitted to smoke in the café in the school. The school received much attention from the national press and was subject to an inquiry, following requests made by groups of disaffected parents (Watts 1977). The college eventually succumbed to external pressures (with the Head being forced to resign by the Local Authority) and the school now has ‘the least democratic and most patriarchal school in Leicestershire’ (Gribble 1998, p.95). This portrays the influence that external forces can have on what happens in schools.

A further example of how external pressure can control what occurs in school is the case of the Lord Byron High School in Ontario, Canada. Lord Byron High School was established in the 1970s and aimed to ‘not only challenge the structures of secondary education in Ontario, but also, the curriculum, the teaching and pupil assessment methods’ (Fink 2003, p.265). The philosophy of the school was to develop a humane educational experience where students will grow and develop based on ‘reason, mutual respect and trust’ (ibid p.265). Students were offered a broad range of programmes from a wide number of courses and the school was one of the first schools to be semesterised. Teachers spent more time with each individual class in comparison to other schools in the locality and students were allocated one free period every day. While initially the school was supported by the community in this new initiative, public opinion on the school soon began to change, wherein people external to the school began ‘questioning practices which were quite different from their own experiences and therefore suspect’ (Stamp 1976 cited in Fink 2003, p.266). As a result the culture and philosophy of the school was influenced by the ‘opposition of
the educational community, some parents, and the teachers union’ (Fink 1999, p.134). Due to external pressures (along with changes in personnel and funding) the original ethos and approach of the school was eroded.

**Conclusion**

Curriculum, while often defined in such narrow terms, is more than mere content. It relates to content, pedagogy and assessment and to a selection from the culture made on the basis of ideologies. Curriculum as a selection from the culture raises questions regarding whose culture is selected and what values are used in determining this selection process. When new curriculum initiatives are introduced into schools, numerous factors impact on their chances of having long term effects. The level of teacher development provided, the extent to which teachers’ views have been acknowledged and the attitudes of external forces all impact on the sustainability of new curriculum initiatives.

**Conclusion of Chapter**

The author will briefly conclude on the preceding chapter by summarising the main points presented within it. The conclusion is divided into five sections reflecting the five sections within the chapter: masculinities, masculinities and the school, social and personal education, parental involvement in education and curriculum and factors that impact on the implementation of curriculum initiatives.

Essentialism is the belief that differences between men and women occur as a result of biological sex differences. Both sex role theory and social constructivism acknowledge the impact of cultural and societal influences on one’s perception of masculinity. In comparison to sex role
theory however, social constructivists acknowledge the active participation of the person in constructing their own gender identity. Social constructivism results in a plurality of masculinity, with some forms being deemed as hegemonic (ideal) and held in high esteem, while other ‘non-ideal forms’ are subordinated.

The school has long been identified as an important site in the formation and maintenance of hegemonic forms of masculinity wherein the culture and structure of schools supports certain forms of masculinity to the detriment of other forms. Schools have also been deemed heterosexist places, where all students are believed to be heterosexual. As a result the voices and needs of gay, lesbian and bisexual students (and teachers) are ignored. Consequently, a high level of homophobic bullying occurs in schools, which often remains unchallenged.

In recent years, the state has become increasingly involved in the social and personal education of the nation’s children, resulting in a number of school based social and personal programmes being in existence e.g. Relationship and Sexuality Education and Social, Personal and Health Education. Studies have found that a number of difficulties may arise as a result of the involvement of the school in such forms of education e.g. levels of teacher development are deemed inadequate, teachers feel uncomfortable discussing such issues and a number of teachers are not given the option of whether they wish to teach SPHE or not. A number of studies have shown that parents welcome the involvement of the school in their children’s social and personal education. However, concerns were raised in relation to the amount of information schools provide parents on this form of education and also in relation to the values and messages that may be portrayed in such programmes. While young men were viewed as a difficult group to engage in social and personal issues, young men, like parents, welcomed the inclusion of social and personal issues on the school curriculum.

While the level of involvement of parents has increased in Ireland in recent years, social class differences appear to impact on a person’s ability to participate in their children’s education
while middle class parents possessing the skills to engage with school personnel in relation to their child’s education. Involving parents in the education process results in increased academic achievement on the part of the child and can result in parents forming more positive attitudes towards their child’s school.

The community (parents, local businesses, the media etc), along with differences in school culture and teacher development, play an important role in the adoption and implementation of reforms. If reforms are viewed positively by the community there is a much higher chance that they will be taken on board. However, if the community does not support a reform, it is less likely that the school will risk implementing it.
Chapter Four: Methodology

To do research is always to question the way we experience the world

Van Manen (1990, p.5)

Introduction

Within this chapter, the main aim of the study and the research questions are set out. The research methods are then explained, as are the advantages of adopting this approach. This is followed by an outline of the methods of data collection, a description of how the data was analysed, the ethical procedures and the limitations of the study.

Main Aim of the research

The current study, Exploring Masculinities- the Sequel, revisits EM and the issues surrounding the programme ten years after its development and launch. It explores the views and attitudes of two groups that were critical of EM at the time of its development, namely some parent groups and journalists (as outlined in Chapter one). It also portrays the reactions of the Project Coordinator of EM to some of the main criticisms advanced by the journalists in the current study.
Research Questions

1. What are the views and attitudes of parents towards the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle?

2. What are the current views and attitudes of a sample of journalists towards the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle? What are the reactions of the Project Coordinator of EM towards some of the main criticisms advanced by the journalists?

3. What do parents and journalists want to happen in relation to the exploration of masculinities with young men in the future?

The parents referred to in the first research question include a national sample of parents of school-going boys and members of the various parent associations namely National Parents Association for Vocational Schools and Community Colleges (NPAVSCC), the National Congress of Catholic Schools Parent Associations (CSPA), Parents Associations of Community and Comprehensive Schools (PACCS), Co-operation of Minority Religion and Protestant Parents Association (COMPASS) and Federation of Parent Councils in Christian Brothers and other Catholic Secondary Schools (FED CBS). The journalists referred to in question two include a number of influential high profile journalists that contributed to the media debate on EM while the Project Coordinator of EM is an independent research consultant who was responsible for facilitating and organising the work of the EM writing group.
Research Methods

A mixed methods approach was adopted in the current study, which drew on both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The following section examines the main differences between quantitative and qualitative research methods, highlighting the pros and cons of each method. The benefits of mixed methods research is then explored.

Quantitative Research Methods

Our social and cultural worlds, today, are massively subject to statistical accounts. Whenever we turn on the TV news or open a newspaper, the world is now routinely accounted for in terms of the numbers it generates.

Balnaves and Caputi (2001, p.1)

Quantitative research methods are based on measurable hard data. Such methods are viewed as reliable and grew ‘out of a strong academic tradition that places considerable trust in numbers that represent opinions or concepts’ (Krueger 1994, p.27). The quantitative researcher is interested in facts and examines the relationship of these facts to each other (Bell 1993). Such researchers seek understanding through facts and statistics and use scientific techniques to produce quantified and generalisable conclusions (Bell 1993). Therefore quantitative data permits generalisations to be made. According to Bryman (2004) the quantitative researcher is concerned with measurement, generalisation and replication. Thorne (2000, p.68) indicated that quantitative researchers believe that the purpose of research is to identify truth through scientific methods. Questionnaires, a form of quantitative research used in the current study, allow the researcher to gather a large amount of data from a representative sample of the population ‘in order to say with a measure of statistical
confidence that certain observed characteristics occur with a degree of regularity’ (Cohen et al 2001, p.171).

Quantitative researchers maintain a distance between themselves and the ‘observed’ (Bryman 1984, p.77). They remain detached and removed from the subjects being studied in order to understand the facts completely. This may be considered one of the strengths of quantitative research, as by maintaining a distance from the subject the researcher reduces the possibility of researcher bias. However, some researchers (see for example Spencer 1983; Parahoo 1997; Bryman 2004) perceive this distance to be a weakness and argue that such approaches treat human beings as if they are objects (Parahoo 1997). Critics of quantitative research believe that there are aspects of the world that statistics cannot measure (Silverman 2000) and ‘sometimes the most measurable drives out the most important’ (Dubos cited in Peshkin 1993, p.23). Bryman (2004) argues that quantitative researchers over rely on measurement, hindering connections between research and real life (ibid 2004, p.79). This may result in the meaning behind events and relationships being ignored and the resulting theories being inaccurate (see for example Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). Therefore, at times an alternative approach may be required.

Also, in relation to education, scientific approaches may not always be best, as according to Gage (1989) attempts to explain ‘the art of teaching’ through science have failed and as a result ‘the search for scientifically grounded ways to understand and improve teaching has led nowhere’ (pp.135-136).

Issues relating to the reliability and validity of the quantitative data are discussed under the relevant headings below.
Qualitative Research Methods

In comparison to quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers are more concerned with understanding ‘individual’s perceptions of the world. They seek insight rather than statistical analysis’ (Bell 1993, p.8) and produce findings that are not based on statistics (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p.11). They ‘embark on a voyage of discovery rather than one of verification’ (Bryman 1984, p.84) and are concerned more with developing an understanding of individuals perceptions and views of the world than in gaining a statistical understanding of that world.

The qualitative researcher focuses on words and observations to present and describe people in natural situations (Krueger 1994) and ultimately seeks an explanation of the how and why of human behaviour. Silverman (2000) believes that ‘if you are concerned with exploring people’s life histories or everyday behaviour, then qualitative methods may be favoured’ (p.8). Qualitative researchers value the participant’s views and seek to understand their world and their perception of their world (Parahoo 1997, p.60). Such methods allow the participants to have a voice, to share their experiences and opinions. This approach enables researchers to learn from first hand experience about the world they are investigating and to develop an understanding of the world through involvement and participation. The qualitative researcher focuses on ‘what individual actors say and do’ (Hitchcock and Hughes 1995, p.161). As a result the qualitative researcher must get close to the subject.

Qualitative researchers are more concerned with ‘uncovering knowledge about how people think and feel about the circumstances in which they find themselves than they are in making judgements about whether those thoughts and feelings are valid’ (Thorne 2000, p.68). Rather than presenting the data in terms of facts and figures, the qualitative researcher describes the data in the language used by the participants (Leach 1990 cited in Carr 1994, p.716). An interview, a form of qualitative research used in the current study, is basically ‘a two person conversation initiated by
the interviewer for specific purpose of obtaining research relevant information’ (Cannell and Kahn 1968 cited in Cohen et al 2001, p.271). Interviews take the shape of a structured conversation between the researcher and their subject and allow the interviewee to explain situations from their own point of view (Cohen et al 2001, p.267).

While qualitative research has a number of strengths (as outlined above) there are also a number of criticisms associated with such methods. The two main limitations of qualitative research that are identified in the literature are discussed below.

Firstly, replication of the research findings can be more difficult in qualitative studies. This can be due to a number of reasons. Replication\(^{27}\) can be more difficult due to the fact that qualitative studies are ‘so personal to the researcher [and] there is no guarantee that a different researcher would not come to radically different conclusions’ (Mays and Pope 1995, p.109). Qualitative studies rely to a large extent on the researcher’s perceptions about what is significant. In qualitative studies, the researcher is the main instrument for collecting data (Bryman 2004, p.284) therefore, what is observed and deemed important is dependent on the researchers’ interests and views. What is deemed significant and warranting further attention may not be consistent across researchers’. Also, the close relationship between the researcher and the participants in the study may create a subjective environment, where both the participants and the researcher may be influenced by each other. This may result in a situation where the participants may provide an answer they think the researcher wants to hear, while the researcher may become emotionally involved with the participants therefore limiting their ability to remain objective. Due to these factors it can be difficult to replicate qualitative studies.

Secondly, but linked with above, the ability to generalise\(^{28}\) the findings is more limited in qualitative studies in comparison to quantitative studies. Generalisation can be defined firstly, as

\(^{27}\) Replication of the results relates to the reliability of the research findings

\(^{28}\) Generalisation of the results relates to validity of the research findings
the extent to which findings are applicable to other populations (referred to as empirical generalisation) and secondly the extent to which the conclusions and the theories developed are justified (referred to as theoretical generalisation) (Ryan and Bernard 2000, p.786). As qualitative research usually involves fewer cases, it is more difficult to transfer the findings to the general population. As a result the research findings may be unique to the few people included in the study (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004, p.20). Furthermore, qualitative studies are contextually based and, therefore, produce ‘situated accounts, tied to a particular context or interaction which may not be a particularly natural one for many participants’ (Sim 1998, p.349). What may be representative of one ‘specific social situation’ (ibid) may not be true of others. Consequently, the meaning of a particular incident may be unique and specific to the context in which it occurs (ibid). As a result, it can be more difficult to generalise qualitative findings and theories to a wider population.

In order to combat these limitations, the researcher must take a number of factors into consideration. Firstly, the researcher should clearly show how the conclusions and theories were formed, therefore aiding the replication and generalisation of the research. This entails, as Seale (1999a, p.158) suggests, ‘showing the audience of research studies as much as possible of the procedures that have led to a particular set of conclusions’. This ensures that the claims made in the study are based on sufficient evidence and that the reader is clear about the research process. Furthermore, ensuring an accurate sample is selected for the study can enhance generalisability. Adequate sampling is viewed as ‘magic bullets that kills off all threats to validity’ (Cronbach 1981, p.304). Subjectivity, however, is more difficult to eliminate and can be viewed as ‘a garment that cannot be removed’ (Peshkin 1988, p.17). Steps can be taken to minimise subjectivity in order to ‘avoid the trap of perceiving just that which my own untamed sentiments have sought out’ (Peshkin 1988, p.18). The researcher can clearly highlight and explore the role of ‘the self’ in the research by clearly stating his/her own views and opinions on the issues being examined and the role they played in interpreting the data. This allows for transparency on any factors that may have
influenced the research. Furthermore, the use of a critical friend at all stages of the research may prevent against subjectivity. Issues relating to the reliability and validity of the qualitative data are discussed under the relevant headings below.

**Mixed Methods**

No one research method will capture all of the relevant aspects of what is being studied. Over reliance on one form of data may ‘distort the researchers picture of the particular slice of reality she is investigating’ (Cohen et al 2001, p.233). While there are merits in qualitative and quantitative methods alone, such an approach may ‘narrow the researchers perspective’ (Carr 1994, p.720) and deprive them from drawing on the strengths of both methods.

One of the main reasons for adopting a mixed methods approach, an approach that integrates both qualitative and quantitative research methods into a single project, is that it ensures triangulation of the data (see for example Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). Triangulation, according to Denzin (1970, p.310), is the use of a number of observers, theoretical perspectives, sources of data, and methodologies. Triangulation is used to ‘check the integrity of or extend, inferences drawn from the data’ (Richie 2003 p. 43). It adds ‘breadth or depth’ to research analysis (Fielding and Fielding 1986). Morse (1991 cited in Carr 1994, p.720) argues that the use of triangulation maximizes the strengths and minimizes the weaknesses of each approach and also strengthens the research findings. This is backed up by numerous other researchers who believe that a mixed methods approach results in ‘superior research’ (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004, p.14) and ‘reinforce[s] confidence in what we know’ (Sosulski and Lawrence 2008, p.143). It can add insight and understanding that might have been missed if a single method approach was used and allows unexpected results to be pursued (Bryman 2007). Mixed methods research provides a
more complete understanding of the study as it results in the gaps left by one method being filled by the other.

Triangulation helps increase the validity of the research by helping to remove bias and identify errors or irregularities in the findings (Anderson and Arsenault 1999 p.131). Greene et al (1989) believe that adopting a mixed methods approach offsets the various biases of the separate methods and ultimately strengthens the validity of the inquiry. Through using a mixed methods approach, the researcher can question whether they are forming a complete description of their data and drawing valid conclusions. According to Smith and Biley (1997) if each method produces the same results, then the truth-value of the data is increased. This is particularly important in relation to qualitative work wherein triangulation is a major means of validating the data (Seale 1999b).

A mixed methods approach permits the researcher to draw on various forms of data in presenting the results e.g. ‘quantified outcomes balanced with the rich context of lived experiences captured in qualitative inquiry’ (Sosulski and Lawrence 2008, p.121). This can put ‘meat on the bones’ of the research by, for example, allowing the researcher to use qualitative data to illustrate some of the themes emerging from the quantitative findings (Rossman and Wilson 1994).

There are four different ways in which a mixed methods approach can be adopted:

1. The method perspective: the research procedure involves a quantitative method and a qualitative method

2. The methodological perspective: moves beyond a mixing of methods and looks at a mixed approach in all aspects of the research process e.g. aims and research questions, data collection and analysis
3. The paradigm perspective: relates to the philosophical perspectives that the researcher brings to their research

4. The practice perspective: a mixed methods approach emerges as the research is being conducted

Drawing on the four different mixed methods approaches listed above, the current study could be classified as relating to the method perspective as it involves ‘at least one quantitative method (designed to collect numbers) and one qualitative method (designed to collect words)’ (Greene et al 1989, p.256). The study also involved a within stage mixed model approach as the questionnaires included both open-ended qualitative and closed quantitative questions.

The paradigm debate

There is a ‘tendency to think of quantitative and qualitative research as discrete domains that inhibits mixed methods researchers’ (Bryman 2007, p.11) with opponents to the merging of different research methods within a single study arguing that each method is embedded within epistemological and ontological commitments that are incompatible and in opposition with each other. Such ‘purists’ (see for example Smith 1983; Guba and Lincoln 1984; Smith and Heshusius 1986) believe that the ‘different paradigms typically embody incompatible assumptions about the nature of the world and what is important to know’ (Greene et al 1989, p.257). Those who hold such a view argue that qualitative and quantitative methods exists on different ends of the same continuum, presenting mutually exclusive worldviews which are incapable of merging (Newman and Benz 1998). Sugrue29 (2009, p.10) suggests that the ‘paradigm wars’, while never over, has

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29 Discussion on research paradigms has, according to Sugrue (2009) ‘evoked silence in the Irish context’ (p.13). Yet, ‘it is reasonable to assume that the conduct of research in Ireland has been shaped (silently) by international discourses’ (Ibid, p.13)
been replaced with ‘a more rapprochement between these competing traditions and generally referred to as mixed methods’

Those who argue in favour of mixed methods research believe that rather than trying to separate the various paradigms employed in educational research, one should note the complementary nature of one paradigm to the other (see for example Snape and Spencer 2003). This is backed up by Reichardt and Cook (1979) who believe that each method is independent and therefore capable of being mixed and matched. As a result, qualitative and quantitative research techniques are not tied to paradigms and this ‘permits innovative uses of a range of techniques for a variety of purposes’ (Sandelowski 2000, p.248). All researchers move from one method to the next as they seek to answer their research questions (Creswell 2003). Elliot (2005 cited in Creswell and Tashakkori 2007, p.304) views a mixed methods approach as ‘a clean approach, untangled with philosophy and paradigm’ and consequently suitable for use. The increasing use of mixed methods research in the social sciences ‘suggests that the philosophical debate about theoretical coherence in mixed research approaches has shifted, making room for a new generation’ (Sosulski and Lawrence 2008, p.123).

**Data Collection and research sample**

The current study consisted of four main phases. Phase one involved the distribution of a questionnaire to a national sample of parents who had sons at senior cycle while phase two consisted of in-depth interviews with a sample of these questionnaire respondents. These two phases were part of a research project funded by the Gender Equality Unit (GEU) of the Department of Education and Science (see Gleeson and McCormack 2006 for unpublished report sent to the GEU). Following the completion of the research report, the author wished to transfer from the Masters to the PhD register resulting in two additional phases being added to the
research. Phase three involved conducting questionnaires with representatives of the various national parent organisations. This phase also involved an interview with a representative of the Congress of Catholic Schools Parents Association (CSPA). The fourth and final phase of the research explored the views and attitudes of a number of journalists who participated in the media debate on EM and the reaction of the Project Coordinator of EM to the main criticisms advanced by these journalists. These four phases are outlined and discussed below.

**Phase One: Questionnaires with a national sample of parents**

As outlined in the rationale section in Chapter One, certain parent groups opposed EM and a small number of parents were involved in the media debate surrounding the programme. As a result, the Gender Equality Unit (GEU) was interested in gaining a greater understanding of the views of a national sample of parents and funded the author (and supervisor) to conduct research to establish these views.

Based on a review of the Exploring Masculinities Programme resource pack, the External Evaluation report (Gleeson et al 2004) and the report commissioned by the NCCA (Mac an Ghaill et al 2004) a questionnaire for parents was devised. The questionnaire aimed to explore parental views towards the inclusion of certain EM topics on the school curriculum\(^\text{30}\).

The questionnaire (see Appendix two)

- Explored parental views on aspects of masculinities
- Sought their reaction to the role of the school in the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle

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\(^{30}\) Due to the fact that the majority of parents may not have heard of the Exploring Masculinities Programme the programme itself was not specifically named in the questionnaire. Rather parents were asked about their attitudes towards the inclusion of certain social and personal topics of relevance to young men (topics that were explored within the EM resource book) on the school curriculum
• Sought their reaction to the inclusion of certain EM topics at senior cycle e.g. sexual orientation, homophobia, male depression, domestic violence

The questionnaire was piloted in a Limerick school in May 2004, the data analysed and subsequent changes made. The questionnaire consisted of closed (dichotomous, ranking and rating scale) and open-ended questions, which ensured a qualitative dimension to the questionnaire. Prior to conducting the study ethical approval was sought and attained from the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Limerick (ethical issues are discussed in greater detail below).

Access

The author wanted to conduct a national study of parent’s views but initially gaining access to an adequate and representative sample of parents proved problematic. The author was faced with three options. Firstly, she could conduct door-to-door surveys, by travelling around the country and calling at homes. This option was not feasible within the context of time restraints and available resources. Secondly, the author could try to obtain a list of parent’s names and addresses from each school, and post questionnaires to them. However, following some investigation, the author was informed that this was not possible under the current legislation regarding the provision of personal information on parents. The final option available to the author was to visit schools and to ask the boys in Transition Year\(^{31}\) and First Year Leaving Certificate to bring the survey packs (including a cover letter (Please see Appendix 3), questionnaire and pre-paid envelope) home to their parents/guardians. This was viewed as effectively the only feasible option available to the author. As a result it was decided to devise a sample of schools where the survey would be

\(^{31}\) Transition Year is a one year programme offered between the Junior and Senior cycle and it is taken by some 40% of a year’s cohort.
administered to young men in Transition Year and first year Leaving Certificate for delivery to their parents.32

Sample

A national sample of 120 schools, along with replacement schools, was drawn up with the assistance of Dr. David Millar, Education Research Centre, St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra. Dr. Millar used a similar method to that previously used in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) research.

The sample was devised based on the number of male students in the target group of Transition Year and first year Leaving Certificate. All co-educational and single sex boys schools nationally were categorised into three strataums based on the number of male students in the target group of Transition Year and first year Leaving Certificate. Schools were categorised as small, medium and large. Schools were then selected from each of these strataums based on Probability Proportional to Size (PPS), meaning that the more male students in the target group the more likely the school was to be selected. Schools were automatically excluded from the sample if they had fewer than 17 male students in the target group. The large stratum included 10 very large schools that were selected automatically due to their size (schools that had more than 187 male students in the target group). The number of small, medium and large target groups in the current sample and the number of small, medium and large target groups nationally are outlined in the table below.

32 The author chose Transition Year and first Year Leaving Certificate as EM was planned for use at senior cycle. The author did not include second year Leaving Certificate students (students due to sit the Leaving Certificate Examination that year) as she believed schools might be reluctant to permit access to these students.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stratum</th>
<th>Number of schools in sample</th>
<th>Number of schools nationally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>143 (3,900 boys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-40 in target group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>136 (7917 boys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(41-80 in target group)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>117 (15,760 boys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(81+ in target group)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Number of schools in sample and nationally classified by size of sample group

The sample included both single-sex boys’ schools (54) and co-educational schools (66) to allow for any possible differences to be highlighted. As of 2004/2005, there were 114 single sex boys and 480 co-educational post-primary schools in Ireland.

Irish post-primary schools can be divided into three different types. Firstly, secondary schools (traditionally single-sex schools but an increasing number are now co-educational) tend to be privately owned and managed. They are under the trusteeship of religious communities, boards of governors and individuals. Vocational and community colleges are mainly co-educational and are owned by the local Vocational Education Committees (VEC’s). Finally, community and comprehensive schools also tend to be co-educational schools and are managed by Board of Managements, which are representative of local interests. While not a factor in selecting the sample, the sample was made up of these different school types and consisted of 84 secondary schools; 17 vocational/community colleges and 19 comprehensive/community schools.

Fieldwork

A letter was sent to the principal of each school in the sample (please see Appendix 4) and contact was made to arrange visits. The school visits occurred during the 2004-2005 school year. The questionnaires were distributed to boys in Transition Year and first year Leaving Certificate in
these schools for delivery to their parents. Permission was sought from parents to conduct in-depth interviews with them at a later date. Those wishing to participate in interviews returned their contact details with their questionnaire (Please see Appendix 5). 119 schools were visited and 9,678 questionnaires were distributed. In total, 1,915 questionnaires were returned giving a response rate of 20%.

Profile of Phase One Questionnaire Respondents

In total 1,915 questionnaires were returned in phase one of the research. Of these questionnaire respondents, 77% were female and 23% were male. 99% of the respondents were the parents of the young man who brought the questionnaire home while 1% identified themselves as the guardians of the young man (all respondents are referred to as parents from hereon in). The majority of parents, 67%, were between the ages of 40-49. 41% of respondents lived in a rural area with almost equal numbers living in either a city (28%) or a town (27%). 93% of respondents classified themselves as Roman Catholic, 3% were Church of Ireland; 2% other and 2% said they had no religion.

The social class of the respondents in the current study was categorised according to male occupation (male respondents/male spouse/partner) and female level of education (female respondent/female spouse/partner)\(^33\).

The percentage of males in the various occupations is outlined below and is compared with the figures from the 2006 Census\(^34\). As can be seen in the table, there is a slight over-representation of Employers and managers, higher and lower professional and manual skilled in

\(^33\) See approach adopted by Clancy 2001; Census Statistics Office 2006

\(^34\) The author is aware that the age of males in the current study ranges from 30-60+, whereas the Census figures encompass all males in the State who are of a working age. However, these were the only figures available to the author.
the current study in comparison to the 2006 Census while semi-skilled and unskilled workers are under-represented in comparison to the 2006 census\textsuperscript{35}.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-economic status (based on occupation of male respondents/male partner/spouse)</th>
<th>Current study (n=1915)</th>
<th>2006 Census\textsuperscript{36} (% males in these categories)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employers and Managers</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Professional</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Professional</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-manual</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual skilled</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-skilled</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers/agricultural worker</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 Occupation of male respondent/male partner or spouse in comparison to the 2006 Census figures

The highest level of education completed by females (female respondent, female spouse/partner) in the current study was compared with the highest level of education completed by females over the age of fifteen in the 2006 Census\textsuperscript{37}. As illustrated in the table below, in the current study there is an almost equal representation of females who completed their education at lower secondary and diploma level in comparison to the 2006 census figures. However, there is an under-representation of females who completed their education at primary level and a slight over representation of those who completed their education at higher secondary and degree level or higher, in comparison to the 2006 census. The results are presented in the table below.

\textsuperscript{35} Please note that this was a self completed questionnaire, where the respondent identified the occupation of the male respondent (male spouse/partner), which the author later categorised. This may explain, to some extent, the over representation of certain occupational groups.

\textsuperscript{36} Taken from table 15B. Males in each Province, county and city classified by socio-economic group. Available on http://www.cso.ie/census/census2006results/PSER/PSER\%20complete.pdf

\textsuperscript{37} The author is aware that the age of females in the current study ranges from 30-60+, whereas the census figures encompass all females in the state who are 15 years and older. However, these were the only figures available to the author.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest level of education completed by female respondents/female spouse/partner</th>
<th>Current study (n=1915)</th>
<th>2006 Census(^{38}) (taking females 15 years and over)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Secondary (Junior cert)</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Secondary (Leaving cert)</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree or higher</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Highest level of education completed by female respondent/female partner or spouse in the current study in comparison to the 2006 Census figures

The majority of survey respondents (64%) were not members of a Board of Management or Parents Council. 87% stated that they always attended parent teacher meetings (with mothers more likely to indicate that they always attend in comparison to fathers: 92% of mothers who always attend in comparison to 72% of fathers). Approximately 2/3\(^{rd}\) reported that, outside of parent teaching meetings, they spoke to teachers once or less in the school year.

**Phase Two: Interviews with a sample of questionnaire respondents**

The author decided to conduct in-depth interviews with 24 questionnaire respondents. The interviews explored:

- Parental views on pressures experienced by young men in Ireland today
- Parental views on aspects of the home-school relationships in relation to the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle
- Parental concerns regarding the inclusion of certain EM topics on the school curriculum at senior cycle

\(^{38}\) Taken from Persons, Males and Females Aged 15 Years and Over Classified by Highest Level of Education Completed, 2006. On [http://www.cso.ie/statistics/pmfageover15edcompleted.htm](http://www.cso.ie/statistics/pmfageover15edcompleted.htm)
The interview questions were devised based on the main themes emerging from the questionnaire data (e.g. reasons for parental disagreement) and aspects previously not examined in the questionnaire (e.g. views on home based social and personal development and aspects of the home-school relationship).

**Sample**

The sample for interview was based on a randomly selected group of carefully stratified questionnaire respondents. The sample included parents who had completed their education at various stages and included equal representation from the co-educational and single-sex school sectors. Although the majority of questionnaire respondents were positive towards the inclusion of EM topics on the school curriculum, given the opposing views generated by the Exploring Masculinities programme (Gleeson *et al* 2004; Mac an Ghaill *et al* 2004) the author felt it would be beneficial to include an equal number of negative cases (Morse *et al* 2002) in this phase. Therefore, the sample was equally divided between those who had expressed different views on the substantive issues in the survey i.e. agreed/disagreed with the inclusion of certain topics on the school curriculum. The sample also included equal numbers of mothers and fathers. Using these variables, 24 were chosen at random for interview. The criteria for selection for interview are illustrated in the table below.
Table 4.4: Sample for interviews in phase two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Pre Leaving Certificate</th>
<th>Leaving Certificate</th>
<th>Post Leaving Cert</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>1 Single sex boys</td>
<td>1 Single sex boys</td>
<td>1 Single sex boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Co-educational</td>
<td>1 Co-educational</td>
<td>1 Co-educational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1 Single sex boys</td>
<td>1 Single sex boys</td>
<td>1 Single sex boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Co-educational</td>
<td>1 Co-educational</td>
<td>1 Co-educational</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Pre Leaving Certificate</th>
<th>Leaving Certificate</th>
<th>Post Leaving Cert</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>1 Single sex boys</td>
<td>1 Single sex boys</td>
<td>1 Single sex boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Co-educational</td>
<td>1 Co-educational</td>
<td>1 Co-educational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1 Single sex boys</td>
<td>1 Single sex boys</td>
<td>1 Single sex boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Co-educational</td>
<td>1 Co-educational</td>
<td>1 Co-educational</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fieldwork

Four pilot interviews were conducted with four randomly selected parents who had indicated their willingness to participate in an interview. Following discussion with an experienced researcher, changes were made to the set of interview questions (Please see Appendix 6 for an example of interview questions). Contact was made with the sample of parents selected for interview. Interviewees were reminded about the aim of the study, assured about the confidentiality of the research and invited to participate in an interview. A suitable time for conducting the interview was arranged. The 24 interviews were then conducted. The interviews, lasting approximately 30 minutes, were conducted over the telephone using a digital recorder and microphone suitable for telephone interviews. The interviews were semi-structured in nature, in that the interviewer had a set of questions but was free to deviate at times if the interviewee ‘opened up an avenue of conversation not already catered for in the schedule’ (Ryan et al 2006, p.152).
Phase Three: Questionnaire with members of the National Parent Associations

The National Parents Council Post-Primary (NPCpp) is an umbrella group made up of five different associations. These are:

- National Parents Association for Vocational Schools and Community Colleges (NPAVSCC)
- The National Congress of Catholic Schools Parent Associations (CSPA)
- Parents' Associations of Community and Comprehensive Schools (PACCS)
- Co-operation of Minority Religion and Protestant Parents Association (COMPASS)
- Federation of Parent Councils in Christian Brothers and other Catholic Secondary Schools (FED CBS)

The author wished to conduct research with the various parent organisations and decided that the most feasible way to do this would be to attend the annual conferences held by each organisation. The author spoke to the president of the NPCpp, who then contacted the senior members of the various associations. Permission was granted for the author to attend these conferences and conduct research.

Based on the initial parental questionnaire (from phase one) and the main themes emerging from the two previous phases, a questionnaire was designed. The questionnaire went through a series of revisions and explored:
• The reaction of members of the parent associations towards the inclusion of EM topics on the school curriculum
• The attitudes of members of the parent associations towards the teaching methodologies they would and would not want the school to adopt with young men when examining such topics
• The views of the members of the parent associations regarding the level of teacher development on EM issues
• The concerns of the members of the parent associations regarding the role of the school in the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle

Fieldwork

In 2009 the author attended the annual conference held by the national parent organisations during the period March-April\textsuperscript{39}. The author gave a short introduction to the study, stressed the confidentiality of the research and asked any member of the parent association present who had sons in post-primary school to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire and cover letter (Please see Appendix 7) were distributed to all of the parents who were willing to participate in the research. The majority of those who participated in the study handed up their completed questionnaire at the end of the conference. Some choose to take the questionnaire home and returned it by post at a later date. In total, the researcher attended four conferences held by NPAVSCC, PACCS, COMPASS, and FEDCBS. The numbers attending these conferences are outlined in the table below:

\textsuperscript{39} It is important to highlight that these conferences occurred at a time when financial concerns and educational budget cuts were high on the agenda. The importance of ‘recession’ related issues was evident in the fact that a number of talks at these conferences dealt with aspects of budgeting e.g. one parent organisation had a speaker highlighting the main cuts in education for the year 2009/2010. However, some conferences included themes relating to the current study e.g. one conference had a stall on bullying, while another had a talk on Internet Use and cyber bullying.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisations</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FEDCBS</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPASS</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PACCS</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPAVSCC</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5: Number of members attending annual parent association conference in 2009

CSPA did not hold an annual conference in the school year 2008/2009. As a result of this an alternative approach to researching the views of CSPA members had to be arranged. The author decided, in agreement with a contact at CSPA, to use the tool ‘Survey Monkey’ to research the views of the CSPA members. The questionnaire was emailed to CSPA members inviting them to participate in the study. The questionnaire was also sent to the contacts in the other four associations, who either made it available on their websites or emailed it to their members. This ensured that all members of the organisations, including those who could not attend the conference, were given an opportunity to respond. Once the deadline for the return of questionnaires had passed, the researcher collected and analysed the data. An interview was also conducted with David Hegarty, who was and still is an officer in CSPA. David was active in the association at the time of Exploring Masculinities. He was involved in devising the CSPA response to EM and participated in the media debate on the programme.

Profile of Phase three respondents

63% of respondents in phase three were female, while 37% were male. The majority of respondents were aged between 45-64 years of age. 87% indicated that they were Roman Catholic. 9% were Church of Ireland while 1% were Presbyterian. 3% indicated that they did not have any religion.
As portrayed in the chart below, responses from members of FEDCBS (Federation of Christian Brothers and other Catholic Schools Parent Council) were the most frequent, with 21 members responding. 19 members of PACCS (Parents Association for Community and Comprehensive Schools) responded while 15 members of NPAVSCC (National Parents Association for Vocational Schools and Community Colleges) filled in the questionnaire. 8 members of COMPASS (Co-operation of Minority Religion and Protestant Parents Association) and 6 members of CSPA (Congress of Catholic Schools Parent Association) completed the questionnaire.

![The number of responses from each association](image)

*Figure 1: The number of responses from each association in the questionnaire responses in phase three*
Phase Four: Interviews with a sample of journalists and the Project Coordinator of EM

The author decided to conduct interviews with some high profile journalists that had contributed to the media debate on EM. The interviews (please see appendix 8 for interview questions) explored:

- the views of the journalists towards the Exploring Masculinities Programme
- the concerns the journalists had with the programme
- alternations the journalists would have made to the programme
- the views of the journalists on what should happen in relation to the future social and personal education of young men.

An interview was then conducted with the Project Coordinator of EM (please see appendix 9 for interview questions). The interview explored his experiences of working with the EM writing group and his reaction to some of the main criticisms advanced by the journalists.

Sample

Using the list of contributions to the media debate on EM, outlined on pages 96-101 in Mac an Ghaill et al (2004), the author noted that certain journalists had made a number of contributions to the media debate on EM. Four of these journalists were selected: Breda O’Brien, David Quinn, Kevin Myers and John Waters. It was decided to conduct the interviews with these four journalists.
Fieldwork

Each journalist and the Project Coordinator of EM were contacted and permission was sought to interview them in relation to their views on EM. The interviews were either conducted in person, with the author travelling to meet the participants, or over the phone. All interviewees were sent the principles and procedures for the interview (Please see appendix 10) and the interview questions (Please see appendix 8 and 9) in advance of the interview. All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and varied in length from forty-five minutes to two hours.

Data analysis

Data analysis involves looking for ‘patterns, themes and relationships between elements in the data’ (Domegan and Fleming 2007, p.31) and involves questioning why such patterns and themes exist in the first place (Bernard 2000, p. 419). Data analysis of any kind, involves some form of transformation of data into ‘clear, understandable, insightful, [and] trustworthy’ findings (Gibbs 2007, p.1). In relation to quantitative data, analysis tends to follow a number of set rules and procedures. Therefore, when conducting quantitative data analysis, the researcher has a number of clear and coherent steps to follow.

The quantitative data from the questionnaires in phase one and three were entered into the computer package Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The data was firstly analysed using descriptive frequencies, which describe the regularity of particular answers in the questionnaire. For example, descriptive frequencies were conducted to determine the profile of the respondents in each phase e.g. numbers of male and female respondents. Cross-tabulations were conducted with certain sets of quantitative data from phases one and three showing the joint distribution of two or more variables. Within the current research project, cross-tabulations were used to explore the impact the sex of the respondent on their attitudes towards the characteristics
of a ‘real man’. Correlation coefficient tests were used to establish the validity of the quantitative data while Cronbach’s Alpha was used to test the reliability of this data.

However, the same set of procedures cannot be said to apply to qualitative data analysis, as few rules for analysing such forms of data exist (Bryman 2004, p.399). This means that the qualitative researcher has a number of options available to them when analysing qualitative data, the majority of which do not involve a list of rules or coherent steps to follow. This ambiguity results in, what Miles (1979) referred to as, the ‘attractive nuisance’ of qualitative data for while often providing exceptional results, qualitative data can be time-consuming and difficult to analyse. This is confounded by the fact that often the analysis of qualitative data is a neglected aspect of qualitative studies with ‘methodologists prefer[ing] to spend more time on such matters as gaining access, interviewing, choosing informants, handling reciprocities, and so on, rather than on the intellectual work of analysis’ (Siber 1976, p.1). Therefore, qualitative researchers must convince their audience about the worthiness of their results by providing as much information as possible on the steps involved in all aspects of the study, especially data analysis.

**Stages of qualitative data analysis in the current study**

In general, the stages of qualitative data analysis begin with data collection and transcription. This is following by coding of the data, interpretation (Gibbs 2007, p.2) and theorising. The stages involved in analysing the qualitative data in the current study are outlined below.

**Stage 1:**

- The qualitative data from the questionnaires were transcribed into word documents for each individual question e.g. the open ended question following question six of the questionnaire in
phase one (examining parental attitudes towards the inclusion of certain EM topics on the school curriculum) for all respondents was compiled into a single word document.

- All interviews were transcribed into individual word documents.

**Stage 2:**

- The author became immersed in the data by reading through the initial set of transcripts. This process of immersion allowed the author to become fully aware of the world of the respondents (Burnard 1991).

- At this stage, the author noted some of the significant and interesting points emerging from this initial reading, for example the reoccurring reference to levels of teacher ‘training’ on EM related issues in phase one, two and three and the emphasis placed on values within the interviews in phase four (with journalists and Project Coordinator).

**Stage 3:**

- The transcripts were re-read and coded into themes. Coding qualitative data has widespread acceptance in the research world (Bryman 2004, p.411). Such coding allows for the vast amount of data generated from qualitative studies to be reduced (see for example Miles and Huberman 1994).

- At this stage, the key consideration when selecting themes was to answer the research questions. The data was divided into themes based on the research questions. For example, in the first phase of the study, the research question looked at parental views towards the role of the school in the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle. Therefore, the role of the school in the exploration of masculinities with young men was selected as a theme and any qualitative data relating to this theme was coded accordingly. Similarly, in phase four of the study, the research
question looked at the views of journalists towards the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle and any data relating to this theme was coded accordingly.

- Each theme was divided into separate word documents and the author was conscious when doing this that some of the qualitative data may be relevant to more than one theme.

- A critical friend was used at this stage to ensure that the data in each theme was accurate and that the author was consistent in her approach. This helped to enhance validity and reduce researcher bias.

- Following this discussion the author re-examined and adjusted the themes and data accordingly.

**Stage 4:**

- Once the data had been divided into themes, based on the research questions, the author re-read each of these themes. The author was aware that a number of different views and opinions were present within each theme.

- Sub-themes, which portrayed the number of different views within each theme, were identified. For example, when parents and journalists referred to the role of the school in the exploration of masculinities with young men, they did so for a number of reasons. Some parents, for example, believed that the school was an ideal environment in which to examine such issues, while others either expressed concerns regarding this, or were against the school playing such a role. Therefore, these different views were identified as sub-themes.

- A critical friend was used again at this stage to ensure that the sub-themes assigned were accurate and that the author was consistent in her approach. This helped to enhance the validity and reduce researcher bias.

- Following this discussion the author re-examined and adjusted the sub-themes accordingly.
• During this stage, the author continuously questioned, drawing on the work of Miles (1976) and Miles and Huberman (1994), whether the themes and sub-themes emerging were based on sufficient evidence and asked the following questions of the research: ‘Does it hold true for several different people? Is there any negative evidence?’ In order to ensure this, the author continued to revisit the data during this stage looking for disconfirming and confirming evidence (Bryman 2004).

Stage 5:

• The remaining qualitative data, which did not relate directly to any research question (and as of yet had not been coded) was divided into themes and sub-themes in a similar manner to above. For example, the specific issue of parental attitudes towards pressures experienced by young men in Ireland today had not been considered when devising the research questions for phase one and two, however data had emerged in relation to this issue. The issue of pressures experienced by young men was identified as a theme. Sub-themes were then devised within this theme. These sub-themes related to such issues as, for example, ‘pressure to conform to male norms’, ‘how being a young man today compares with twenty years ago’ and ‘issues facing young men today’. In relation to phase four (interview with journalists and Project Coordinator of EM) the theme of lack of contestation of feminist ideology values emerged as an unexpected theme. Subthemes were then devised within this theme e.g. differing views on why feminist ideologies are not contested.

• The data was revisited and themes and sub-themes created until the author and critical friend were satisfied that thematic and data saturation (Krueger 1994) had occurred. At this stage, no additional data was emerging in relation to each theme and no new themes were emerging from the data (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p.212).
Stage 6:

- The main themes were discussed and, as Bryman (2004) suggests, the author considered how the themes and sub-themes linked with relevant literature.

Validity and Reliability

Research, whether quantitative or qualitative, ‘is a human activity subject to the same kinds of failings as other human activities…..there is no paradigm solution to the elimination of error and bias’ (Norris 1997, p.173). According to Cant et al (2009), there is a high probability of bias when one is dealing with people (p.175). This is backed up by Cohen et al (2000) who indicated that ‘it is inevitable that the researcher will have some influence’ on the respondent ‘and, thereby, on the data’ (p.121). Consequently, the researcher must ask how they can ensure that the observations and measurements they present are accurate (Wellington 2003, p.30).

Validity questions whether you ‘are observing, identifying, or measuring what you say you are’ (Mason 2006, p.24). Validity indicates that an instrument studies what it claims to study and that the results and theories produced are true. According to Sapsford and Jupp (1996), validity asks ‘whether the evidence which the research offers can bear the weight of the interpretation that is put on it’ (p.1). Furthermore, it requires the researcher to question, why should I believe the results and conclusions presented? (Wallace and Wray 2006 p.28). In order to show this, the researcher needs to portray and prove the validity of the data and the conclusions drawn. Validity also refers to the extent to which a study can be generalised across different social setting.

The reliability of the research examines the extent to which the data can be repeated or ‘the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions’ (Bell 2005, p.111). Reliability refers to the consistency of the research method and causes the researcher to question, ‘is the design such that different researchers…will arrive at the
same conclusions, or at least the same evidence?’ (Vogt 2007, p.114). The validity and reliability of the current study are discussed below.

**Validity of the current study**

The validity of the research instruments (Phase one and Phase three) was tested through the use of construct validity. Construct validity examines the extent to which a test has measured the construct it claims to measure and is a ‘theoretical measure of how meaningful a survey instrument is’ (Litwin 1995, 45). Construct validity can be demonstrated using, to name but a few, content analysis, correlation coefficients and factor analysis. Within the current study the correlation coefficient was completed with a number of the topics listed in question six of the questionnaire in phase one of the research (Please see Appendix 2) and question eight of the questionnaire in phase three of the research (please see Appendix 7). The correlation coefficient ‘indicates the strength of a relationship between variables’ (Balnaves and Caputi 2001, p.155). According to Cohen et al (2000) correlations ranging from 0.65-0.85 ‘make possible group predictions that are accurate enough for most purposes’ (p.536). Correlations above 0.85 show a very high relationship between the variables.

The two correlations below show that group predictions, for the research instrument in phase one, can be made accurately, with the correlation coefficient being 0.662 and 0.757 respectively.
### Table 4.6 Correlation coefficient between phase one respondents’ attitudes towards the inclusion of issues relating to sexual orientation and attitudes towards gay people on the school curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spearman’s rho</th>
<th>Sexual orientation should be addressed on the school curriculum</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Attitudes towards gay people should be addressed on the school curriculum</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>.662**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### Table 4.7 Correlation coefficient between phase one respondents’ attitudes towards the inclusion of issues relating to male depression and suicide on the school curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spearman's rho</th>
<th>Issues relating to male depression should be addressed in the school curriculum</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Issues relating to suicide should be addressed on the school curriculum</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male depression</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.757**</td>
<td>1903</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A similar test was conducted on the research instrument used in phase three of the study. The strength of the relationship between two sets of variables in the questionnaire was tested using the
correlation coefficient. The two correlations below shows that group predictions, for the research instrument in phase three, can be made accurately, with the correlation coefficient being 0.829 and 0.852 respectively. These results show a high correlation between the two variables.

**Correlations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spearman's rho</th>
<th>Sexual Orientation should be included on the school curriculum</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>Attitudes towards gay people should be included on the school curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>.829*</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

*Table 4.8 Correlation coefficient between phase three respondents’ attitudes towards the inclusion of issues relating to sexual orientation and attitudes towards gay people on the school curriculum*
**Correlations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male depression should be included on the school curriculum</th>
<th>Suicide should be included on the school curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spearman's rho</td>
<td>Male depression should be Correlation Coefficient</td>
<td>Suicide should be Correlation Coefficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.852**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>69</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.852**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>69</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 4.9** Correlation coefficient between phase three respondents’ attitudes towards the inclusion of issues relating to male depression and suicide on the school curriculum

These correlation figures allow the author to conclude that the research instruments in phase one and phase three of the research, the data emerging and the conclusions drawn from the research are valid.

The validity was further enhanced though the use of carefully selected samples across the research. For example, Dr. David Millar drew up the sample of schools for Phase One of the study. In order to gain a broad perspective of viewpoints from the various partners, a carefully stratified sample of parents were selected for interview in Phase Two.

At each phase the author tried to include as many individuals as possible so as to improve the extent to which the research findings could be generalised. For example in phase three of the research, the author attended conferences held by the various parent associations, where a questionnaire was administered to those who were present. The author attempted to increase the
size of the sample by distributing the questionnaire through using Survey Monkey to those who did not or were unable to attend the conference.

Cohen et al (2000) claims that issues of validity can be strengthened by carefully structuring the questions, piloting helps the researcher do this. According to Teijlingen and Hundley (2001, p.3) piloting the research in advance helps the researcher to improve the validity of the research as it allows the researcher to:

- Discard all unnecessary, difficult or ambiguous questions,
- Assess whether each question gives an adequate range of responses,
- Establish if the replies can be interpreted in terms of the information that is required,
- Check that all questions are answered,
- Re-word any questions that are not answered as expected.

All questionnaires and interview questions in the current study were piloted in advance of use. Furthermore, while the interviews (in Phase Two and Four) were semi-structured in nature, the researcher ensured that she ‘read [the same basic] set of questions exactly as they were worded so that every respondent was answering the same question’ (Foddy 1994, p.149). This ensured that all interviewees were given an opportunity to talk about the same basic set of questions while still permitting the author to move beyond the interview questions.

The validity of the interview questions and open-ended questions in the questionnaire were enhanced through the use of a critical friend at all stages of the research. This critical friend ‘served as an intellectual watchdog’ (Rossman and Rallis 2003, p.69) helping to ‘strengthen the value of what [was] concluded’ (ibid, p.66).
Reliability of the research instruments

In order to prove the reliability of the survey instruments (phase one and phase three), a test for reliability was conducted using Cronbach’s Alpha, the most ‘widely reported reliability statistic’ (Vogt 2007, p.115). It is a measure of the internal consistency among items and it is used for multi-item scales. Cronbach’s Alpha is ‘a statistical test of how well the items in a scale are correlated with one another’ (Bernard 2000, p.298).

The Cronbach’s Alpha test was conducted on question six of the questionnaire instrument for phase one of the research (level of agreement of the national sample of parents with the list of EM topics appearing on the school curriculum). This test yielded an alpha coefficient of .903. The Cronbach’s Alpha test was also conducted on question eight of the questionnaire instrument for phase three of the research (level of agreement of members of parent association with the list of EM topics appearing on the school curriculum). This yielded a Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of 0.986.

Bryman and Cramer (1990, p.710 cited in Cohen et al 2007, p.506) believe that ‘the reliability level is acceptable at 0.8’ while Vogt (2007) argues that .70 is satisfactory. According to Cohen et al (2000) an Alpha coefficient of greater than .90 indicates that the data is very highly reliable. Therefore, it can be concluded that the data in relation to parental attitudes towards the integration of certain EM topics on the school curriculum in Phase one and Phase three is reliable.

Ethical considerations

Prior to conducting the study the researcher was conscious that ‘whatever the nature of their work, social researchers must take into account the effects of the research on participants, and act in such a way as to preserve their dignity as human beings’ (Cohen et al 2001, p.56). The author was aware of the sensitive nature of the research topic and was conscious of ensuring that the dignity
of all participants was preserved. Therefore, approval for the study was sought from and granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Limerick. Suggestions from the committee were taken on board. The author ensured all aspects of the study (all questionnaires and interviews) were conducted in an ethical manner by, for example, ensuring that all participants (principals, parents, journalists and the Project Coordinator) were supplied with detailed information about the research and provided with contact details for the author and an external contact if they had any queries regarding the study.

All participants were informed that participation in the study was voluntary. For example

- In phase one and three of the research those willing to participate in the study did so by completing and returning the questionnaire and those not wishing to participate in the study were free to disregard the questionnaire
- In relation to phase two those wishing to participate in interviews returned their contact details with their questionnaire. Once contacted interviewees were informed of the voluntary nature of the study and were invited, if they wished, to participate in an interview
- Participants in phase four were invited, if they were willing, to participate in an interview. Interviewees were not placed under an obligation to participate in the research.

Furthermore, participants across all four phases were assured about the confidentiality of the study e.g. at no stage in the research were schools, principals, parents, individual members of parent organisations named. In phase three, respondents were informed that while their responses would be linked to their association, they would not be individually identified or named. Due to the fact that associations were identifiable, participants were asked to inform the author, either verbally or
on the questionnaire, if they did not wish for some aspects of their responses to be used in the final thesis or any subsequent publications. In relation to phase four, participating journalists and the Project Coordinator were provided with the ‘principles and procedures for the interview’ in advance of the interview (please see Appendix 10) – wherein permission was sought to record the interviews and to name each individual. Interviewees in phase four were also sent a copy of the interview questions in advance of the interview. Transcripts of the interview were sent to each individual prior to using any data in the final thesis. At this stage, some requested omissions or alternations to certain aspects of the interview.

**Limitations of the study**

All research, no matter how thorough, has limitations. Below, the author highlights the main limitations in the current study.

As a result of the relatively low response rate to the national questionnaire in phase one and the slight over representation of the middle class parents in these responses, the views of certain social classes are over-represented in the research findings in comparison to others. It is common that ‘one stratum of a carefully stratified sample’ (Wellington 2003, p.103) can respond more than other groups. The lengthy questionnaire in phase one may have been a contributing factor here. Furthermore, the majority of questionnaire respondents in phase one were female, resulting in mother’s views being over-represented in the research in comparison to father’s views. Due to the approach adopted in the distribution of the instrument to parents in phase one, it cannot be guaranteed that all parents in the selected sample received the questionnaire. The response rate from the national study of parents was dependent on two factors:

1. The young man was present in class on the day the questionnaire was distributed
2. The young man who received the questionnaire gave it to his parents.
Within phase two, due to time and financial constraints, twenty four parents who had expressed an interest in participating in an interview were selected to do so. The twenty four parents that were selected may not be representative of the other parents who put their name forward for interview.

In relation to phase three (the questionnaire with members of the various national parent associations and interview with David Hegarty, CSPA), not all members of the various organisations were present at the annual conference in 2009. While further attempts were made to gain the views of those not present at the conferences, through the use of Survey Monkey, their participation in this depended on them having both access to a computer and being computer literate. Therefore, despite best efforts on the part of the author, some members of the five organisations may not have been invited to participate in the research. CSPA did not hold an annual conference in 2008/2009. Therefore, the author had limited access to members of CSPA. While the author did include CSPA members in the distribution list for the Survey Monkey questionnaire, the response rate for CSPA members remained low. In order to compensate for this, David Hegarty (an officer with CSPA today and at the time of EM) was interviewed. However, his views may not be representative of other CSPA members.

In phase four, due to time and financial constraints, the author could only select four influential journalists that had participated in the media debate. While the author drew on the work of Mac an Ghaill et al (2004) in choosing these journalists, those selected may not represent the views of other journalists that participated in the media debate on EM. The author is aware of this, however, and is not presenting these views as representative of all the journalists that participated in the media debate on EM but merely as the views of the journalists that participated in phase four. Also, this aspect of the research required the journalists and Project Coordinator to think
back on their views and opinions from a decade ago. This lengthy time lapse may have resulted in participants unknowingly presented facts incorrectly or failing to remember key points.

**Conclusion**

This study aims to ascertain the views of a sample of parents and journalists towards the role of the school in the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle. Within the current study a mixed methods research approach was adopted, utilising both qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (questionnaires) research methods. The study consisted of four main phases. Phase one involved a questionnaire with a national sample of parents. Phase two involved interviews with 24 of these questionnaire respondents. Phase three explored the views and attitudes of members of the various parent associations, while phase four examined the attitudes of a sample of journalists towards the Exploring Masculinities Programme. The Project Coordinator of EM was also interviewed at this stage. The quantitative data was analysed using the computer package Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) while the qualitative data was analysed using a themed approach. The validity of the research was tested using the correlation coefficient, while the reliability was tested using Cronbach’s Alpha.
Chapter Five: Main findings

Introduction

Among the most vocal critics of the Exploring Masculinities Programme at the time of its development and launch were certain parent groups and a number of journalists. Now that ten years have passed since the development of EM, the author wishes to ascertain the current views of parents and a sample of journalists that participated in the media debate on EM. Also, due to the fact that members of certain parent associations (namely CSPA) were critical of the programme, the author wishes to explore the views of members of the various parent associations towards the involvement of the school in the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle and also to determine if these views are reflective of the views of a national sample of parents.

The current chapter is divided into three main sections, reflective of the three research questions identified in Chapter four.

Section one outlines the views of a national sample of parents towards the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle. The views of members of the five parent associations and David Hegarty (representative of the Congress of Catholic Schools Parent Association) are also presented within this section.

The data from section one is presented under the following headings:

- Parental perceptions on being a young man in modern Ireland
- Parental attitudes towards the primary purpose of schooling
- Parental views on the role of the home in the exploration of masculinities
• Parental attitudes towards the values underpinning the exploration of masculinities
• Parental attitudes towards the content included in the exploration of masculinities

Section two outlines the current views of a sample of journalists towards aspects of the Exploring Masculinities programme. The reaction of the Project Coordinator towards the journalists views are presented, where relevant, within this section. The findings are presented under the following four headings:

• Attitudes towards the primary purpose of schooling
• The role of the home in the exploration of masculinities
• Attitudes towards the values underpinning the Exploring Masculinities Programme
• Attitudes towards the content included in Exploring Masculinities Programme

Section three outlines suggestions made by parents and journalists on how EM related issues could be effectively dealt with in schools in the future.

Section One: The views of parents towards the exploration of masculinities with young men in school

Outside of journalists, certain parent groups, mainly CSPA, were amongst the most vocal critics of EM. As outlined in Chapter One and Three, parent groups can be a powerful lobby group in relation to accepting or opposing school based programmes. In order to learn from the controversy surrounding EM, it is important to establish the views and concerns of
parents towards the role of the school in the exploration of masculinities. The author now wishes to present the views of a national sample of parents and members of the five parent associations (including CSPA) towards the role of the school in the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle.

Within this section data from phase one (national questionnaire), two (interviews with 24 questionnaire respondents from phase one) and three (questionnaire with members of the national parent associations) are used. When direct quotes are used, the following information is provided on participants from each phase:

- Phase one respondents are identified as questionnaire respondents. Phase two respondents are identified as interviewee’s while the association to which phase three respondents are members of is stated.
- The sex of the respondent is outlined for phase 1, 2 and 3 respondents.
- The level of agreement of phase 1, 2, and 3 respondents towards the topics listed on the questionnaire appearing on the school curriculum is also outlined: Respondents are classified as either agree, disagree or unsure depending on their level of agreement with certain EM topics being included on the school curriculum.
- David Hegarty (representative of CSPA) is named directly when drawing on data from his interview.

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40 Please see Appendix 11 for the comparative results of the five associations.
41 It is important to note that within the parent questionnaires and interviews, Exploring Masculinities as a programme was not specifically mentioned, as the author felt that it was unlikely that parents who had son’s in senior cycle in 2005-2008 would have been aware of the programme at the time of the media debate. Instead the author drew on the topics/issues within EM and established parent’s views towards the school dealing with these issues.
42 An example of a description for phase one respondent is Questionnaire respondent: Female, Agree. An example of a description for phase two interview is Interviewee: Male, Disagree. An example of a description of a phase three respondent is Member PACCS: Male, Agree.
Parental perceptions on being a young man in modern Ireland

Phase one and phase two examined parental views towards various aspects of masculinities and explored their perceptions on what it was like being a young man today. These issues are discussed below under two main headings. Firstly, parental views on characteristics they perceive as important in a ‘real man’ are outlined followed by the main findings relating to being a young man in 21st century Ireland.

Parental views on important characteristics in a ‘real man’

Phase one respondents (national sample of parents) were asked to indicate the level of importance they attached to certain characteristics in a ‘real man’ e.g. ‘being caring/sensitive’, ‘being good at sport’, ‘being heterosexual’, ‘sharing problems and emotions’, ‘taking school seriously’ and ‘being tough and hard’. Parents were asked to categorise these as either very important, important or not important in a ‘real man’. They were asked to respond to this question from two different perspectives. Firstly, they were asked to answer the question based on their own views as parents. Secondly, they were asked to answer this question based on their perceptions of young men’s views. The results are presented under below the six characteristics outlined previously.

43 The author acknowledges that the inclusion of a question regarding the characteristics of a ‘real man’ may have led parents to respond in terms of the stereotypical characteristics of a ‘macho man’. However, while acknowledging this limitation, the author believes that the findings remain interesting.
Importance of being caring and sensitive

All phase one respondent regarded being caring and sensitive as a very important/important characteristic in a “real man”. On the other hand just over half of the respondents believed that young men viewed this attribute in the same light. The remaining respondents believed that young men viewed being caring and sensitive as not important in a ‘real man’. The results can be seen in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ own views (n=1888)</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young men’s views as seen by parents (n=1816)</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1: Importance of being caring and sensitive in a ‘real man’.

Female respondents were more likely than male respondents to regard being caring and sensitive as an important characteristic in a “real man”. These results can be seen in the chart below.
Importance of being good at sport

Just over half of phase one respondents regarded being good at sport as an important (or very important) characteristic in a “real man”. However, respondents believed that young men placed greater importance on this than parents with nearly all respondents rating this as very important/important from young men’s point of view. The results can be seen in the table below.
Male respondents were more likely than female respondents to indicate that being good at sport was very important/important in a ‘real man’. The results can be seen in the chart below.
Importance of heterosexuality

Almost 60% of phase one respondents regarded heterosexuality as a very important/important characteristic in a “real man” while 42% disagreed. On the other hand almost 90% of parents believed that young men regard heterosexuality as an important characteristic in a ‘real man’ with three out of every four saying that it was very important. The results can be seen in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ own views</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=1801)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young men’s views as seen by parents</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=1798)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3: Importance of heterosexuality in a ‘real man’

The importance placed on heterosexuality increased with the age of respondent, with 21% of 30-39 year olds believing it to be very important compared to 33% of 50-59 year olds and 36% of 60+. Male respondents were more likely than female respondents to regard heterosexuality as very important/important in a “real man”. This can be seen in the chart below.
Figure 4: Importance of a ‘real man’ being heterosexual by sex of respondent

**Importance of sharing problems and emotions**

Nearly all phase one respondents believed that sharing problems and emotions were important characteristics in a ‘real man’. However, respondents believed that young men did not place as much importance on this as parents did, with nearly half of all phase one respondents believing that young men view this characteristic as not important in a ‘real man’. The results can be seen in the table below.
Female respondents were again more likely to view this characteristic as very important in a ‘real man’ in comparison to male respondents. This is illustrated in the chart below.

![Bar chart showing the distribution of opinions on sharing problems and emotions by sex of respondent.](chart.png)

**Figure 5: Importance placed on sharing problems and emotions by sex of respondent**
Importance of taking school seriously

The majority of phase one respondents believed that taking school seriously was either very important/important in a ‘real man’. In comparison to this 1/3\textsuperscript{rd} of respondents believed young men viewed this as not important in a ‘real man’. The results can be seen in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ own views</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=1846)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young men’s views as seen by parents (n=1839)</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.5: Importance of a ‘real man’ taking school seriously

Male respondents were more likely than female respondents to place greater importance on taking school seriously as important in a ‘real man’ in comparison to mothers. The results can be seen in the chart below.
Figure 6: Importance of a ‘real man’ taking school seriously by sex of respondent

Importance of being tough and hard

Approximately 1/3rd of all phase one respondents viewed being tough and hard as either very important/important characteristic in a ‘real man’ while just over 90% of respondents believed that young men viewed this in a similar way. The results can be seen in the table below.

Table 5.6: Importance of a ‘real man’ being tough and hard
Male respondents were more likely than female respondents to indicate that being tough and hard was important in a ‘real man’. The results can be seen in the chart below.

![Bar chart showing the importance of being tough and hard by sex of respondent]

**Figure 7: Importance of a ‘real man’ being tough and hard by sex of respondent**

**Summary of findings**

Phase one respondents identified being caring and sensitive, sharing problems and emotions and taking schools seriously as important characteristics in a ‘real man’. However, parents believed that young men viewed being good at sport, being heterosexual, and tough and hard as more important characteristics in a ‘real man’. Male respondents were more likely to place more importance on these last three characteristics in comparison to female respondents.
Being a young man in 21st century Ireland

Phase one and phase two respondents were asked for their opinion on various aspects of young men’s lives e.g. the issues facing them today, the pressures they may experience and how being a young man today is different from 20 years ago. All of these findings are presented below under three main headings: being a young man today in comparison to twenty years ago, issues facing young men today and pressure to conform to hegemonic forms of masculinities. Data presented within the following section draws on findings from phase one, two and three.

Being a young man today in comparison to twenty years ago

Phase two respondents (interviewees) were asked their views on how being a young man today was different from twenty years ago. Four main themes emerged and are discussed below.

Firstly, over half of the interview respondents believed that young men today were under greater pressure. They believed that young men experienced pressure socially, from peers, academically, sexually and financially, in comparison to young men twenty years ago. One mother felt that young men felt pressure ‘to be like each other and to do what everyone else is doing’ (Interview Respondent: Disagree). Others felt that nowadays there is ‘more pressure to get what you are supposed to have i.e. status, money, right car’ (Interview respondent: Female, Agree). A number of parents (both phase one and phase two) commented on the increasing pressure on young men to achieve academically with there now being ‘a huge amount of pressure on young men to get the points and go to college and get a good job, which definitely wasn’t there 20 years ago’ (Interview Respondent: Female, Agree). This is expanded on in the section ‘parental attitudes towards the primary purpose of education’ below.

Secondly, a number of phase two respondents commented that young men are now privy to more information and have more life choices in comparison to young men 20 years ago. They felt that young men received more information about sex, sexuality, drugs, and life
styles at a younger age from television programmes, films, the Internet, magazines and computer games. Phase two respondents believed that young men have much more options and opportunities available to them now. Some typical comments follow:

It was a very small world 20 years ago. Everything was limited. Opportunities are immense now. The world is a much smaller place. Everybody is so accessible and at the same time so distant (Interview Respondent: Male, Agree)

There are more temptations nowadays. Young men feel that they ought to be doing stuff they see on television but it doesn’t gel with reality (Interview Respondent, Male, Disagree)

Information and sex is very much in their face. They are more aware now. Attitudes are more liberal. There is stuff of TV that would not have been there 20 years ago (Interview Respondent, Female, Disagree)

Thirdly, a number of phase two respondents believed that young men today mature at a younger age in comparison to young men 20 years ago as they ‘are meeting the social problems in primary school now they don’t have to wait until they are young men. They are way more socially aware of the problems facing them than we were 20 years ago’ (Interview Respondent: Male, Disagree). Others believed that although they are more mature in some aspects of life, they are not mature in other areas with one mother indicating that ‘they are more grown up in a way but then they aren’t in other ways. They give the impression they are grown up’ (Interview Respondent: Agree).

Finally, a number of phase two respondents highlighted that the roles of men in society has changed in the past 20 years and some young men are having difficulty figuring out their new expected role in society e.g. ‘in our society we have given so much empowerment to women, which is a good thing, but it puts young men in a quandary. Young men wonder now
‘Do I open the door? Am I to protect my spouse?’ (Interview Respondent: Female Disagree). This issue will be discussed further under the heading of ‘gender issues’ below.

**Issues facing young men today**

Phase two respondents were asked to identify the main issues they believed were facing young men today with particular attention to personal and societal paradigms of masculinity. As well as this, a number of questionnaire respondents from phase one and three commented on what they perceived to be the main problems experienced by young men in 21st century Ireland. Such issues included communication skills, depression and increasing suicide rates, and a number of gender issues pertinent to young men’s lives.

1. Communication skills

A number of parents remarked on how young men today experience difficulty communicating and are slow to talk about problems with others. For examples, parents felt that ‘boys are inclined to keep things to themselves’ (Interviewee: Female, Agree) and ‘are inarticulate about their feelings and emotions’ (Questionnaire respondent: Female, Agree). As a result ‘problems arise because young men traditionally feel that they are unable to express their feelings’ (Member of PACCS, Female, Agree). These parents believed that young men are often afraid to share their feelings, can be made to feel ‘stupid or weak’ if they do so (Member of NPAVSCC, Female, Agree) resulting in ‘anger being the only acceptable emotion for them to express’ (Interviewee: Female, Agree).

It was suggested that young men’s poor communication skills develops out of a fear of being labelled homosexual as those who are more open and honest about their feelings are easier targets for homophobic bullying. In this context young men tend to keep their feelings, emotions and concerns to themselves. The comments of two mothers were particularly
illuminating: e.g. ‘it is more difficult for boys to express their feelings and emotions without being seen as less masculine’ (Interviewee: Agree) and ‘it is vital for the well being of our young men that they are able to form relationships where talking about personal issues with friends/mentors is seen as healthy not ‘gay’ or ‘soft’ (Interviewee: Agree).

Phase two respondents (interviewees) described the differing levels of communication they had with their sons in comparison to their daughters, explaining how ‘girls will talk and you tend to know what is going on. With boys you have to drag the information out of them a bit more. They won’t come and volunteer information. You have to ask the questions and then you might get some information’ (Interviewee: Female, Agree). While another mother explained how in her home the ‘boys don’t talk the same way girls do. Sometimes you don’t really know what is going on’ (Interviewee: Disagree).

It was suggested by a small number of male interviewees that levels of communication between mothers and daughter differs from the way that fathers communicate with their sons. These fathers commented that:

We had 3 girls after my son. My wife would talk far easier to the girls about things than I would to my sons. We don’t discuss personal matters at all whereas I see my wife chatting away about personal matters with my daughters. I think it’s harder for men to talk to each other. I know if I go into my son’s room to talk we would probably end up wrestling or something like that, rather than talking. You seem to show more aggression rather than sitting around a table (Interviewee: Male, Agree)

I think men and their sons could never be as close as mothers and their daughters. I don’t think we are made up psychologically that way (Interviewee: Male, Disagree)

You have a different sort of repertoire with girls, which just isn’t there with boys. You just feel that you would be embarrassing the living day lights out of them. You try and educate them but particularly when they are 18 you aren’t going to sit them
down because things can become confrontational and misunderstood very easily. They don’t come to you with anything (Interviewee: Male, Agree).

A link was made between young men’s poor communication skills and the ‘alarmingly high’ numbers of young men dying by suicide. For example: ‘in my county six male suicides have occurred in the past week- aged 15-72. Men are poor talkers and don’t ask for help’ (Questionnaire respondent: Female, Agree) and ‘keeping issues to themselves, because they are considered a sissy if they don’t, leads to depression, self-doubt and lack of confidence. They have a right to cry and real men do cry’ (Questionnaire respondent: Female, Agree). Some other typical comments from parents follow:

From my own experience, from both my father and husband, neither of which can easily speak about their feelings and emotions, I find this almost a handicap. Young men should be made aware that it is not a sign of a weak man to be able to talk through anything that may be bothering them. I feel that this is very important especially in the times we are living in now and the increased incidences of suicide in this country (Questionnaire respondent: Female, Agree)

The old adage boys don’t cry should be abolished (Questionnaire respondent: Male, Agree)

In an ideal world everyone would discuss their fears, but young lads tend to bottle things up and fears just go deeper and deeper. I know 2 young lads who committed suicide simply because they had nobody to talk to. Nobody knew they had problems (Questionnaire respondent: Female, Agree)
However, a differing view was also advanced that rather than being uncommunicative perhaps ‘the truth may be that many of them don’t feel they have someone to talk to. They would talk given the right opportunity, the right setting, and the right person’ (Questionnaire respondent: Male, Agree). These parents believed that the view that men do not communicate was a ‘stereotype that probably dissuades most men from talking and listening to emotional and sensitive topics’ (Questionnaire respondent: Female, Agree).

2. Gender Issues

A number of phase one and phase two respondents believed that young men today face issues relating to their role in society. Some parents believed that young men ‘have lost their role’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Male, Disagree) or ‘no longer see themselves as having defined roles’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree). It was suggested that while in the past, a man’s role may have been defined through work and by being ‘the provider’, this is no longer the case and has resulted in the ‘increasingly devalued role of men’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Male, Agree). As a result of this lack of defined roles it was suggested that young men are ‘missing a rite of passage into adulthood. Previously employment and salary distinguished their role. Nowadays the testosterone filled adolescence have no clear vision on what it is to be a man’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree). Some argued that this has left many young men ‘without the skills to cope with life in general’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree).

A number of phase one and two respondents commented on how gender roles have become reversed in recent years with young women’s role being redefined but the same is yet to occur for young men. It was believed that the increased focus on equality of the sexes has resulted in ‘the equality balance being dipped in favour of girls’ (Questionnaire Respondent:
Female, Disagree) and ‘women have taken their own independence to a level that can make young men feel of no use’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Disagree). Other comments include:

The whole notion of what it means to be a man is totally upside down. Young men are very insecure about what it means to be a man because the old picture [i.e. sport, macho] is gone [and] the new [picture] hasn’t emerged yet (Interview Respondent: Male, Agree)

To the eyes of young men, women now have the power. Boys often feel manipulated and used and whereas it’s okay for girls to complain in similar situations – boys are labelled as being sissies. The emotional world has become a mine field for our sons and we are forced to stand as spectators hoping we will not have to pick up the bits and pieces that the inevitable explosion will produce. God help our children but especially our sons because in the years to come the journey to find an identity will become an ever more dangerous one (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Disagree)

A number of respondents believed that as a result of these issues young men faced difficulties ‘building self esteem, confidence and self worth’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree). They believed that young men needed to learn ‘how to live and be happy with themselves, be happy with what they are and who they are’ (Interview respondent: Male, Agree). Others believed that young men face issues learning to ‘accept themselves warts and all’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree). One mother (Questionnaire Respondent: Agree) told of her experiences:
I was part of a committee dealing with such topics. We sent out questionnaires to kids. We gave list of courses and asked them to put in order of demand. Top of list was confidence building courses, assertiveness courses and drink and drug courses. This is what the young people wanted talks on. I don’t know why but I was surprised. Young people often appear over confident, but are not.

**Pressure to conform to hegemonic form of masculinities**

Phase one respondents were asked to comment on the pressure on young men at post-primary school to conform to male norms. 70% agreed that there was strong pressure on young men *in general* to be physically strong, heterosexual and good at sport. Parents believed that such ‘pressure comes from their peers – no one likes being different’ and ‘we are a country with a strong tradition of the above and it is expected by older generations’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree). Furthermore, parents felt that frequently young men’s role models embody these characteristics e.g. ‘heroes on television and video games are always strong and heterosexual’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree) and ‘young men look up to strong successful sports stars who they presume are heterosexual’(Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree).

While many agreed that young men in general experience such pressures, remarkably only 33% of phase one respondents agreed that this same pressure applied to *their own son*. Female respondents were slightly more likely than male respondents to agree that their own son felt such pressure (5% difference). This conflict of opinion was pursued in the subsequent interviews. The main reasons advanced for these conflicting views were that their son did not feel this pressure because of family support, his close relationship with his parents and the values portrayed in the home. Some typical comments include:
In our house our children were brought up in a Christian home, He has a Christian framework to work from whereas the majority of kids would not (Interview Respondent: Male, Disagree)

[My son] was brought up differently. He was not brought up with the notion of this typical macho man. I was at home. I was cooking, I was cleaning, and I was sharing the housework with my wife so he was brought up with a different notion of what it means to be a man (Interview Respondent: Male, Agree)

A small number of phase two respondents put these conflicting views down to the personality of the young man in question – his independence, happiness with who he is and his desire to do his own thing. For example one mother commented that ‘personally he is happy in himself and I don’t think he would be forced into acting a certain way he would not be happy with’ (Interview Respondent: Agree). Others argued that because their sons already had these characteristics they did not experience such pressure e.g. ‘I wouldn’t say he is under pressure. He is fortunate he has these characteristics in spades’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Male, Disagree) and ‘he has these attributes naturally so there is less pressure on him’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Disagree).

Parents who agreed that their sons did feel such pressure explained how ‘he is anxious to be accepted by group and avoids boys who are different’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree), ‘he takes part in team sports and likes to do well on the team and is unhappy when he doesn’t perform well’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree), and ‘he voices opinions to suggest strength and heterosexuality are important’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree). A number of parents (from phase one and two) highlighted homophobia as a major issue amongst young men today and within Irish post-primary schooling. Parents
commented on how important it is for young men to be perceived as heterosexual, with one mother commenting that ‘sexuality is of extreme importance for boys, the fear of being homosexual is a serious worry, both for themselves and how they are perceived by their pals’ (Questionnaire respondent: Agree). A number of respondents commented on the frequency of bullying and personal ‘put-downs’ relating to sexuality in schools, with children as young as ten ‘calling each other such derogatory terms as gay and lesbian…..it now appears to be the greatest insult to call one another a girl, woman or gay’ (Questionnaire respondent: Female, Agree). Some parents believed that ‘young men would prefer any label other than homosexual’ (Questionnaire respondent: Female, Agree) while others indicated that young men ‘do not include homosexuals in their circle of friends’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Male, Agree). One father told the story of his son who ‘is a sensitive soul was labelled gay by one of the other students’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Disagree) while another mother (Interview Respondent: Disagree) explained how ‘my sons father wouldn’t be very tolerant of homosexuals and this has rubbed off on him. I think my influence has become less as he has become a man. He thinks it’s just not macho to be gay’.

**Summary of findings**

Parents believed that young men today face a number of issues, for example developing effective communication skills and dealing with the reversal of gender roles. Parents believed that while young men in general experienced pressure to be heterosexual, good at sport and strong, their own sons did not experience such pressure. Parents felt that their sons were different because of the home he grew up in and the type of person he is.
Parental attitudes towards the primary purpose of school

Within this section, parental views towards the primary purpose of schooling are outlined. This is followed by an examination of parent’s attitudes towards the role of the school in the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle.

Academic or holistic development

Prior to exploring parental attitudes towards the role of the school in the exploration of masculinities, the author wished to establish their perceptions of the primary purpose of education.

Phase one and phase three respondents (i.e. both sets of questionnaire respondents) were asked to identify what they believed was the overarching aim of education: the holistic development of the student or academic success. As can be seen in the table below, the majority of both sets of parents indicated that the main purpose of education was the ‘holistic personal growth of the student and preparation for life’, with members of the parent associations being more likely to identify this as the primary purpose of education (84% to 72%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Purpose</th>
<th>Phase 1 (national sample) (n= 1895)</th>
<th>Phase 3 (member of parent associations) (n= 69)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holistic Development</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Success</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.7: Attitudes of phase one and phase three respondents towards the primary purpose of education
In both cases females were slightly more likely than males to prioritise the holistic development of the young man over academic success.

Slight variations were found on how parents answered this question based on their age. In terms of phase one respondents, those aged 30-39 and those 60+ were more likely to place greater importance on academic achievement in comparison to respondents in the other age groups. The results can be seen in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Holistic Development</th>
<th>Academic Achievement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30-39 (n=152)</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49 (n=1268)</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59 (n=455)</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+ (n=17)</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5.8: Age of respondents in phase one by their attitude towards the primary purpose of education*

Similar to above, members of the parent associations aged 55-64 were more likely to identify the holistic development of the student as the primary purpose of education\(^4\).

Leading on from this, parents across the three phases (the national sample of parents, interviewees and members of the parent associations) made reference to the lack of ‘rounded thought put into education’ (Member PACCS, Male, Agree) and called for increased focused on holistic development in post-primary schools. These parents were critical of what they perceived to be the over emphasis on academic success in the current education system with, for example, parents believing that ‘the primary focus on boys’ education at present seems to be in achieving points and getting to college’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Disagree).

As a result ‘schools now have a narrow academic focus. I am a great believer in exams, but not

\(^4\) Please note that the age categories used in the questionnaire for the national sample of parents differed from those in the questionnaire for the members of the parent associations
where a wider sense of education is sacrificed at the altar of examination results’
(Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Disagree).

Criticism was made of the pressure placed on young men (and students in general) to achieve high results in both the Junior and Leaving Certificate. For example:

I feel that nowadays there is too much emphasis on academic ability and not enough on the child's personal development. Most parent-teacher meetings are in relation to academic ability and very few discuss how he actual appears i.e. has he low self esteem or is he happy or discontent, whether he mixes or not. There is more to life than top class honours (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree)

The value of the person irrespective of achievement needs to be enforced. Schools should reward and encourage effort and should place less focus on results. Encourage young men to make the best of the hand they are dealt (Member PACCS: Male, Agree)

It was suggested that as a result of this over emphasis of academic success, ‘adequate time is not allocated to social and personal topics, resulting in holistic development being put on the back burner’ (Member NPAVSCC: Male, Agree). Increasing academic pressure results in ‘the majority of schools omitting any class that is not relevant to the points race…as a result there is no time for young men to share their fears or voice their ambitions’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree).

These parents felt that holistic development was just as important as Irish, English or Maths. With this in mind a number of parents called for the format of post primary education to be changed, with more focus being placed on the holistic development of the child. These parents believed that ‘education should lean more towards the development of the person as
opposed to exams’ (Questionnaire Respondents: Female, Agree) and should emphasize “education for life” in order to develop well-rounded individuals.

Accordingly, numerous suggestions were made as to how schools could further develop young men in a holistic manner. Parents suggested possible topics that could be addressed in school such as ‘independent life skills – home economics for boys, home management, nutritional needs, food safety, driving lessons, road safety, interviewing techniques, stress management’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree). One quote was particularly poetic:

Our young men are beautiful and a great treasure, we should in an ideal world teach love, kindness and tolerance and not be gearing them to reach 600 points, to look like plastic people in pinstripes suits and no souls. Teach them to laugh, to sing, to travel far and wide. Because where they are now, so once were we (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Disagree)

The role of the school in the exploration of masculinities

Leading on from this, phase one respondents were virtually unanimous in agreeing that the school (95%) should play a role in the exploration of masculinities with young men with 70% trusting their son’s teachers to treat EM topics in confidence and with sensitivity. Furthermore, the majority of phase three respondents (members of the parent associations) indicated that they were happy that schools provided SPHE at junior and senior cycle (81% agreement in relation to junior cycle, 78% agreement in relation to senior cycle). David Hegarty (CSPA representative) agreed in principle with the school playing such a role, once such teachings were ‘grounded in Catholic moral values’.

Respondents advanced three main reasons as to why the school should be involved in the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle.
Firstly, respondents indicated that young men tend to be more comfortable discussing such issues in a school setting. While acknowledging the importance of the home in young men’s social and personal development⁴⁵ a number of respondents believed that ‘schools are good places for getting information’ (Member FEDCBS: Female, Agree) as young men are more comfortable learning about these issues in school as they can ‘find discussing issues at home embarrassing’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Disagree). It was suggested that ‘while a parent can encourage their son to talk about problems/concerns, they often do not open up and may need support with this issue’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Unsure). Parents argued that ‘young men develop a lot of their social skills in school. As parents we try to teach them right from wrong but a lot of what they do and act outside of school depends on who they hang around with in school’ (Interviewee: Male, Agree) therefore the majority of respondents welcomed support from the school in educating their sons on such issues.

Secondly, respondents felt that such education should occur when young men are amongst their peers. They believed that ‘it is good for boys to learn about these issues with their peers’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree) as ‘they listen to people in school more than they would at home. It is more of a relaxed atmosphere and there are other boys with them and it’s not on a one-to-one basis with a parent’ (Interviewee: Female, Disagree). Some indicated that ‘the school is where they interact as teenagers with other teenagers and where they should learn these skills of acceptance’ (Member FEDCBS: Female, Agree). They felt that ‘learning among their peers is a better environment for them to learn these skills’ (Member PACCS: Male, Agree) and ‘as a group they can support each other. Good attitudes can be fostered. It would be difficult to get a captive audience elsewhere’ (Member NPAVSCC: Female, Agree).

⁴⁵ In phase one, the home received 99% agreement as a location for young men to learn about social and personal issues
Thirdly, parents feared that not all homes offer an environment that is conducive to discussing such issues, therefore some young men may not be provided with adequate support on such issues from the home. For example, ‘we cannot assume that the above topics would be covered in the home – therefore to ensure the safety of our young men the school should provide this education’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Male, Agree). In addition to this, ‘not every parent can talk about these things. Some people might be too awkward or some might not recognise the necessity’ (Interviewee: Female, Disagree). Others feared the type of messages that would be portrayed in some homes, as ‘the wrong or no message may be given’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Unsure). Parents believed that ‘school could provide a more objective view of all the above issues. If the home was bigoted the school could provide a different view’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree). It was felt that young men needed to hear views and opinions, outside of those portrayed in the home. For example, ‘boys need to hear other views besides their parents so they can make decisions for themselves’ (Member FEDCBS: Female, Agree)

Summary of findings

One can conclude that a number of parents across these three phases of the research are opposed to and critical of the current environment in Irish post primary schools which is characterized by increased academic pressure. Parents believed that education should focus to a greater extent on the social and personal development of young men. This is evident in the fact that the majority of both sets of parents indicated that the holistic development of the student was the primary purpose of education. Both members of the parent associations and the national sample of parents welcomed the participation of the school in the exploration of masculinities and called for an increased focus on ‘life-skills’ within senior cycle.
The role of the home in the exploration of masculinities

While nearly all respondents across the three phases believed that the school should play a role in the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle, parents stressed the fact that the home had a major role to play in this as reflected in the fact that 99% of phase one respondents believed the home should be involved in this type of education. While phase three respondents (members of parent associations) were not asked directly about the involvement of the home, a number of parents highlighted the important role played by parents in the education of young men. For example, parents felt that the family and the home are ‘the primary educators who need to provide good example and early briefing’ (Member FEDCBS: Female, Unsure) and are ‘the legal guardians who have responsibility for the education and well being of their children’ (Member NPAVSCC: Female, Agree). The influential role of the family in this form of education was evident in the following comments from parents: ‘home is where attitudes are caught at an early age and where the seeds are sown’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree) and messages ‘absorbed rather than decided’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree) and ultimately where ‘the tone is set’ for attitudes in later life (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree). Consequently, some felt that responsibility for these issues should ‘not be passed over totally to any school, individual or organisation’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Male, Agree).

Even though parents welcomed support from the school in the social and personal development of young men, they deemed themselves to be the primary educators of their children. As a result concerns were expressed in relation to lack of communication and involvement of the home in their son’s school based social and personal education. These parents feared that this would result in a situation where schools ‘would not utilise a partnership approach with parents’ (Member FEDCBS: Female, Agree).
Concerns were raised in relation to the increasing involvement of the state in this form of education as ‘the more we move away from the family and the church the more we are becoming dependant on the state. This has happened rapidly over the past few years’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Male, Agree). There was a fear that the increasing role of the state in the social and personal development of children, would result in ‘parents abdicating their role in this area’ (Member FEDCBS: Male, Disagree). A further example follows:

I think the current trend towards the state deciding on moral issues and indoctrinating children is just as wrong here as it would be in communist countries. The family is the core unit of society and should be helped and encouraged to pass on values from one generation to the next. I strongly disagree with the ideas of schools passing on varying degrees of morality to adolescents because I would not agree with everything that they would say (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Disagree)

**Attitudes towards the values underpinning the exploration of masculinities in school**

The issue of what values would underpin the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle emerged as an issue for some parents. Concerns related to whether such teachings would be based on Catholic or secular views, with calls for both being made and the extent to which the values underpinning these programmes would contradict those of the home. These two issues are discussed below.
The inclusion of Catholic or secular values

While the majority of respondents made no reference to the values underpinning the exploration of masculinities with young men concerns were expressed by some in relation to whether teaching on EM issues would or would not be based on the principles of the Catholic Church, with a small number of parents requesting that such teachings be based on Catholic values. It was suggested that a politically correct ideology should not be introduced into Catholic run schools as it goes against the teachings of the school. Reservations were expressed in this regard as, for example, ‘I would not want politically correct values to be imposed on young men’ (Member CSPA: Male, Disagree). According to one mother ‘that is not what a number of parents want. Is it ok to pass on to schoolchildren that [having a homosexual relationship] is ok sexual practice, just because a lot of people do it? When stuff like sexual orientation gets taught in schools it does teach anything goes because they cannot say that this is wrong’ (Interviewee: Female, Disagree). It was suggested that within a school context a politically correct view must be taken as schools cannot say that certain behaviours, for example homosexuality, is wrong, resulting in ‘an anything goes attitude’ (Interviewee: Female, Disagree). Such a view was supported by David Hegarty (representative of CSPA) who believed that ‘political correctness is detached from reality and promotes a kind of secular piousity’. According to David Hegarty:
If a programme is based on political correctness it shouldn’t be in a Catholic school, just as I wouldn’t expect Catholic values to be forced on a Protestant school or Muslim values in a Catholic school or Catholic values in a Muslim school. Within Catholic schools, Catholic views should have primacy and if people want to found politically correct schools let them do so.

However, others expressed differing views in relation to the extent to which such teachings should emanate Catholic values. While some called for these issues to be provided within a Christian framework others expressed concern about the involvement of, in this case, the Catholic Church (or their teachings) in this form of education. Parents who expressed such concerns were unsure about issues like sexual orientation and suicide being taught within the teachings of the Catholic Church.

For example:

While traditionally and by default the Catholic Church was granted these roles I would have serious reservations about this (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree).

Most of the time [EM] issues seem to be examined within religion class and I am not convinced that this is the right place, especially if there is a very Catholic culture in the school. For example homosexuality would not be dealt with only in that they would be told that they shouldn’t be a particular way (Interviewee: Female, Disagree).
Respondents who felt this way, indicated that the ‘church should not be allowed to teach young boys about these issues’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Male, Agree) as ‘they will never speak openly and honestly’ about them (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree). It was suggested that ‘a common sense approach should be used in relation to these issues not what the church thinks’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Male, Agree) as ‘the clergy will only fill boys minds with rubbish. I feel they have no right to interfere or voice such an old-fashioned and wrong opinion’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree).

Values that contradict those of the home

Leading on from concerns regarding the extent to which such education would emanate Catholic values, parents were concerned that the school may transmit messages and values that were counter to the beliefs and values of the home. This concern was particularly relevant to the area of sexual relationships and sexuality; with parents fearing that messages relating to these topics would contradict their own beliefs and values. These parents, for example, were weary that sex before marriage would be advocated and preferred the message of ‘postponing sexual activity for as long as possible to be encouraged’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree). These parents indicated that such teachings, if they occurred in the school, would go against the principles and values taught in the home. For example, ‘we emphasis abstinence at home and would not want that knocked in a sex education class’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree) and ‘there is not such thing as ‘safe sex’ outside of a faithful heterosexual marriage. Disease or even pregnancy may be avoided but what about the emotional impact of having shared so intimately with another person and then being discarded’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Disagree).
Some of these parents were concerned that the school would be dictating how the home should think. For example, ‘I would be the minority view and what we as a family think wouldn’t be standard issue. I wouldn’t want someone else coming along telling me its one way or the other. They would be dictating what my moral view is or should be’ (Interviewee: Male, Disagree).

Summary of findings

Differing views were expressed by parents on whether the exploration of masculinities with young men in schools should be based on Catholic or secular values. Some called for Catholic values to underpin the teaching of EM topics, while others believed that the Catholic Church should not be involved with this form of education. Parents were concerned that the values and messages portrayed in schools may contradict those taught in the home.

Attitudes towards the content included in the exploration of masculinities

The following section outlines parental attitudes towards certain EM topics being included on the school curriculum. The section begins by giving an overview of levels of parental agreement towards the inclusion of EM topics on the school curriculum and examines additional topics referred to by parents. Reasons for parental agreement with these topics being included on the school curriculum are outlined. Parental concerns in this regard are then explored.
Level of agreement with the inclusion of EM topics on the school curriculum

Both phase one and phase three respondents were asked about the inclusion of certain EM topics on senior cycle curriculum, namely sex education, male/female relationships, sexual orientation, attitudes towards gay people, male depression, suicide, bullying and domestic violence. Male-male relationships, gender stereotyping and the role of society in constructing male identities were three additional topics included on the questionnaire completed by members of the parent organisations (phase 3).

There was a very high level of agreement, from both sets of respondents, towards the inclusion of the topics listed in the table below on the school curriculum. In general, members of the parent associations tended to be slightly more positive than the national sample of parents. There was a very high level of agreement with the inclusion of bullying, sex education, and male/female relationships from both sets of respondents. The lowest level of agreement was in relation to sexual orientation and male-male relationship. The table below illustrates the level of agreement with topics being included on the school curriculum.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>Level of agreement from national sample of parents</th>
<th>Level of agreement from members of parent associations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>99%       (n=1909)</td>
<td>99%        (n=65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Education</td>
<td>97%       (n=1906)</td>
<td>98%        (n=65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male/Female Relationships</td>
<td>94%       (1906)</td>
<td>97%        (n=63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>91%       (n=1908)</td>
<td>94%        (n=65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Depression</td>
<td>91%       (n=1903)</td>
<td>95%        (n=64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes Towards Gay People</td>
<td>90%       (n=1907)</td>
<td>94%        (n=62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>82%       (n=1908)</td>
<td>89%        (n=62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>81%       (n=1906)</td>
<td>95%        (n=63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male-Male relationships</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td>86%        (n=64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Stereotyping</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td>93%        (n=63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Society in Constructing Male Identities</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td>92%        (n=64)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5.9: Level of agreement of phase one and three respondents towards the inclusion of EM topics on the school curriculum*

**Justification for including EM topics on the school curriculum**

A number of parents stressed the importance of including the topics mentioned above on the school curriculum. The following section explores the reasons why respondents agreed with the inclusion of the following topics on the school curriculum:

- sexual orientation and attitudes towards gay people
- suicide and male depression
- domestic violence
- sex education
- bullying
Sexual orientation and attitudes towards gay people (please see appendix 12 for published paper by author and supervisor on this topic)

The majority of both sets of questionnaire respondents were in favour of the inclusion of sexual orientation (greater than 80%) and homophobia (greater than 90%) on the school curriculum. Females were slightly more positive than males in both cases as were members of the various parent associations in comparison to the national sample of parents. Furthermore, the majority of the members of the parent association were in favour of issues relating to male-male relationships (86%) being included on the school curriculum.

Three main arguments emerged in favour of the inclusion of these topics on the school curriculum. Firstly, a number of parents welcomed the inclusion of such topics because of the high level of homophobic bullying in schools. It was suggested that there is a high frequency of bullying and personal ‘put-downs’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree) relating to sexuality in schools. This results in children as young as ten ‘calling each other such derogatory terms as gay and lesbian…it now appears to be the greatest insult to call one another a girl, woman or gay’ (Interview Respondent: Female, Agree). It was believed that young men ‘do not include homosexuals in their circle of friends’ (Interview Respondent: Male, Agree) and ‘would prefer any label other than homosexual’ (Interview Respondent: Female, Agree). It was suggested that schools should tackle this by ‘stopping young men from thinking that any person who is different or sensitive has to be gay’ (Interviewee: Male, Agree) and by ‘getting rid of bias towards anyone who doesn’t fit into what society classes as the norm’ (Member FEDCBS: Female, Agree).

Secondly, there was a belief that schools are currently not doing enough to challenge students’ attitudes towards homosexuality or tackle homophobic bullying. For example:
Boys’ calling each other names especially ‘gay’ was somewhat accepted in my son’s school. The school did very little to help and my second son is beginning to have to put up with the same treatment all because they are involved in music, drama and can speak about feelings (Interviewee: Female, Agree)

The education in Ireland’s single sex schools remains by and large filled with homophobia, racism, sexual remarks, and personal put-downs (Interviewee: Female, Agree)

Thirdly, parents, who did not feel comfortable discussing such issues with their sons in the home, welcomed support from the school. For example, one mother described how it was ‘nearly impossible’ (Interviewee: Disagree) to discuss issues of sexuality in the home. Others provided practical advice on how they address such issues with their sons, with one father indicating that ‘the practical way to talk to them is to go off for a drive. At 60 miles per hour they can’t exactly jump out of the car!’ (Interviewee: Agree).

Suicide and male depression

The majority of phase one and phase three respondents (90%+ in both cases) were in favour of the inclusion of issues relating to suicide and male depression on the school curriculum. Mothers were slightly more likely than fathers to agree with the inclusion of issues relating to male depression (in both phase one and three) and suicide (in phase one only) on the school curriculum. Members of the parent association were more in favour of the inclusion of these topics in comparison to the national sample of parents.
Respondents who agreed with the inclusion of these topics did so for two main reasons. Firstly, they believed that issues relating to suicide and depression should be included on the school curriculum due to the fact that these issues are relevant to young men’s lives e.g. ‘suicide is becoming very prevalent at [our sons] age and if it is discussed it might help them’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Unsure). One mother’s comments were very revealing when she stated, ‘Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes. Issues relating to suicide should be discussed. My son suffered with depression but thank God he felt able to tell me before he committed suicide’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree).

Secondly, there was a belief that more could be done at both school and national level to help prevent against suicide amongst young men with, for example, parents indicating that ‘the huge increase of young male suicides have been disgracefully ignored by our leaders. These problems need to be addressed and discussed particularly at government level’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Male, Agree). Those in agreement with such issues being included on the school curriculum believed that schools had a role to play in helping young men in this regard by ‘letting them know that there are people they can talk to’ (Member NPAVSCC: Female, Agree).

**Domestic violence**

The majority of both sets of parents (phase one and three) indicated that they would like issues relating to domestic violence included on the school curriculum, with members of the parent associations being more supportive of this in comparison to the national sample of parents (95% to 81%). Mothers were slightly more likely than fathers to agree with the inclusion of issues relating to domestic violence on the school curriculum in both cases.

Four main reasons were advanced as to why domestic violence should be included on the school curriculum. Firstly, parents believed that domestic violence is prevalent in Irish
society with the level of such occurrences continuing to increase. For example, these parents felt that domestic violence is ‘sadly a reality in Ireland’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Male, Agree) and ‘is a growing concern in today’s society’ (Member NPAVSCC: Female, Agree). Based on this, parents wished for the school to deal with issues relating to domestic violence with young men.

Secondly, parents felt that it was of vital importance for schools to deal with such issues, as it may be the only forum wherein boys can seek help. For example, ‘school is often the only place outside the home that a young man can turn to with problems especially when these problems are in the home’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree). Parents felt that schools should develop an awareness of such issues amongst young men and provide them with an understanding of how to cope and where to get help if they find themselves in such a situation.

Thirdly, parents felt that discussion on such issues in schools may help ‘break the cycle of domestic violence that often passes from one generation to the next’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree), as those who have experience of domestic violence are often ‘condemned to repeat it’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Male, Disagree). They felt that dealing with issues around domestic violence might help young men develop anger management skills and prevent them from becoming perpetrators of such violence in the future. These parents believed that ‘prevention is better than cure’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree) therefore being proactive and including such issues in schools may help prevent domestic violence from occurring in the future.

Finally, parents felt that young men needed to be made aware that ‘men can be victims of domestic violence too’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree). They believed that some young men may ‘feel it isn’t very macho to be a victim of domestic violence’
(Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree) and they need to understand that ‘there isn’t any shame in seeking help for domestic violence’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree)

**Sex education**

The majority of both sets of respondents (phase one and three) were in favour of the inclusion of sex education on the school curriculum. No differences emerged in relation to how male and female respondents or phase one and phase three respondents answered this question.

Overall, two main arguments emerged from the data in favour of the inclusion of this topic. Firstly, parents indicated that many young men may not be fully aware of accurate information relating to this issue and ‘sometimes they can get the wrong information so they should be taught the truth instead of believing half truths or whole lies’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree). Parents argued that it would be best to learn about such issues from a knowledgeable source rather than ‘learning it incorrectly or inappropriately from peers’ (Member COMPASS: Male, Agree). It was felt that often young men ‘don’t know enough about their own bodies and girls bodies and how easy it is to become pregnant and to contact STD’s’ therefore schools need to provide young men with the relevant information (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree).

Secondly, parents commented on the current poverty of effort put into addressing sex education with boys in Irish post primary schools, for example:

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46 85% of Phase one respondents believed that women were the main victims of domestic violence, while 13% believed it was equal numbers of men and women and 2% believed it was men. In saying this however, a number indicated that the figures on male victims of domestic violence could be higher than reported as women are more able to seek help on such issues e.g. ‘while I recognise women’s suffering from domestic violence, I feel that there are more male victims out there that we don’t know about due to stigma’.

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My sons have been in post-primary school for five years and there hasn’t been any sex education yet (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree)

These issues are not being addressed properly with boys in secondary schools in comparison to girls. In a lot of cases sex education is not addressed at all (Questionnaire Respondent: Male, Agree)

The Department of Education and Science needs to provide more resources to schools to educate young men on sex education (Questionnaire Respondent: Male, Agree).

It was suggested that boys were disadvantaged when it comes to education on sexual issues as ‘girls have more opportunities to access these topics in school – boys are not even offered basis sex education’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree).

**Bullying**

The majority of both sets of questionnaire respondents (phase one and three) were in favour of the inclusion of bullying on the post primary school curriculum. No differences emerged in relation to how male and female respondents or phase one and phase three respondents answered this question.

Two main arguments for the inclusion of this topic emerged from the data. Firstly, respondents believed that bullying was ‘a constant’ issue within Irish society, and was ‘so prevalent in Ireland especially amongst young males’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Unsure). These respondents indicated that bullying ‘is a major issue. Bullying can be done in such a subtle underhand way that it is difficult to detect but reeks havoc in young men’
A few years ago my son did a small survey in school as part of his CSPE class. He looked at attitudes to violence and exposure to violence in first and fifth years in post primary school. What was evident was that people’s attitudes changed, for the worse, as they got older. Behaviour that the first year identified as violence was not identified by fifth years. This worsening of attitudes happened in post primary school and needs to be addressed in that form (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Unsure)

Secondly, respondents commented on the current lack of effort made by schools to combat bullying with a number believing that ‘bullying needs to be brought to the fore front and not brushed under the carpet’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Disagree). These parents believed that ‘principals are not dealing with the verbal put downs that occur each day in schools’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree) and ‘my son’s bullying could have been avoided if the predominance towards macho-ism was challenged’ (Interviewee: Male, Disagree).

Another parent shared her personal experience of dealing with bullying:

My son went to an all boys primary school and was very popular until he got to fourth class. Then he would come home with tales of boys calling him names. We thought we had an over sensitive son and while we would not promote violence by telling him to hit back, we often wished that it would turn physical as it is easier to prove physical bullying. By sixth class we ran out of the school. We learned from other parents that it was quite common in the school…. being a victim I think that is
the most damaging part of the whole bullying cycle. I truly feel that it is in the school that this behaviour has to stop (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Unsure)

**Additional social and personal topics that could be included on the school curriculum**

Beyond the topics listed, parents across phase one, two and three suggested a number of other topics that could be included on the school curriculum.

Parents saw the need for the school to include such issues as communication skills; substance abuse/addictions (alcohol, drugs and gambling); positive masculine identities; increased sense of self-worth and self-confidence, conflict resolution, being able to think for themselves, the physical and emotional problems of adolescence, social skills, interview skills, life skills, safe driving, manners and courtesy, civic pride and dealing with emotions.

While a number of parent’s suggested additional topics others believed that instilling respect and developing values in young men would be more effective than including a long list of individual topics on the school curriculum. These parents called for schools to ‘create a culture of tolerance and respect for each individual person’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Unsure) while some were ‘not so sure that teaching boys about the topics mentioned on the questionnaire works as effectively as inculcating an attitude of tolerance and respect and promoting care and concern within the whole community’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Unsure).

Some additional typical comments include:

Self respect, respect for people you are dealing with, treat others as you expect to be treated yourself. If that gets through to a number of kids I think everything else will fall into place (Interviewee: Male, Disagree)
I think as a society we have developed and progressed but maybe its time to regress and go back to core values. The importance of accepting people for who they are and what they are has, I feel, been lost. Maybe this recession will rekindle people’s respect (Member NPAVSCC: Female, Agree)

The men of the future, which are the young men of today, need to learn tolerance, kindness, gentleness and acceptance of all people (Member FEDCBS: Female, Agree)

In relation to respect for others, a number of parents indicated that they would like attitudes towards ethnic minorities included on the school curriculum.

The majority of phase two and phase three respondents (interviewees and members of parent association) could not think of any topic they would not want included on the school curriculum. Parents believed that ‘any topic should be dealt with. I don’t think there should be anything that is hidden’ (Interviewee: Female, Agree) and there should be ‘no limits to what is explored in schools’ (Member NPAVSCC: Male, Agree). Those that felt this way believed that young men ‘were going to be exposed to everything in life and would prefer they hear it from a professional knowledgeable source rather than picking it up second hand from conversations’ (Interviewee: Male, Agree).

Summary of findings
The majority of phase one and phase three respondents agreed with the inclusion of EM topics, such as homosexuality, homophobia and domestic violence, being included in the school curriculum. Parents agreed with such inclusion on the basis that, for example, such issues are of relevance to young men and schools are currently not doing enough to examine these issues. Outside of the topics listed on the questionnaire, additional topics were proposed: it was suggested by some that respect for oneself and others should be the starting point.
Concerns in relation to the inclusion of certain topics in the exploration of masculinities

Some concerns were expressed in relation to the inclusion of EM topics (and other related social and personal topics) on the school curriculum. These concerns related to the sensitivity of some of the topics and the extent to which some topics may result in young men being victimised. Parents also worried that young men may not be mature enough to deal with some aspects of the content. The ability of teachers to deal with this content, based on their level of teacher development in the area, was a concern for a number of parents. David Hegarty also raised concerns regarding the ‘pseudo agreement’ students are encouraged to make prior to participating in such programmes. These five issues are discussed below.

Content may be too sensitive

It was suggested that some EM topics may too sensitive to address in a school environment. This was particularly true in relation to such issues as suicide and domestic violence. For example, some parents feared that discussing suicide in class might be upsetting for students who have experienced this in their lives or who were dealing with related issues e.g. ‘if a child was after going through suicide in the family and they were in school and discussing it, it may bring back feelings and your child could come home upset and you wouldn’t know why’ (Interviewee: Female, Disagree). These parents doubted that such issues ‘would be dealt with comprehensively and sensitively in the school setting keeping in mind that each class would have a number of members suffering from various degrees of depression’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Male, Disagree).

Similar concerns were expressed in relation to dealing with issues of domestic violence in a school setting as this ‘may be upsetting for a number of kids especially if there is domestic
violence in their home’ (Interviewee: Male, Disagree). Parents felt that those experiencing
domestic violence in their lives would be unlikely to openly share their experiences in a
classroom setting. For example:

There could be young men in the class that may have to deal with domestic
violence at home. It may upset them. It’s not something they would come out with
and say that they are having these kinds of problems (Interviewee: Female, Agree)

Unfortunately it’s very difficult for a child to walk into a class and talk about
domestic violence. Even if it is discussed in class, children who are in this situation
certainly aren’t going to discuss it in front of 30 students (Interviewee: Male,
Disagree)

Dealing with these issues may result in the victimisation of young men
There was a fear that including such issues as homosexuality may result in some young men
being ‘victimised’, ‘isolated’ and ‘picked on’. Parents that were concerned about this felt that
focusing on such issues might make some students ‘feel self conscious and give students ideas
against them’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Unsure). They feared that addressing issues
around sexual orientation may be frightening for homosexual young men as, for example, ‘in a
class of thirty students, one or two may be gay. I think they would have more of a chance of
being victimised. Others who say that it is their choice and indicate that they have no problem
with them being gay, would be more likely to be tarred with the same brush’ (Interviewee: Male,
Disagree). It was suggested that the ‘school climate would not allow discussion on issues
of sexuality for fear of ridicule and bullying’ (Interviewee: Male, Disagree). One mother’s
advice was as follows: ‘never come out to your peers or in school. It is a proven disaster’
(Interviewee: Agree).
Young men may not be mature enough to deal with these issues

Questions were raised regarding student’s ability to deal with some of the EM content, due to their level of maturity. These parents believed that young men at the beginning of senior cycle might not be mature enough at this stage of their development to deal with such issues as sexual orientation, relationships and suicide appropriately. Therefore, ‘it depends on the maturity of students. I believe some of them would be able to discuss issues on sexual orientation and some wouldn’t’ (Interviewee: Female, Disagree). While ‘some young men are ready for discussion on issues around relationships based on maturity and experience’ (Member PACCS: Male, Agree) others are not. These parents feared that this immaturity may result in a ‘more jokey approach’ (Interviewee: Female, Disagree) to discussion at school and it would make it more difficult to get ‘beyond the silly responses’ (Interviewee: Female, Agree).

Parents were particularly concerned about young men’s level of maturity and their ability to deal with the issue of suicide adequately. It was suggested that young men at senior cycle might not be mature enough to process information relating to suicide. Such discussion on suicide might ‘present an option to immature minds as they can not assimilate topics like suicide at their age’ (Interviewee: Female, Disagree). Parents feared that discussion on suicide, if ‘over emphasised, may give immature minds the wrong idea’ (Interviewee: Female, Disagree) and provide them ‘with an option if things aren’t going well? There are a lot of insecure young men out there and if it is discussed they may see it as an option and the cool thing to do’ (Interviewee: Male, Disagree). These parents feared that such discussion may create a ‘copycat’, ‘revenge factors’ and can be ‘myth-making’ (Member FEDCBS: Female, Unsure), with some believing that there are ‘too many fake suicides in society today’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Disagree).
**Inadequate levels of teacher development**

Teacher development was a major worry for parents across all three phases, with parents expressing concern that teachers were not adequately ‘trained’ to deal with EM issues. This is reflected in the fact that the majority of phase three respondents (members of the parent association) were either unsure or disagreed (72%) that teachers were adequately prepared to deal with EM related issues. The majority of these parents indicated that they lacked sufficient information regarding the levels of teacher development in the area to agree.

It was suggested that levels of teacher development were not adequate in preparing teacher to deal with EM related issues as ‘when they have studied a BA they do not study such issues as domestic violence’ and ‘a few in-service days here and there does not equal training’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Unsure). One mother, whose husband was a teacher, described him ‘as a kind man but he is not qualified to lecture, discuss or counsel on these issues. Teachers are not qualified’ (Interviewee: Female, Disagree). These parents felt that, ‘teachers receive no specific training on how to deal with these issues’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree), consequently ‘are not trained to take on this role’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Male, Agree) and ‘there is no real training in place; there is no real protocol on how to deal with issues generally’ (Interviewee: Male, Agree).

Parents had reservations on such issues being included when levels of teacher development in the area were low as ‘untrained people can do more harm than good’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Unsure). These parents felt that in the absence of proper training and support for teachers these topics would be better off not included. They feared that if teachers were not suitably trained then ‘such programmes might be worse than ‘school yard’ learning’ (Member COMPASS: Male, Agree).
Some feared that teachers who teach such classes are merely ‘filling in teaching hours’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Unsure) resulting in ‘some guy who is normally a biology/woodwork teacher being told to go in there and teach SPHE. This person doesn’t know how to deal with these issues and may be passing on more error than fact’ (Interviewee: Female, Disagree). These parents would be unsure, for example ‘if a maths teacher was told to go in and give this type of lesson. They may not be comfortable doing this’ (Interviewee: Female, Disagree).

**Reaching a pseudo agreement**

A further concern raised by David Hegarty related to the practice of encouraging students to sign or reach what he referred to as ‘a pseudo agreement’ prior to participating in social and personal education classes. By reaching such agreement students are encouraged to feel that ‘what we say in here is private’ so that students will feel safe discussing private and personal issues. David indicated that he found such an approach ‘profoundly objectionable’ as it was turning the classroom into a ‘therapy centre’. David Hegarty felt that:

> People shouldn’t be invited to make, what could be potentially embarrassing disclosures. People are under 18 years of age. They are not adults. While the teacher is in charge in the classroom, the ethos of the school has to have primacy and parent’s rights must be respected. Without reference to those kinds of norms, nobody should be attempting to set a pattern of ‘what we say in here is private’
Summary of findings

Parents that expressed concern regarding the involvement of the school in the exploration of masculinities with young men stated a number of key concerns. Parents were worried that some of the issues mentioned were too sensitive to explore in a school environment, with such exploration possibly resulting in some students becoming upset or being victimised. Others questioned young men’s ability to discuss such issues due to their level of maturity, while for others lack of teacher development was an issue.
Section Two: The views of a sample of journalists towards the Exploration of Masculinities with young men in school

As outlined in Chapter one, among the most vocal critics of the Exploring Masculinities programme (along with members of CSPA) were a number of journalists, who discussed aspects of EM in the media around the time of its development and launch. In order to establish the views of journalists, interviews were conducted with four influential journalists (Breda O’Brien, David Quinn, Kevin Myers and John Waters) who contributed to the media debate on EM. The findings of these four interviews are presented under the four headings outlined previously. Where relevant the reaction and views of the Project Coordinator of EM are presented after the journalists views.

Attitudes towards the primary purpose of school

Two of the four journalists viewed the school as playing an important role in the social and personal development of young men. For example, Breda O’Brien believed that the involvement of the school in the exploration of masculinities with young men was ‘positive and vitally important’ while John Waters felt that ‘talking to boys about their journey into manhood is an intrinsic element of the education system’.

David Quinn (while acknowledging that schools do play a role in such forms of education) questioned the feasibility and practically of actually doing this. He felt that any new programme that is introduced into schools needs to ‘justify itself and show why it deserves to take time away from the mainstream’. Both he and Kevin Myers questioned the extent to

47 Each journalist is identified by name, as outlined in the methodology chapter
which schools could succeed in educating young men on EM issues within the allocated timeframe. For example:

I certainly see schools having a role in citizenship education and it’s not all about the core subjects. There has to be more to education obviously or you wouldn’t have things like sport in school. However, there is an extremely overcrowded curriculum. I want my children to come out of school with knowledge of particular subject areas. We have growing concerns in Ireland around literacy standards and yet they find time to put in a programme like EM (David Quinn).

Schools cannot focus on holistic development in the office hours of academic life. It doesn’t have the time or the resources to develop this in pupils and to educate them. You have one teacher in a class of 35 pupils – it is not up to him or her to change the habits of all his/her pupils. What the teacher can do is fine tune a person’s social conduct. If societal norms have gone from society it’s almost impossible for schools to impose them. If it does try to impose them it then has to sacrifice its educational duties (Kevin Myers).

The Project Coordinator of EM, Peadar King, viewed the primary purpose of education to be about ‘developing a curiosity in students and for students to be motivated and inspired’. He believed that education ought to be broad in nature and should encourage students to develop an understanding of the world in which they live. He suggested that education should ‘give students time and space to think about things that are not very exam orientated, education should develop a curiosity about the world’. Peadar raised concerns regarding the narrow prescriptive nature of the current education system. He feared that students nowadays have ‘an appalling lack of knowledge about the world in which they live’. He viewed education as becoming increasingly regressive, exam focused and narrowed. As a result, schooling is
becoming ‘less inspiring and less focused on curiosity’. Within the current education system, he feels that enjoyment isn’t viewed as important.

**The role of the home in the exploration of masculinities**

While two of the four journalists (and to a lesser extent David Quinn) broadly agreed that the school should play some role in the exploration of masculinities, all four journalists stressed the important role played by parents and the home in the social and personal development of young men. A number of journalists drew attention to the fact that such education begins in the home, with parents being the primary educators of their children with schools playing a subsidiary but supportive role. For example:

Most of the discipline occurs at the hearth. It is a family project. The school fine tunes the product that is produced in the household. What you learn in school are relatively small things. They are small additions to the cultural creation of the home. The school cannot compensate for the inadequacies of the home (Kevin Myers)

School based social and personal education is no replacement for the development that is going on at home (Breda O’Brien)

Concerns were also raised in relation to the continuous encroachment of the State in social and personal education, with questions being asked in relation to the ability of the State to do this in an effective and appropriate manner. For example, ‘if parents are not the primary educators it has to be a third party. That third party is more than likely going to be the State. Who says the State does things well? Most of the evidence would tell us that they actually do
things rather badly – if you take the health services as an example’ (David Quinn). It was suggested that in recent years parents have become accustomed to the State taking more and more responsibly for the social and personal education of their children and as a result parents no longer view themselves as having a primary role in this form of education. This results in:

People’s springs of action being uncoiled as they continue to delegate things to the State that they traditionally knew they had to handle themselves. To a certain degree this happens with parents when it comes to education, they figure the State is doing all that now so they don’t need to think about it too much (David Quinn)

Attitudes towards the values underpinning the exploration of masculinities

All four journalists made references to the values underpinning EM. A major concern for them was the fact that EM was, in their view, based solely on a feminist ideology. The concept of gender as a social construct was also a dominant discussion point during the interviews. The views of the journalists in these two areas are outlined below.

Feminist ideology

The four journalists expressed concern regarding what they perceived to be an underlying feminist ideology behind the Exploring Masculinities Programme.

Their comments related to:

- EM and feminist ideology
- Feminist ideology within Irish society.
These two issues are discussed below. The reactions of Peadar King, the Project Coordinator of EM, are presented at the end of the section.

**EM and feminist ideology**

The four journalists felt that EM was based solely on a feminist viewpoint. For example, David Quinn viewed the thinking behind EM as a ‘pretty extreme version of feminism’. Breda O’Brien, who identified herself as a feminist, explained how she had called for specific attention to be paid to the social and personal needs of young men prior to EM but was ultimately ‘disappointed by what emerged as it was definitely from a feminist ideological camp’ (Breda O’Brien). This was supported by both Kevin Myers and John Waters who stated that:

> EM was an entirely feminist programme. The overall aim was to engineer men in such a fashion as to make them agreeable to feminist demands. I don’t want maleness interfered with, doctored with, or changed by ideological driven zealots that are called feminists (Kevin Myers)

> EM represents a particular ideology of a faction…..I got the sense that this was a programme which came from a very narrow ideological perspective and it seemed to me to be an attempt to indoctrinate young men, at a very vulnerable and critical point of their adolescence (John Waters)
A particular concern in relation to this ideology was that the journalists believed it to be anti-male and represented masculinity in a negative light, ‘as if they were inferior to girls’ (Breda O’Brien) or ‘beyond redemption and toxic’ (John Waters). There was a feeling that such an ideology could result in young men feeling resentful, guilty and unsure about their male identities. For example, Kevin Myers felt that:

I felt the cold chill of someone who was in the company of really hated boys. I got the sense that EM was devised by a group of people who just disliked maleness (Kevin Myers)

Furthermore, there was a concern that EM, drawing on an anti-male feminist ideology, was attempting to alter male identities:

EM was clearly an attempt to say to young men that the models of masculinity they were proffered by the older generations were damaging to them and were bad, not only to themselves but to society and they needed to rethink them and find a different way of being. That is a dangerous thing to set about doing. You could certainly have a discussion about these things but to have a one-sided programme forced on them as truth is dangerous (John Waters)

The ideology behind EM was that the only sex that needs to be engineered in any way is the male sex. The female sex is fine as it is. This is ridiculous. Orwell would have understood this (Kevin Myers)
Due to the fact that, according to the journalists, EM was based on ‘anti-male’ feminist ideologies, it was suggested that young men may ‘react against it and question why the hell they were doing this?’ (Breda O’Brien). It was also felt that young men may not see any value in the messages portrayed within the programme. Two examples follow:

**Example 1:**

Young men would see through all of this and if they can see through it what is the point. You are not going to foul them. In fact, you will probably turn them against you and they will become resentful if you are trying to shove this stuff down their throats (John Waters)

**Example 2:**

**David Quinn:** I don’t think people particularly trusted that if you put the upbringing of boys into the hands of a pretty extreme version of feminist ideology you get what you want. In fact you might get the opposite of what you want

**Orla:** So did you feel that boys could turn against what was taught?

**David:** I think if you don’t present the boy with a convincing male role model they will go elsewhere. They might find a role model that would be very destructive. Teaching softness doesn’t actually appeal to boys

It was suggested that young men would not be the only ones to reject such forms of masculinity, as women would do likewise e.g. ‘women would reject it because it is not what they want from men’ (John Waters), evident in the fact that ‘new men don’t get dates’ (Breda O’Brien).
**Feminist ideology within Irish society**

Leading on from this discussion on the feminist ideology underpinning EM, the journalists highlighted the lack of critical debate and questioning of certain ‘ideological truths’ and values within Irish society. John Waters, Kevin Myers and David Quinn all referred to the conformist nature of Irish society and to the fact that discussion and debate on controversial issues, such as feminist ideology, rarely takes place. It was suggested that once an idea or belief becomes accepted within society, it is no longer contested e.g. ‘we are a single idea society. Once an idea becomes fashionable it is not questioned’ (Kevin Myers) and ‘certain ideas become popular, fashionable and are almost impossible to challenge’ (John Waters). As a result of this reluctance to challenge taken for granted ideologies, it was suggested that Irish society ‘ends up as rigidly and ruthlessly consensus driven as in the past…freedom goes down the drain… any sensible society will hold a variety of values in balance’ (David Quinn).

Possible reasons as to why debate and discussion on these issues does not occur were advanced by some journalists:

Culturally when someone creates a moral impediment, we do not want to confront it. In our culture when you have an idea that is implicitly regarded as virtuous it is almost like water, in that public sentiment follows the path of least resistance. People are anxious not to become embroiled in this debate out of fear (John Waters)
Cowardice. Nothing is contested. This is not a society that tolerates descent. This is not an open society in which people exchange ideas and in which ideas are carefully reflected upon and thought out and then rejected, diluted or accepted. This society wants and likes conformity……..Feminism is just about unquestioned and unchallenged. People in the media do not attack feminist projects. They know the likely outcome is the lynch mob. It’s a black crow society that will mob the white crow (Kevin Myers)

This conformity was advanced as a possible explanation for men’s reluctance or inability to stand up to or challenge feminist ideologies. It was suggested, by John Waters, that men are slow to question feminist viewpoints because they ‘don’t want to rock the boat’, because they ‘couldn’t be arsed’ and because they ‘want to win the affections of women. That is basically why men get out of bed in the morning!’ (John Waters).

A further reason advanced by journalists for the lack of contestation of feminist ideology was the growing dominance of political correctness within Irish society. David Quinn and John Waters referred to this and questioned the benefits of a politically correct society. There was a feeling that political correctness prevented people from speaking their mind and ultimately ‘is against freedom’ as it ‘prevents people from expressing their opinions and from having a different point of view’ (David Quinn). John Waters believed that political correctness forces certain issues ‘underground’ resulting in an ‘extreme reaction emerging’. For example, ‘in the last few years the word ‘gay’ has become a term of abuse in a way that it never was before. It is now a generic word for stupid. That has never happened before and it is a direct response to politically correct thinking’ (John Waters).

This lack of contestation was also related to the reaction of the Department of Education and Science and the Minister for Education at the time to the Exploring
Masculinities Programme. For example, John Waters felt that the DES did not want to engage with this issue and instead of discussing it, they wished ‘to close the discussion down and didn’t allow any discussion to take place’.

**Essentialism versus social constructivism**

The fact that Exploring Masculinities was based on the premise of gender as a social construct was a concern for the four journalists. It is important to note however, that all four journalists acknowledged the varying influence society exerts on one’s gender formation but they questioned the presentation of gender as solely a social construct. For example, Breda O’Brien, while acknowledging that society does impact on one’s gender behaviour, felt that:

> Problems arise when people embrace this ideology completely and start to downplay the fact that there are genetically predisposed aspects to identity. The danger then is that you start taking an entirely constructed view on what the female gender is about and start imposing it on the male gender. People who do this are totally devoid of any sense of irony because that is what they despised happening to them – a version of womanhood been imposed on them from a male perspective. A mere 20 or 30 years after the feminist revolution they are planning to do it to young men.

The fact that EM was based on the premise of gender as a social construct encouraged David Quinn to participate in the media debate in the first place as he felt that ‘once that was the underlying philosophy the entire programme was built on faulty foundations’. Again, while acknowledging the influence of society on one’s behaviour, both Kevin Myers and John Waters deemed biological factors more influential:
The behaviour and experiences of every society in the world tells us that men are different from women. The primary impetus for behaviour is genetic and you cannot programme one sex to do something that is apathetical to their nature……. Child birth is not a social construct, nor is rape. These are genetic things (Kevin Myers)

A man is a man and a woman is a woman. There are certain indisputable facts about biology and child bearing. Really for those nine months, to begin with, there isn’t a lot of flexibility. The man cannot carry a baby. This has consequences and distinguishes men and women. This is not a social construct. This is a biological reality (John Waters)

The reaction of the Project Coordinator of EM to criticisms regarding the ideologies underpinning EM

The Project Coordinator, Peadar King, believed that EM was attempting to engage young men in a debate on issues around gender equality and to explore the ideas of democratic relationships between men and women. He thought that EM was ‘underpinned by very simple concepts such as fairness, equality, inclusiveness and respect for others’.

When asked for his reaction to the criticisms of the ideologies underpinning EM, the Project Coordinator indicated that the writing group did not discuss the various ideologies and theories that could and would underpin the Exploring Masculinities Programme prior to selecting content e.g. ‘I don't recall us having that conversation in any great depth. We may have skirted the issue’. Therefore they did not debate whether the concept of gender as a social construct should be advanced within EM nor did they debate whether EM should be based on a particular ideology. According to the Project Coordinator ‘this was largely a group of
practitioners. There wasn’t any theoretical debate going on. We didn’t sit around discussing theoretical issues’. The group were more concerned with what ‘they needed to do and how they were going to do it rather than why they were doing it’. However, the Project Coordinator and Project Director did discuss such issues and the Coordinator indicated that, for example, ‘gender as a social construct would have informed and influenced my work as I was aware of this through my previous work and writings prior to my involvement in this writing group’. Additionally, the Coordinator was influenced by his own personal relationship with feminists and by the fact that he had an interest in human rights issues from a young age. These influences ‘would have coloured [his] thinking on feminist issues’.

Peadar King found it difficult to accept the journalist’s views that EM was an anti-male programme. He suggested that critics tend to see what they want and ‘hone in on certain aspects of the programme. They didn’t like it and they were going to stop it’. He also questioned whether ‘if you challenge patriarchy are you anti-male?’ Instead he argued that the main critics of the programme were made up of ‘lay conservative right wing’ individuals who were interested in maintaining the status quo and didn’t want change.

The Project Coordinator agreed with John Waters in relation to the reaction of the DES and Minister for Education and Science towards EM. He suggested that the Minister viewed EM as a ‘political hot potato’ that needed to be ‘kicked to touch’.
Attitudes towards the content included in the exploration of masculinities

The journalists outlined aspects of EM that they viewed positively. However, a number of concerns were expressed in relation to aspects of the content of EM. These are portrayed below. The reaction of the Project Coordinator to the journalists' concerns is then outlined.

Positive aspects of EM

The journalists (mainly Breda O’Brien and John Waters) identified aspects of the Exploring Masculinities Programme they deemed positive, namely the sections dealing with bullying, alternative careers, men in caring roles and positive male role models. For example, John Waters felt that:

The bullying section was wonderful because what it said was: abandon all your prejudices about what a bully might look like or what a victim of bullying might look like. Sometimes it might be a younger person bullying an older person. It might be a girl bullying a boy so this is a much more sophisticated and subtle phenomenon than anyone understands.

David Quinn, while not able to remember specific aspects of EM that he deemed suitable, indicated that he understood the overall aim of the programme. In saying this however, he felt that EM may not have been the best approach to achieving these aims. As
evident in the following excerpt Kevin Myers struggled to identify any positive element of the Exploring Masculinities Programme:

**Orla:** Were there aspects of the programme that you liked?

**Kevin:** Nothing. As I said I didn’t stay with it all so there may have been wonderful aspects to it but I didn’t see any reason to be optimistic.

Reflective of this a number of concerns emerged in relation to aspects of the EM material. In total four main concerns were identified. These related to the selective nature of the EM content, the imbalanced nature of two sections of the programme (sexuality and domestic violence/sexual harassment) and the superficial nature of the content. These four issues are outlined below.

**Selective nature of EM content**

It was suggested that the messages portrayed and the content of the resource material were selective in nature. There was a feeling that the resource pack was devised based purely on the purpose of presenting a feminist ideology. The following excerpt from the interview with John Waters portrays his view on this selectivity:

**John:** By the time EM was developed, I was writing about men’s issues for five or six years, maybe more. I am not mentioned in the resource pack. Every kind of a male writer that they could find is in here. Many of whom have never written about men.

**Orla:** Do you think that you were kept out intentionally?
**John:** Yes. There is no question that the idea was ‘that guy is not getting anywhere near this’. Ok, put in an article by me and ask them what do they think of this? Is it bullshit or not? So guys doing this can decide whether they agree with it or not. There is clearly tendentiousness and selectivity about this that is unhealthy. That alerted me as well to the problem.

**Orla:** So am I correct in thinking that you felt they only wanted certain views portrayed within EM?

**John:** Yes, what was selected was from a particular perspective. Fundamentally, that is my problem in that I was aware of so much richness in a whole load of writers that could have really been brought to bare in introducing young men to manhood –but they were not included. My point is that there is so much wisdom about this yet it was wilfully ignored in this programme.

In this regard, concerns were raised regarding the approach adopted by the EM writing group in selecting content for EM. The journalists questioned the lack of consultation and minimal involvement of personnel outside of the writing group in the selection of content for Exploring Masculinities. It was suggested that content for EM was devised ‘in a superstitious manner, without any reference to parents or a democratic process’ (John Waters) and ‘wasn’t a general application of will from different sources’ (Kevin Myers). This was supported by David Quinn who indicated, for example, that ‘the Gender Equality Unit, which no one has ever heard of, came up with this and slipped it in to schools, without any debate and after consultation with a tiny handful of people who were going to have the right views from the developers point of view anyway’.
Imbalanced nature of the section on sexuality

Concerns were raised, by John Waters, regarding the overemphasis on homosexuality in comparison to heterosexuality within the EM resource pack. He felt that this was a ‘denial of reality as we have a situation where 99% of boys are facing a context of heterosexuality yet overwhelmingly the treatment of relationships within the programme was on homosexuality. Again that was an ideological denial of reality; it wasn’t a random accidental element’. He suggested that this denial was reflective of the underlying feminist ideology previously mentioned. Outside of the imbalanced nature of the EM content, John Waters raised concerns regarding what he perceived to be an over-emphasis on sexuality within Irish society. While he believes that sexuality is a factor in a person’s identity he felt it should not be the starting point for dealing with issues relating to the treatment of others and while both himself and Breda O’Brien acknowledged the high levels of homophobia in Irish society, particularly amongst young men, he suggested that the current approach to examining sexuality issues is not effective as ‘the more you take this approach the more homophobia develops. Homophobia seems to be directly as a result of this attempt to say to young men that they must accept homosexuality’ (John Waters).

Imbalanced portrayal of domestic violence and sexual harassment

Again, concerns were raised regarding the portrayal of domestic violence as a solely male phenomenon within the EM resource material (i.e. something men did to women). Two of the four journalists indicated that they viewed this particular section as ‘terribly imbalanced’ (Breda O’Brien). It was suggested that this imbalance would prevent young men, who were experiencing such violence or harassment in their lives, from seeking help. While, as previously outlined, John Waters agreed with the approach adopted within the bullying section
of EM\(^48\), he found that a similar approach was not adopted within the domestic violence section, resulting in young men being:

Expected to abandon the messages they got from the bullying section. The domestic violence section assumes that sometime around the age of 16 or 17 an entirely new logic infects the human species. Girls, who were previously capable of being bullies, are no longer bullies. Males, who were previously capable of being bullied, are no longer capable of being victims. You would really have to question their judgment and intelligence that they were actually capable of putting those two sections in almost side by side yet not recognize that there was a problem of coherence between the two.

Both Breda O’Brien and John Waters identified similar concerns with the section of Exploring Masculinities on sexual harassment – as they felt that it focused mainly on men sexually harassing women and did not deal with the reverse, for example, ‘it doesn’t acknowledge the possibility that a young man might be subjected to sexual harassment by an older woman in a work situation or if you were sexually harassed by a homosexual’ (John Waters). Overall John Waters felt that the imbalanced nature of this content was assuming that ‘one side is all good and the other side is all bad’. This was supported by Breda O’Brien who indicated that EM did not acknowledge that ‘you may have a young man who was sexually abused by a female. How could he deal with that? How could he cope with that?’

\(^{48}\) Where young men were encouraged to suspend their views on what a perpetrator or victim of bullying may be or look like
Superficial nature of content

Outside of the imbalanced nature of some aspects of EM, John Waters raised further concerns regarding the complexity, or lack there of, of the EM content. He referred to the content as ‘very simplistic, insipid and in general is pretty banal stuff’. He felt that the programme lacked depth and ultimately avoided any critical analysis of the views that were presented within the programme.

Furthermore, he felt that aspects of the content did not encourage young men to think critically on the issues in question. An example, where he felt this was evident, was:

The section on ‘black culture and black life’ with Bob Marley. He is only in here because he is black. He is a member of Rastafarianism. Even within the logic of this module, the politics of Rastafarian in relation to women are deeply dubious, far more than you would find in any Muslim or even in an extreme right wing Christian society. Yet this isn’t talked about. He is presented as a role model purely because he is black. There is no discussion on whether or not Rastafarian is such a hip creed as it is implied here.

Concerns were also raised, again by John Waters, in relation to the ‘very short, superficial section’ on mental health within Exploring Masculinities. This is illustrated in the following excerpt:
Orla: As you said yourself you were one of the few or only journalists in the 1990s to highlight the high rate of suicides amongst young men. What were your views on the treatment of suicide in EM?

John: I can’t remember what was in it. *(Looks through resource material)*. If it is under the mental health section it is very short. There is very little about it. I think there is no real emphasis on it. I don’t feel any confidence in a programme which would actually set out a section on mental health that is so bland and superficial.

Reaction of the Project Coordinator of EM to the criticisms made by journalists regarding the content of EM

According to the Project Coordinator, the writing group placed a large amount of energy and emphasis on selecting, preparing and organising material for the EM booklet. The remit under which the group worked was to produce a resource pack for the programme. Therefore, as stated above, the group did not discuss the values underpinning the selected content and activities. As a result of this, discussion within the writing group focused on the merits and demerits of particular activities and content, rather than on the values that would underpin the programme. The group initially devised headings and categories that would be included in the final booklet. The selections made here were influenced by members of the group own personal interests. For example, ‘one member of the group was a career guidance counsellor and suggested the heading of work while another member suggested the topic of sport’. The Project Coordinator then prepared material in advance of the following meeting, where it was then discussed by the group. Some activities were selected and others were rejected. Due to the fact that the group did not discuss the ideological underpinnings of their work, selections and
rejections were made on the grounds that the activities and content would ‘not be practical and wouldn’t work in the classroom’.

The Project Coordinator indicated that the writing group on EM did not consult or engage with other groups or organisations sufficiently while developing the programme. As stated above, the emphasis was placed on devising a resource book and the entire process of curriculum development ‘revolved around getting the resource pack together’. The writing group did not focus on forming alliances with external agencies nor with getting the views of a range of different organisations. Peadar King believed that the writing group were too narrow in its focus and should have engaged with other organizations and agencies during the process of curriculum selection.

The Project Coordinator acknowledged that the group invested too much energy into developing material for EM and as a result other activities were neglected e.g. discussion on ideological underpinnings of programmes; making links with schools and organisations etc. According to the Coordinator instead of adopting this ‘solo-run’ approach more time needed to be set aside to ‘explain what they were doing, to work with principals and unions and to get feedback from people’. He also suggested that there was a need for an advisory group that would provide feedback to the writing group on the work they were doing.

On being asked to respond to the claim made by journalists that EM was selective in nature, the Project Coordinator indicated that he did not understand such claims as ‘everything is selected. When these journalists write articles they make selections’. He questioned why the selection of curriculum for EM was subjected to scrutiny but yet the history and science curriculums, for example, are not. He believed that ‘nobody questions the ideologies or the selection within these subjects. For example, in History class now they don’t study the Vietnam War, they study the reaction of the USA to Vietnam! This is a selection but the ideologies underpinning other aspects of curriculum are not questioned’. The Project
Coordinator acknowledged that the writing group did make selections and that if a different group were invited to devise EM, they may have made different choices: ‘the question is whether or not we made balanced choices?’

In relation to claims that aspects of EM were imbalanced, particularly sections on sexuality and domestic violence, the Project Coordinator viewed such claims as ‘wholly without foundation’ on the basis that:

There are two sessions given over to the subject of sexuality out of a total of 76 i.e. 2.6% of the whole resource. And in the first of those two lessons, there is equal reference to homosexuality and heterosexuality. While numbers differ radically a conservative estimate is that 5% of any population is homosexual. So in that context we probably downplayed it!

The Project Coordinator highlighted the homophobic nature of some aspects of society (although he suggested that such views are ‘dissipating somewhat’) particularly in single sex boys schools ‘where it is more difficult for boys to be open about their sexuality’. As a result the Project Coordinator felt that the writing group ‘would have been completely remiss if they did not address issues of homosexuality and homophobia’.

Similar comments were made in relation to claims that the portrayal of domestic violence within EM was unbalanced. He referred to the fact that the United Nations view domestic violence against women as the ‘biggest global challenge’ facing them in the twenty-first century. He indicated that violence refers to ‘domestic violence, physical beatings, trafficking, kidnapping, imprisonment and much of the pornographic industry’ – of which he feels men are the main perpetrators. He indicated that men are also victims, and made particular reference to male-on-male violence. ‘Given what has emerged in recent times about the abuse of and violence against children, EM was one of the few public places where
children could participate in a discussion on this issue’. As a result of this he believed that claims that EM presented issues of domestic violence in an unbalanced manner were again ‘wholly without foundation’.

Summary of findings

Three of the four journalists believed that the school had some role to play in the development of young men on EM related issues. Concerns were raised however in relation to how the school might effectively do this within the allocated time frame. Questions were raised in relation to the increasing involvement of the State in forms of education, previously considered the remit of the home. While the journalists identified some positive aspects of EM, these were outnumbered and overshadowed by the concerns raised in relation to the programme. Such concerns related to, for example, the dominance of the feminist ideology within the programme, the representation of gender as a social construct and the lack of consultation with parents and the public in developing EM. The Project Coordinator indicated that the writing group did not discuss the theoretical or ideological underpinnings of the programme in advance of selecting content. He acknowledged that the group invested too much time devising the resource book rather than questioning why they were doing it in the first place. While he agreed with the journalists’ view that the writing group did not consult sufficiently when developing EM he did not agree with their view that EM was anti-male. He also questioned why concerns were raised regarding the selective nature of EM, when, in his view, all curriculum is devised based on a selection process.
Section 3: The future of the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle

Both journalists and parents made suggestions on how EM related issues could be addressed with young men in schools in the future. These suggestions related to values that could underpin such programmes, the content of such programmes, the consultation process that could be adopted in developing such programmes, teaching approaches and issues relating to teacher development. These five issues are discussed below and draws on data from all four phases of the research.

Values and education

The journalists suggested possible values or ideologies that they would like to underpin such forms of education in the future. These included Catholic and Christian values, humanistic values and a new form of feminism. David Quinn made reference to the importance of Catholic and Christian values when educating young men on social and personal issues and suggested that such programmes should question ‘what is the Christian way to live’. He stressed the importance of the four classic virtues: temperance, justice, fortitude and prudence and he believed that ‘EM was actually an attempt to fill the gap left by the disappearance of notions of character formation and virtues in schooling.’

While not referring directly the Catholic or Christian values, John Waters believed that all of the issues discussed within EM fundamentally relate to religious education. The current approach to teaching religion in schools, according to John Waters, reduces ‘everything down
to being about the Catholic Church, Islam and so on’. However, he felt that this should not be the case as religion should be about ‘the total relationship with everything. It is the meaning of life. It raises such question as: what is life? What am I doing here? What is the meaning of my existence? What is my destiny?’ Leading on from this, he called for such education to adopt a humanistic approach, wherein schools and teachers attempt to open ‘the child’s eyes to their own humanity and to the world’ and encourage them to question who they are and to consider the meaning of their existence. So rather than discussing issues of sexuality and homophobia, education should begin from the premise of humanity, wherein sexuality has a place but is not the ‘fore-runner’. Within such an approach, young men would be encouraged to question ‘what is humanly desirable?’ wherein needless violence and homophobia, for example, would not have a place.

This is further illustrated in the following except from the interview with John Waters:

Our entire culture needs a fundamental re-education into the meaning of life. We need to actually go right back and open young men’s minds up and give them a tradition. That sounds reactionary but a tradition is no more than inherited wisdom. It’s the wisdom that survives so to each generation you say ‘here is our wisdom and tradition’. You have the right to tear this to shreds to find the bits of it that fit your life

It was suggested by the journalists that any new programme introduced into schools should not be based solely on feminist ideology, but should entail ‘showing young men the position of feminists on issues and ask them what they think about it and then showing them another point of view’ (John Waters). Breda O’Brien called for such programmes to be based on a ‘new,
more balanced, feminist ideology’, where ‘men and women actually start to look at things they have in common…one that isn’t based solely on the negative aspects of masculinity’.

A small number of parents identified their ideal approach as being based on a ‘good Christian framework’ (David Hegarty, CSPA) and ‘Catholic faith and values’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Disagree). These parents believed that such education should be based on the teachings of the Catholic Church with emphasis placed on ‘loving God and your neighbour’ and on ‘proper Christian values, rituals and discipline’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Disagree). They suggested that:

I think they should be addressed within a moral framework. This framework should be unashamedly Christian, considerate of other people. Not just about catching diseases or not dying because you took an overdose. Within a framework, which helps the person decide themselves and have a more mature view (Interviewee: Female, Disagree)

It is important to explain and promote strong Christian teaching to enable young men to stand in the world, to stand against peer pressure to adopt standards which do not reflect the ethos of home (Member COMPASS: Female, Agree)

It was suggested that ‘Catholic values should be presented in Catholic schools and instead of secularising the school; it should maintain the Catholic ethos’ (Member CSPA: Male, Unsure). Such a view was supported by David Hegarty, who indicated that teachings on EM related issues in schools should be based on Catholic moral values and Catholic principles. He believed that ‘if it’s a Catholic school, Catholic views should have primacy and ideally Catholic schools should be reinforcing the Christian family’. He also called on the Catholic Church to devise its own programme for use in religious run schools.
A positive discourse on masculinity

Reflective of the journalists concerns relating to the imbalanced nature of some aspects of EM, it was suggested that the presentation of issues such as domestic violence, sexual harassment and homosexuality should be reconsidered and presented in a more balanced manner. In addition to this, the journalists suggested aspects of young men’s lives they would like emphasized more within such programmes namely positive aspects of masculinity, with particular attention being given to fatherhood. The journalists would like such programmes to be underpinned by a positive discourse on masculinity wherein young men are encouraged to feel positive about being men and reflect on the strengths they have as both human beings and men. Drawing on her experiences teaching in a single sex girls school, Breda O’Brien explained how ‘the whole push for girls education is on self-esteem, develop your sense of yourself as a person, develop your sense that it’s good to be a woman. I think that would be important for young men to explore that it’s good to be a guy; that being a young man has good things about it, that they have their own rituals and male bonding things’.

This was supported by parents who campaigned for an increased positive affirmation of maleness and men’s role in society. Parents made such comments as:

I would like to see the positive side of being a young male applauded more: their competitiveness, their logic, their feelings of invincibility and power. Sometimes I feel these qualities are put down in favour of sharing, caring and emotional issues. Maybe it is ok to run or train your anger or frustration away if you don’t want to talk (Questionnaire respondent: Female, Agree)

49 The Project Coordinator of EM highlighted the fact that a section within the theme Relationship, Health and Sexuality, looked at fatherhood and presented positive accounts of fathers and fatherhood.
I think they need to be taught not to be afraid to be male. I think boys should not be afraid to grow into men (Interviewee: Female, Disagree)

They ought to be taught to be proud to be young men, to feel good about being young men. They are young men through no fault of their own and they ought to feel good about this (Interviewee: Male, Disagree)

One suggestion on how to achieve this would be through the use of ‘positive role models’ (Interviewee: Female, Disagree) to help young men form their identities. Some felt that young men ‘must be challenged and mentored by older men and given a sense of purpose. This can be easily done by training a group of 45-70 year olds to mentor lads in their areas. This is done in Russia and the UK successfully’ (Questionnaire respondent: Female, Disagree).

Leading on from the idea of positive male role models, another aspect of men’s lives, the journalists would like emphasised, is that of fatherhood, an element that John Waters and Breda O’Brien felt was missing from EM. They both suggested that the inclusion of discussion on such issues would be a positive development. For example, ‘there is a need to include something on the rights of fathers or fatherhood as a role for a male’ (John Waters). While Breda indicated that she ‘would like a bit more around parenting. The need for fathers - taking the approach that mother’s do not father a child’.

Again, this was supported by parents, evident in the following examples:
Speaking from my own experience with my father and my own son, young men need positive male role models and discipline and structure at home. In today’s society of one-parent families and separation this isn’t always the case (Questionnaire respondent: Male, Disagree)

Young men need role models. My son has an excellent one in his father. Not every child is so lucky (Questionnaire respondent: Female, Unsure)

Men are being displaced by women but society cannot survive without both men and women. This need’s to be fixed, as children most definitely need their father and mother to become well developed adults (Questionnaire respondent: Female, Unsure)

Leading on from the suggestions highlighted above and drawing on the work of Robert Bly (1992) in Iron John, John Waters highlighted the important role played by fathers and older men in handing down male traditions and virtues to young men and, in a sense, providing them with an initiation into manhood. The following excerpt, while long, expresses this initiation process:

The young man is taken away from the mother and brought to the place where there are only men. One of the elders has a knife. He cuts his own arm, puts his blood in a bowl and passes it around to the other elders. They do the same. The bowl arrives at the boy and he is invited to drink the blood. These rituals have particular cultural meaning that is telling, one of which is that the boy needs to be removed from the exclusive influence of femininity. He needs to be introduced into the idea of manhood because afterwards they tell him all the rituals of manhood.
He needs to understand that manhood is a wound, just as womanhood is a wound. He needs to know that there are stories, traditions and wisdom which are handed down to him formally and he becomes a man. We sneer at this but in its absence we create a situation where young men find other uses for knives and they have other kinds of myths e.g. narcissistic myths (John Waters)

**Teaching Approaches**

Parents and journalists made suggestions in relation to the pedagogical approaches that could be adopted. In total, three main suggestions emerged from the data and are discussed below.

**External Experts**

It was suggested that personnel external to the school may be best suited to examine such issues with young men. Those that suggested this felt that such an approach ‘would hold the attention of the student. If an outside speaker came in, it would be a novelty so students would listen better and would not be as embarrassed as asking questions as they would on their own teachers’ (Member PACCS: Female, Agree). They also felt that such an approach would be effective as ‘nothing moves people like true stories of those who are willing to share them’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Unsure). Furthermore, parents felt that young men would ‘listen more to someone who has experienced the situation’ (Member FEDCBS: Female, Agree).

These parents believed that external counsellors, agencies and those with first hand experience in the relevant areas should be invited to visit or give talks in the school. Parents listed a number of agencies they would like to be involved in this e.g. Acorn, Accord, Alcoholics Anonymous, AMEN, CURA, Mental Health Services, Rape Crisis Centre and the Samaritans.
Active Learning

Active learning methodologies emerged as a popular teaching methodology to use for this form of education. Active learning methodologies were viewed as the most effective as ‘this type of education is not something you can stand at the top of the class and teach’ (Interviewee: Male, Agree). It was suggested that ‘the more creative side’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree) of young men should be developed through using such activities as plays, role-plays, videos/films and modern literature (e.g. Roddy Doyle’s The woman who walks in to doors for use when examining domestic violence). Drama was advanced as ‘a good way to convey some of these topics – acting out a scene of gay bashing and getting discussion groups going’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree). A call was made for ‘a more feminine approach, learning things holistically by being in the experience rather than sitting and being taught: more games, group work and so on’ (Interviewee: Male, Agree).

According to these parents such teaching methods would actively involve young men and hence promote greater learning. Others felt that such approaches would ensure young men would listen more as, ‘it needs to be real, not just a teacher talking all the time but involve group sessions’ (Member PACCS: Female, Unsure). These parents felt that a didactic lecture style approach would be an inappropriate method to use when exploring social and personal issues with young men at senior cycle as ‘it is boring and lacks enthusiasm. Nobody would listen and it is like a shutter comes down over their eyes’ (Member FEDCBS, Female, Agree). Parents believed that such approaches would not be conducive to creating a positive learning environment as students would become bored and would not listen.
This was further supported by the journalists, who suggested the inclusion of content and pedagogy that promoted critical discussion and debate, wherein young men would be encouraged to develop their own views and opinions on the issues under discussion. Parents also suggested debate and discussion as a possible pedagogy for dealing with such issues. As a result, such education ‘would not be about giving them a prescribed version of reality or filling them with information that they have to reproduce at various points’ (John Waters) but would be about ‘pulling the ideas from them in relation to this’ (Breda O’Brien) and ‘letting children say what they want in their own way’ (Interviewee: Male, Agree). Therefore, ‘more open sessions and debates’ are required (Breda O’Brien).

Cross-curricular

Suggestions were made on what was the most effective way to present EM related content to young men. Firstly, it was suggested that a cross-curricular approach would be the most effective way of dealing with social and personal issues with young men, wherein teachings on EM issues ‘would be woven into the total way the school does things’ (David Quinn). For example, John Waters felt that the current approach to education is fragmented and should not ‘simply be a question of presenting information to young men under various headings – here is geography, here is science’.

Such a view was supported by parents as while some parents saw merit in providing for these issues within a timetabled SPHE class (66% of phase one respondents indicated that the SPHE teacher was their first preference for dealing with EM issues), others highlighted the importance of these messages being reflected in the school ethos and across a range of subjects, not just within SPHE. These parents felt that ‘addressing something in the curriculum needs to be supported by a suitable ethos otherwise it is merely lip service’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree). As a result, ‘all of the above should be addressed within the curriculum
preferably within a subject such as SPHE but should also be reflected in the whole ethos of the school and their methodology’ (Questionnaire respondent: Female, Agree)

It was suggested that EM issues could be embedded across a range of subjects. For example, members of the parents associations suggested that such issues could be included in religion class, English, home economics, history, geography, and physical education classes. This was supported by David Hegarty (Representative of CSPA) who suggested that ‘English books and Irish language material could be topical and edifying, demonstrating the virtues such as courage, persistence, telling the truth, defending one’s values’.

While the SPHE teacher was advanced by parents as the person most suited to dealing with these issues in a school context, it was also suggested that ‘all teachers have a role to play’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Disagree).

**Consultative process**

It was suggested that in the future, prior to devising social and personal programmes for young men, a consultative process should be adopted. Both John Waters and David Quinn suggested that, in comparison to the approach adopted in devising EM, school based social and personal programmes for young men should be compiled following consultation ‘far and wide’ (David Quinn) with relevant bodies. For example:

If they want to have programmes like this why not offer it out to tender. Why not get relevant groups to come up with a module for a programme to educate young men under these headings. They shouldn’t choose just one tender but perhaps use the process to create an overall structured approach that would bring in to play all the elements that are suggested. From different perspectives you get different inputs (John Waters)
Parents requested that those responsible for devising such curriculum consult and inform parents about these programmes. This is reflective in the fact that the majority of phase two interviewees and phase three respondents (81% agreement) would like to be informed about the content of any social and personal programmes that their sons may participate in before introducing such programmes into schools. While the majority of phase two interviewees did not wish to have their consent sought in advance of their sons’ participating in any school-based social and personal programmes, 62% of the members of the parent associations (phase three) would like this to occur.

Parents who wished to be informed or consulted on such programmes did so for four main reasons. Firstly, a number indicated they would like to be informed so that ‘the home can back up what is being taught in the school’ (Interviewee: Female, Disagree) and parents ‘can be ready to answer questions that the young men have and give them another place to ask questions’ (Interviewee: Female, Agree).

Secondly, parents wanted to be consulted and informed about such issues in order to ensure they were satisfied with what was included and for fear that they had any concerns regarding the issues under discussion. They felt that, if they had concerns or disagreed with such education, they should be given the opportunity to provide such education in the home. Based on this, the majority of phase two interviewees believed that an opt-out option should be available to parents not wishing to have their sons participate in social and personal programmes in school.

Thirdly, they believed that the ultimate choice should be left to the parent, who as ‘primary educators’ and ‘consumers’ who are ‘paying for service’ (Member PACCS: Male, Agree) should be given the option of removing their sons from such classes. Based on this view, members of the parent associations indicated that, as primary educators of their children, such consultation was in fact their ‘right’ (Member FEDCBS: Male, Agree).
Fourthly, parents felt that by working together, the home and school could succeed in meeting the needs of young men therefore parents should be included and informed on such issues. They felt that the school alone could not do this, as ‘no matter how many courses are organised in school they will not work without the support of parents’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree). Parents called for the home and school to ‘compliment each other’ with ‘the school reinforcing what parents are saying’ (Interviewee: Male, Disagree).

There was also a feeling that the school might provide education for parents on the issues examined within such school based programmes. It was felt that such an approach would help parents to understand the issues addressed in these programmes and help them develop the skills necessary to communicate with their sons on such issues. For example:

Schools could arrange sessions for parents at the same time that the boys are having sessions in school. In this way communication could be opened up at home. Maybe joint sessions could eventually take place if people had got to that stage of being comfortable with this (Interviewee: Female, Agree).

Parents called for ‘education for parents on the sexual freedoms enjoyed by teenagers’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Disagree) and it was suggested that ‘the school authorities and the Department of Education and Science could offer more topical advice to parents’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Agree). One male interviewee (Agree) called on the school for help him develop greater skills in parenting – ‘I always say I have been so long in school but I never learned anything about parenting. First I think parents would have to learn these things themselves before being involved in the school’
**Teacher Development**

Parents suggested that there was a need to increase the level of teacher development in social and personal issues, prior to teachers getting involved in such lessons. They suggested that social and personal classes should only be carried out by people who ‘have proven their competency in this area by completing a recognized course or training programme’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Male, Agree). As a result, parents called for social and personal education to be ‘a major part of teacher training’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Female, Unsure).

Differing views were expressed in relation to the importance of teacher development as although a number of parents drew attention to the importance of ‘training’ for all teachers addressing EM issues, the personality of the teacher was highlighted as an important element as ‘the personal relationships is the biggest factor’ (Interviewee: Male, Disagree). These parents believed that ‘you can have all the training in the world but you may never be able to deal with these issues adequately’ (Interviewee: Male, Disagree). According to these parents, completion of related courses ‘is no guarantee that teachers will have the skills to deal with these difficult problems’ (Questionnaire Respondent: Male, Unsure). Parents, who perceived the personality of the teacher as key, called for teachers who are ‘sensitive, kind, caring and good listeners’ to be involved in such lessons and requested that ‘only the best and most enthusiastic teachers work in this area’ (Member NPAVSCC: Female, Agree).
Summary of findings

Numerous suggestions were made in relation to dealing with EM issues in the future. A small number of parents, along with David Quinn and David Hegarty, called for such programmes to draw on Catholic values and principles. Journalists suggested that such programmes should be based on more than just feminist ideologies and should present a variety of views to young men. Both journalists and parents called for positive aspects of masculinity to be emphasised, with both paying particular attention to the important role played by fathers and older men in this.

Calls were made for EM related issues to be included in SPHE classes and also across a range of subjects, ultimately permeating the ethos of the school. It was suggested that these issues would be best explored by personnel external to the school, for example by people with first hand experience of domestic violence. Active learning methodologies, including critical discussion and debate, were suggested as the most effective methods for examining such issues with young men.

The journalists suggested that a process of consultation should be adopted prior to developing social and personal programmes in the future and while the majority of parents (from phase two and three) would like to be informed about the content of such programmes, differing views emerged in relation to being consulted regarding the participation of their sons in these programmes (with phase two interviewees not requiring this in comparison to phase three respondents who did). Parents called for schools to provide education sessions for parents on EM issues in order to enable parents to communicate effectively with their sons on such issues.

Finally parents called for EM related issues to be given a more prominent place in teacher education programmes.
Conclusion of chapter

Parents and a number of journalists, along with the Project Coordinator, believed that education had a role to play in educating young men on issues relating to masculinities. In fact, concerns were raised in relation to the current lack of emphasis placed on such holistic development within the Irish education system. Calls were made for schooling to move beyond focusing merely on assessment to emphasising ‘education for life’ issues.

Questions were raised in relation to the values that should underpin the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle. The journalists raised concerns regarding the fact that in their view, EM was based solely on feminist values. Parents raised concerns on whether such teachings would be based on secular or religious principles, with calls for both being made.

The journalists in the current study questioned the selective and imbalanced nature of the EM content. They also raised concerns relating to the lack of consultation during the development of EM, a view that the Project Coordinator of EM concurred with.

A high level of agreement was found from parents in relation to the inclusion of EM topics on the school curriculum. Those that agreed with such inclusion felt that EM issues were relevant to young men today and schools are not doing enough to deal with these issues. Those that raised concerns did so because they questioned teacher’s ability and level of ‘training’ to deal with these issues effectively. Also, they were unsure if EM topics were too sensitive to discuss in a classroom setting and feared that discussion on these issues would result in some young men being victimised.

In relation to the exploration of masculinities with young men in the future, a number of recommendations were made. Firstly, numerous values were suggested that could underpin such teachings. These included Christian values, Catholic values, secular values and ‘a new
form of feminism’. It was suggested by parents and journalists that such teachings should focus on positive aspects of maleness and masculinity. It was suggested that personnel external to the school may be most effective in dealing with such issues and that active learning methodologies would be a suitable approach in engaging young men on EM issues.

It was recommended that those responsible for developing such programmes consult with the public (including parents) in relation to the development and implementation of EM issues into schools.
Chapter Six: Discussion

Introduction

A number of themes emerged from the findings of the current study. These include, for example, the high level of agreement from parents on the inclusion of EM issues on the school curriculum; parental views on the number of pressures facing young men today; contradictory parental views in relation to the perceptions that young men in general experience pressures to live up to male norms but their own son is exempt from such pressure; questions regarding the values (Catholic, secular, feminist etc) that would underpin such teaching; concerns regarding the lack of focus on holistic development in Irish post-primary schooling; the high level of homophobic bullying in Irish schools; concerns from journalists regarding the process of curriculum selection during the development of the Exploring Masculinities Programme and issues regarding the lack of teacher development on EM topics.

For the purpose of the current study, five main themes have been selected for discussion. These are as follows:

- Curriculum as a selection from the culture and the Exploring Masculinities Programme
- Balance between academic achievement and holistic development in the Irish education system
- The emergence of contradicting parental views regarding the inclusion of Catholic or secular values in social and personal programmes
- Teacher development and the exploration of masculinities
- The need for a positive discourse on masculinities in Ireland
These five issues are discussed below and draws on literature from chapter two, three, the relevant findings from the current study and additional related literature.

Curriculum as a selection from the culture and the Exploring Masculinities Programme

An issue to emerge within the current study relates to the fact that the journalists believed that the content of the programme was selected based on a feminist viewpoint. While the Project Coordinator believed that the selection made by the writing group were appropriate, others questioned the selection made, due to the fact that the ideologies that were chosen contradicted their own.

Concerns regarding the selection of ideologies for the Exploring Masculinities Programme relates back to the fact that curriculum can be defined as a selection from the culture made on the basic of ideologies, as discussed previously in chapter three. Within such a definition, curriculum can be viewed as passing the most important messages from the culture of today on to the next generation (Lawton 1975). It is not feasible to pass on all aspects of ‘the story we tell our children about the good life’ (Trant 1998, p.8). Therefore a selection must be made – resulting in certain aspects being passed on, while others are cast aside. The philosophy and values of those deemed responsible for selecting curriculum directly impacts on what gets chosen, as reflected in the comments by Helu Thaman (1993) that ‘whatever is selected would depend to a very large extent upon the experiences and ideologies of those involved in the selection’ (p.250). This is likely to create difficulties, as reflected in the case of EM, when what gets selected does not represent the values of the entire population. For example, a number of journalists in the current study adopted an essentialist view on gender construction, ultimately
believing that the main differences between men and women were as a result of biological differences. In comparison to this, the Project Coordinator of EM held a social constructivist view, wherein he believed that boys are not born with specific male characteristics but instead construct their male identities based on the concepts of masculinity they experience from their culture (please see chapter three for more details on differing theoretical perspectives of gender). The ideologies of the Project Coordinator and the members of the EM writing group were presented within EM, but these did not reflect the views of other members of society e.g. journalists, certain parent groups. The impact of ideologies is reflected further in the contrasting parental views that emerged in the current study, with some parents calling for EM to be based on Catholic values, while another group of parents held secular views and wanted these views represented within school based social and personal programmes\textsuperscript{50} (this aspect of contrasting ideologies is explored further under the third section of the discussion chapter).

The author wishes to explore this issue in more detail, by firstly revisiting the process of curriculum selection adopted during the development of EM and then by discussing some of the concerns regarding this approach.

The process of curriculum selection for EM

EM was devised by a Project Coordinator and a writing group of teachers from seven schools, who were instructed to devise curriculum material and produce a resource pack. This was the main focus of the work of the writing group. The group discussed the merits/demerits of certain activities and content and when a topic/issue was rejected, this tended to be for practical reasons (i.e. that it wouldn’t work in the classroom) rather than on ideological grounds. In fact, the writing group did not discuss or debate the ideologies underpinning EM prior to its development, as outlined by the Project Coordinator in the current study. The

\textsuperscript{50} The majority of parents made no reference to values, Catholic or others in their response but a vocal minority demanded that EM be based on Catholic values
Project Coordinator did acknowledge however, during his interview, that his involvement in EM and his selection of curriculum would have been influenced by Gender Equality ideology. Furthermore, the writing group did not consult with other groups or organisations prior to selecting curriculum\textsuperscript{51}.

This approach to devising the EM resource pack (a writing group comprised of 8 individuals selecting without prior consultation with other interested bodies) is relevant when one considers that the main criticism advanced by the journalists in the current study related to the ideologies underpinning the programme. As has been seen, the four journalists questioned why ‘a programme based solely on feminist ideology’ was selected for presentation to young men in schools or why masculinity was presented as purely a social construct. These concerns highlight the problems that may emerge whenever a selection of curriculum is made. The ideologies presented within EM were obviously not reflective of the beliefs held by some of the main critics of the programme but were supported by others (e.g. a number of academics that supported the programme and members of the writing group). This was confounded by the fact that the writing group did not consult with other groups, organisations or individuals.

Issues relating to the consultation process adopted during the development of EM are discussed below.

The consultation process adopted during the selection of curriculum for EM

While the development of EM could not be classed as externally mandated change (in that it wasn’t forced on schools by government bodies or legislation), it was still devised by a core writing group who did not officially consult with the wider educational community when

\textsuperscript{51}The resource material was piloted in 19 schools, following which alterations were made to the resource pack prior to its official publication
developing and selecting EM materials. The importance of consultation is stressed by Fullan (1991) when he states that connections with the wider environment are critical for the success of any new initiative. This is due to the influence of external forces on curriculum, with the external forces being capable of acting like a ‘network of constraint’ (Hanson 2001, p.647) if planned curriculum initiatives are deemed inappropriate. While it may be difficult to select curriculum based on ideologies that everyone agrees with, the process of consultation (or lack thereof) during the development of EM did not ensure that a number of different perspective and viewpoints were considered prior to selecting curriculum, as outside of the writing group and pilot schools, additional internal and external players who had a vested interest in curriculum were not provided with opportunities to have their views considered.

Perhaps as well as involving a writing group and pilot schools in the development of such programmes, consultation ‘far and wide’ could be conducted in advance of selection. This would ensure a more ‘bottom-up’ approach, wherein parents, students, teachers and the general community have their voices heard as ‘from different perspectives you get different inputs’ (John Waters). Such an approach would guarantee that the selection of curriculum considers a wide range of ideologies and viewpoints. This is supported by, for example, Elliot (1998) who believes that:

> Neither teacher-driven nor state-driven change appears to work….we must adopt a third option…the negotiated adjustment of society, reconstructed in an interlocking network of local (school level), regional (local government level) and national forums. At each level, representatives of functional groups in our society – teachers, parents, employers, employees – and of appropriate levels of government, would share and negotiate in dialogue their respective visions of educational aims and processes.
This is supported by Goodson (2001) who highlighted the need for harmonization between the internal and external personnel in educational reform, with particular importance being placed on the personal dimension of change. The vision of *Curriculum as Partnership*, as advanced by Trant (1998), portrays this further. He argues that ‘curriculum can only be owned in partnership – a partnership which recognizes the rights and responsibility of the various partners – teachers, students, parents, and local communities’ (Trant 1998, p.7). For effective curriculum change to take place there is a need for ‘time, carefully planned implementation strategies, firm commitment from all the partners…and necessary and appropriate consultation’ (Murray 1995, p.55). The importance of an inclusive partnership approach in developing curriculum highlights the errors made by the EM writing group in not consulting with the wider community.

A re-examination of the approach adopted by the Curriculum and Examination Board (CEB) in the 1980s may be useful here. According to Logan and O’Reilly (1985) the purpose of the CEB was to ‘to broaden the social base of decision-making so that the process of selecting knowledge, skills or experiences for inclusion on the national curriculum will address the common good’. While the work of the CEB did not actually result in a broadened social base of decision-making, such an approach could go some way to preventing the view advanced by David Quinn, one of the journalists interviewed in the current study, that ‘the Gender Equality Unit, which no one had ever heard of, came up with this and slipped it in to schools, without any debate and after consultation with a tiny handful of people who were going to have the right views from the developers point of view anyway’.

An additional possible model could be the approach adopted by a national consultative process called Your Education System (YES). The purpose of YES was to ‘provide all involved and interested in education with the opportunity to contribute to the development of a
vision of education for the future’ (Kelleghan and McGee 2005, p.1). It was acknowledged that while general consensus would be difficult to achieve, providing opportunities for interested bodies and individuals to highlight their vision for the education system would allow ‘the major values underlying our education system [to be] articulated’ (ibid, p.1). Public meetings were held around the country, people were invited to make submissions through the YES website and the views of a sample of the Irish population were sought on issues such as conditions in schools, examinations, teaching and the overall goals of education.

If such consultation becomes an integral part of curriculum development, there is a need to re-examine the current centrally controlled approach to curriculum development, wherein agencies external to the school implement mandated change without sufficient prior consultation. Within such an approach the development of resources is often seen as the first and most important job of those responsible for curriculum development. However, the development of materials is only one of a number of important steps involved in bringing about curriculum change. According to Fullan (1993) vision and strategic planning come later, following consultation and piloting of ideas. Therefore, the production of resource material would only be completed following consultation and piloting rather than preceding this 52.

It is important to point out that while the concept of partnership is now written into Irish legislation (in the Education Act (DES 1998)) it has not resulted in increased participation amongst the majority of parents or members of the community. Instead partnership has only been successful in ‘smoothing the way for top-down curriculum reform…despite the original intention of broadening the social base of decision-making, there is little sense of participation in curriculum decision-making on the part of the wider education community’ (Gleeson 2010, p.277). Such a partnership model has merely resulted in the voices and policies of the dominant classes being legitimised and marginal voices continue to be ignored. The voices that have

52 While an initial resource book was devised by the EM writing group, this was revised following the pilot phase and prior to the launch of the programme.
continued to dominate are those of the providers (Bruton 1999). Within a model of partnership, unions have tended to dictate more than other groups, preventing true partnership from occurring. This is reflected in the comments of the former President of the ASTI, David Barry (1989, p. 160), when he stated that ‘in it’s participation in policy-making the ASTI will seek to ensure the welfare of its members rather than work objectively to create a good education system, where these objectives are in conflict’. According to Minister Noel Dempsey (2003), a challenge facing the partnership approach is to encourage individuals to ‘look beyond the interests of the organisations which nominated you to the interests of children and young people in the education system’. As a result of various vested interest groups opportunities for creative conflict can be limited.

However, attempting to increase the level of consultation and to broaden out ‘the social base of decision making’ in relation to the development of social and personal programmes in the future could ensure that the views of various interest groups are considered in advance of selecting curriculum for such programmes. Such a consultative process would ensure that the views and opinions of individuals and organisations both internal and external to the school would be acknowledged prior to curriculum development and could ensure less contestation would occur when curriculum on controversial topics is devised. The author is aware, however, that it may be impossible (and undesirable) to devise curriculum on such issues without having contestation and conflict. This issue is discussed in more detail under the next section.

Prior to this however, it is important to briefly refer to the relationship between the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the Gender Equality Unit (GEU) and the Department of Education and Science (DES) during the development of EM. While virtually all syllabus design and programme development is devised by the NCCA, the development of the Exploring Masculinities Programme was an exception. EM arose out of the GEU, with this department taking responsibility for developing the programme. If EM had
been developed by the NCCA, who tend to utilise a consultative approach when devising curriculum, parent groups (through representation of the National Parents Council on the NCCA) would have had an opportunity to voice their opinions on the programme. However, in this instance programme development was not conducted by the NCCA, with the council not playing any role in this. The NCCA did not become involved in EM until the Minister for Education and Science was put under pressure due to the level of controversy surrounding the programme. Having initiated the review, the Minister for Education and Science (or any Minister to date) did not respond to the findings of the study.

The lack of debate on curriculum issues

As well as concerns regarding the process of selecting curriculum for EM, questions were raised in relation to the lack of engagement on the part of the Minister for Education and Science and the DES in the debate surrounding EM. For example, John Waters felt that the DES wished to ‘shut down’ this debate, while Peadar King believed that the Minister for Education and Science viewed EM as a ‘political hot potato’ that needed to be ‘kicked to touch’. As a result, it was felt by some participants in the current study that the DES and the Minister did not engage adequately in the debate. The reaction on the part of the Minister for Education and Science could be reflective of the fact that one of the main concerns of politicians in Ireland is to ensure that they get re-elected. Within the context of maintaining seats, ‘ministerial backing for an idea can often become a matter of gaining public acceptance rather than achieving educational ends’ (Gleeson 2010, p. 60). The main focus tends to be on making decisions that appeal to the broadest section of the electorate (Johnson 1992). Those who do not make decisions that are supported by the electorate can pay a high price. This is evident in the fact that Niamh Bhreathnach was not re-elected in 1997 following her championing of the introduction of RSE, which was not well received by certain, mainly
religious, groups. When controversy does arise, ‘political decision-makers look fearfully over their shoulders’ (Garvin 1992) and tend to ‘try to kick such controversy to touch’. This was also outlined earlier in chapter three, where it was acknowledged that policy makers and school personnel tend to avoid controversy and withdraw to ‘safer subject matter’ (Cornbleth 2001). This may explain why the Minister for Education and Science and the Department of Education and Science were unwilling to engage in the debate on EM.

The lack of willingness on the part of the politicians and the DES to engage in debate on curriculum issues is also reflective of the broader context in Ireland where there is reluctance to debate curriculum issues. Farrell and Trant (1999) question ‘why is there so little interest in whole curriculum matters in educational debate in Ireland?’ (p.3). Gleeson (2003) suggested that there is an obvious lack of interest in curriculum debate in Ireland.

Internationally this is supported by Fullan (1993), who believes that there has been a silencing around curriculum. While it appeared as if the debate on EM would provide an opportunity for critical debate to take place this did not occur, reflective of the fact that when curriculum issues are debated in Ireland, this tends to be technical rather than critical in nature (Gleeson 2000). As a result what gets discussed is ‘what we do’ and ‘how we assess it’ rather than ‘why we are doing something’ or why ‘certain forms of knowledge are selected over others’. For example, when the Junior Certificate was introduced, debate within the NCCA centred on such issues as what the new programme should be called rather than on the philosophical underpinnings of the programme (Hyland 1988). This is also evident in the approach adopted by the EM writing group wherein they did not debate the theoretical basis of EM but merely focused on the technical aspects of curriculum development i.e. preparing a resource book. While the EM programme did create an opportunity to debate critical aspects of the Irish education system (e.g. curriculum as a selection from the culture or ‘the meaning of the good life’), this did not occur due to the fact that (a) all the main criticisms were advanced
early on in the media coverage and were not teased out sufficiently and (b) the DES did not engage adequately with the debate (Mac an Ghaill et al 2004). As a result, what occurred was an ‘extended media coverage’ rather than a ‘public debate’.

While the level of debate surrounding EM may have come as a surprise and may have been unwelcomed by members of the DES, it has long being acknowledged that contestation and debate are important parts of curriculum reform. For example, Mutch (2003, p.6) argues that ‘contestation in curriculum construction is unavoidable’ while Weiler (1990) believes that curriculum selection is ‘inherently controversial and subject to conflict and dispute’ (p.17-18). This is supported by the work of Carr (1998), who argues that curriculum policy and practice will always be subject to disagreements and curriculum is ultimately ‘an ideological battle’ (ibid 1998, p.326). It needs to be acknowledged then that as long as a selection of curriculum is made and particular viewpoints are advanced (while other viewpoints are not) there will be controversy. Within this light, discussions on new curriculum developments need to be seen as an integral part of the change process, for as Fullan (1993) states, conflict is essential as ideas that are taken on board with ease are discarded with ease. Due to the fact that conflict is inevitable, what is important is how those responsible for the curriculum reform react to and deal with any disagreements that arise once new curriculum is implemented. Those responsible must ensure they ‘leave room for further debate’ (Elliott 1998, p.35) once a programme has been implemented remembering that ‘change is a journey, not a blueprint’ (Fullan 1993, p.24) that must be worked on at both school and department level and the backing of the wider community is essential. While conflict is inevitable and desirable, the adoption of an inclusive process when devising curriculum may reduce the level of debate that ensues.
Conclusion

Concerns were raised by journalists in relation to the process of selecting content for EM. The journalists felt that this selection was made based on particular ideologies that did not represent their own views. It has long been acknowledged that curriculum is a selection from the culture made on the basis of ideologies. Therefore, a person’s beliefs, values and upbringing will impact on how they select curriculum. The process of curriculum selection ultimately boils down to how the curriculum decision maker views the world. The selection group for EM consisted of a writing group of eight individuals who did not discuss and debate the values underpinning their selection but the Project Coordinator and the Project Director did discuss values and had a very definite idea of what the values underpinning EM should be, mainly that of empowerment (Gleeson et al 2004). As a result, the values underpinning the programme were more implicit rather than explicit in nature. Furthermore, the writing group did not consult with parents or other relevant organisations prior to selecting content for EM.

Adopting a more inclusive process, involving consultation ‘far and wide’, would ensure that a number of different perspectives are considered when selecting curriculum. Attempting to adopt a partnership approach, as outlined by Trant (1998) and Elliot (1998) may help to increase the ‘social base of decision making’ (Logan and O’Reilly 1985) so that when a selection is made it will encompass a range of ideologies. However, as discussed above, a partnership approach does not always result in equal representation and voice. Also, it would be impossible to devise curriculum on controversial issues in such a manner that all interest groups agree with what gets selected.
Finally, when concerns are raised in relation to the selection of particular ideologies over others, it is important that those responsible for curriculum encourage and permit such debate to take place. Debate and conflict is essential if ‘deep change’ (Fullan 1991) is to occur. In contrast to the approach adopted by the Minister for Education and Science in relation to EM (as outlined by individuals in the current study), discussion on the ideologies underpinning programmes needs to be viewed as a central part of curriculum development. While conflict should always be welcomed, the adoption of a more inclusive process when selecting curriculum may help reduce the extent of this debate.

Balance between academic achievement and holistic development in the Irish education system

Parents in the current study believed that the primary purpose of education was the holistic development of the child, with parents and the Project Coordinator of EM raising concerns regarding the over-emphasis on examination results within the current education system, with emphasis placed on the acquisition of CAO points in the Leaving Certificate examinations. Parents feared that the well-being and the overall development of the whole person were being ignored. These views are reflective of a number of influences on Irish post-primary schooling, as outlined in detail in chapter two. For example, the education system is derived from the Classical Humanistic model, where emphasis is placed on the acquisition of knowledge, for knowledge sake. This has resulted in a situation where importance is placed on cognitive development, resulting in a neglect of the affective. Overreliance on cognitive development and dependence on textbooks and instructional forms of teaching are common aspects of Irish post-primary schooling (OECD 1991). While the emphasis has remained on the development

53 The Central Applications Office is responsible for allocating points to students based on their grades in Leaving Certificate examinations. A student who receives an A1 in an honours subject gains 100 points. Students count the marks received in their six best subjects. Some colleges allocate additional marks for grade achieved in honours maths (40 points for A1) therefore the total points a student can receive is 600/640.
of cognitive skills, education has become directly linked to the development of the economy, to acquiring a job or college place, resulting in assessment and the achievement of high grades in state examinations becoming the be all and end all of education (Points Commission 1998). This is reflected in the findings of Tuohy et al (2000), who found that the ethos of Voluntary Catholic secondary schools was often viewed as secondary to gaining high points in the Leaving Certificate Examinations, wherein the Catholic ethos of these schools becomes ‘absorbed into a State system that controlled the real ethos of the school’ (Tuohy et al 2000, p.63). O’Sullivan (2005) highlights the prominence of ‘careerism’ in Irish post-primary schooling, where schools focused on preparing students for examinations in order to receive a college place to gain a ‘middle-class and professional occupation’ (p.125).

Within such a context, social and personal development of the child is often deemed as less important in comparison to the achievement of high results in terminal examinations. While there has been general acceptance that education has a role to play in the social and personal education of children at both national and international level (see for example Hannan and Shortall 1991), over-emphasis on academic achievement can result in the social and personal development of students being ‘put on the back burner’. For example, the majority of early school leavers in the study by Hannan and Shortall (1991) did not feel that their educational experiences succeeded in developing them in a holistic manner, with only one-third of respondents believing that their time in school had resulted in increased self-confidence and only one in five believed that they had been prepared adequately for adult life as a result of their time in school.

The author now wishes to explore how the balance between academic achievement and holistic development can be achieved so that the reality of the Irish education system can become more in line with what parents desire for their children’s education.
Refocusing the purpose of education: increasing the emphasis on holistic development

The reality of Irish post-primary schooling, as outlined previously, does not mirror what parents in the current study desire for their children's educational experience. This is reflected in the fact that when offered a choice the majority of parents selected the primary purpose of education as the development of the whole person, with concerns being raised regarding the over-emphasis on academic achievement in education. This is supported by the work of Boldt (2000) who found that parents believed that academic achievement was valued more highly than it should be in schools. The study found that the top three things parents wanted schools to develop in their children were: to become a well-rounded individual, to have respect for others and to get a good job. Within the study by Boldt, and evident within the findings of the current research, discrepancies emerged in relation to 'what schools actually value most in pupils against what [parents] think they should ideally value most' (Boldt 2000, p.41).

Parents' in the current study would like the focus of education to shift more towards 'education for life' encompassing, for example, cooking, anger management and self-esteem. John Waters called for education to give students a meaning and a purpose to their lives and for the education system to 'undergo a fundamental re-education into the meaning of life' while the Project Coordinator of EM called for education to develop in students 'a curiosity about the world'. Such calls are not new however and have been reiterated by numerous organisations. For example the Conference of Religious in Ireland (CORI) proposed that the education system 'adopt a holistic approach to the development of individuals so that every aspect of their personalities can grow in a balanced and harmonious way' (CORI 2002). The OECD (1997)

\footnote{It is important to note however, that although parents selected the above as the primary purpose of education it is unclear to what extent this would remain the case if their children's academic achievement was compromised as a result}
highlighted the importance of looking beyond mere economic gains and Gross National Product (GNP) to looking at well-being and quality of life issues in order to ensure that a situation does not arise where a country is doing very well economically, but yet the people living there don’t feel well (Healy and Reynolds 1996). Following an OECD conference (1997) with twenty member countries, it was concluded that too much emphasis is currently placed on the cognitive aspects of education. The pendulum has swung too far in the direction of education for economic growth, with more emphasis now needing to be placed on the well-being of individuals (O’Brien 2008). Parents in the current study appear to be in line with the views of the OECD (1997) and O’Brien (2008). If the pendulum is to be readjusted, there is a need for debate on the balance between economic thinking and well-being (Sugrue and Gleeson 2004). Within such a debate, concerns for holistic development ‘must sit squarely on the table besides concerns for “economic capital” (ibid, p.288). If concerns for ‘well-being’ were to sit side by side with economic development then programmes such as EM would hopefully receive more pride of place in the Irish education system and would no longer remain invisible (Gleeson et al 2004).

There is now a need to re-examine the focus of the education system, to question, as Dunne (1995) has, ‘what is the good of education?’ and to develop a coherent overall philosophy to the education system. At present, ‘we are unlikely to find a well articulated coherent philosophy transparently evident in Irish education’. (Bhreathnach 1994, p.6). This is due to the fact that debate in Ireland, as stated previously, tends to focus on technical aspects of education such as economic issues and terminal assessment rather than on the philosophy underpinning the education system. As a result the values underpinning Irish education tend to be implicit and tacit in nature and are ‘rarely subject to explicit comment’ (Bhreathnach 1994, p.8; see also comments by OECD 1991).
Numerous suggestions have been made as to the philosophy that should underpin the Irish education system by, for example, Murray (1991), Dunne (1995), Trant (1998) and O’Brien (2008). Dunne (1995) suggested that the purpose of education lies not only in developing skills but in emphasising virtues. He called for education to help students develop a fuller perspective on the human good (Dunne 1995). Through the educational experiences offered to students, Dunne (1995) wished for them to develop such virtues as honesty, humility, a sense of justice and generosity in cooperating with others. Wholeness, truth, respect, justice and freedom were viewed by Murray (1991) as integral elements of the education system. There is a need for schools to focus on such issues as ‘solidarity, citizenship, care for the environment, respect for human rights and the fundamental principles of relating to each other as human beings’ (Trant 1998, p.9). A decade later, O’Brien (2008) made a similar suggestion that issues of respect, care, relationships, love and emotions need to become a ‘part of the vocabulary of second-level’ (O’Brien 2008, p.171).

If holistic development is to become a more central feature of the Irish education system, O’Brien argues that we must ‘recalibrate the balance’ between academic achievement, preparing students for the labour market and educating students for the ‘good life’ (p.171). In order to achieve this, the culture of schools (the way schools structure learning, the way they assess students learning and the relationships within schools) need to be ‘problematised’ (O’Brien 2008, p.170). For this to occur, a new curriculum is needed (Gough 2004). This new curriculum needs to move beyond traditional subject boundaries and focus on issues of relevance in modern society. If schools are going to encourage students to ‘live philosophically’ they must, according to Kemmis (2008) move beyond the formal prescribed curriculum and attempt to incorporate a number of the values referred to above. Positive steps have been taken in Irish post-primary schooling in this regard. For example, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA 2003; 2008) has worked at
integrating key skills across all subject areas with the hope of ‘contribut[ing] to the
development of each individual’s moral, social, cultural and economic life and enhance their
quality of life’ (NCCA 2005a, p.11; NCCA 2008). It is proposed that these skills will develop
student’s personal effectiveness, their communication skills and their ability to work with
others. This is a positive move in terms of facilitating student’s development in social and
personal areas and will hopefully aid with the increased emphasis on holistic development in
post-primary schools. It is also planned that Transition Units (TU) and short courses will be
introduced into senior cycle education. An example of a short course is health education and
promotion, while possible TU’s include units deal with such issues as global warming, gender
studies, road safety, food matters and exploring disadvantages in Irish society. The inclusion of
issues relating to care and emotions in the Irish Teaching Councils Core Values (undated) is a
further step in the right direction.

Conclusion

The importance placed by parents in the current study on ‘education for life’ issues and their
critical views of the overemphasis placed on knowledge and academic achievement in the
current education system provides a valuable platform for the increased focus on the
development of the whole person at post-primary level, particularly at senior cycle. It holds
well for the proposed introduction of SPHE at senior cycle and Transition Units and Short
Courses (as per NCCA proposals 2005a). In saying all of this however, despite calls for change
and attempts to increase the level of holistic development in the Irish education system to date,
the emphasis still remains on acquiring knowledge in order to succeed in examinations. This is
evident in the continued focus on the pursuit of ‘points’ in the Leaving Certificate Established
(LCE), the growing popularity of ‘grind’ schools and the fact that the LCE enjoys a ‘high level
of public support, far higher than that enjoyed by any other senior cycle programme’ (NCCA
2003, p.11). Therefore, while parents in the current study have called for changes to the education system and for a shift in focus from academic to holistic development, the fact remains that parents (and the wider community) continue to act as a conservative force on schools, with, in particular, middle class communities wishing to maintain the status quo (Lynch 1989). As a result, parental views on the function of and expectations for schools can constrain schools and prevent them from implementing radical alternations (Eisner 1992). However if one takes the views expressed by parents in the current study at face value, this would suggest that parents would welcome such radical alternations being made to senior cycle education.

As always, however, drastic change will be very difficult to achieve and as it currently stands ‘instruction continues to be suffocated by training and instruction’ (Gleeson 2010, p.366) and ‘assessment remains the tail that wags the curriculum dog’ (Hargreaves 1989).

Parents and contrasting values in social and personal education

Within the current study, contrasting views emerged as to whether the teaching of social and personal issues within schools, particularly sex education and sexuality, should or should not be based on religious principles. While the majority of parents did not make any reference to religious (or secular) values within their responses, a vocal minority requested that religious teachings form the basis of social and personal programmes while others wished for the State to take responsibility for these issues without the involvement of religious bodies. David Hegarty (a representative of the Congress of Catholic Schools Parents Association (CSPA)) expressed similar views to the latter, reflecting the concerns outlined by the association at the time of EM.
The author wishes to explore these contrasting views further, however, prior to doing so, it is important to briefly revisit the context, as outlined in chapter two, out of which these contrasting views have emerged.

These contrasting views are reflective of the legacy of involvement and influential role played by the Catholic Church in Irish education. The Catholic Church viewed their role in education as their prerogative (Coolahan 1981), resulting in the majority of schools at primary and post-primary level being run by religious bodies or at least having representation from religious bodies on their boards. While the number of schools owned and managed by religious bodies has declined, the establishment of Trust Boards ensures that the ethos of these schools is maintained. Furthermore, the Education Act (DES 1998) protects this ethos by stating that schools will not be expected to introduce curriculum that diverges from the ethos of the school. In the past the Catholic Church has opposed any attempts by the State to introduce health related programmes into schools (or even in terms of broader health initiatives such as the Mother and Child Scheme). It is important to highlight that Ireland is not alone in having contrasting views on the role of the Catholic Church in education e.g. the experiences in relation to America, England and Poland are outlined in chapter two.

Prior to exploring possible ways the State can accommodate the contrasting parental views that have emerged from the current study, the author wishes to explore the emergence of contrasting views in previous cases. The author will do this firstly by looking at international examples, followed by an exploration of contrasting parental views in relation to RSE and the Exploring Masculinities Programme at the time of its development. Some possible reasons for the existence of these different views will then be explored.
An international perspective

Contrasting views have caused debate about the teaching of sex and health education\textsuperscript{55} in American schools. Some groups (e.g. Christian Crusade) have lobbied for the inclusion of ‘abstinence only until marriage’ programmes in schools. Religious conservatives succeeded in adding abstinence education provisions to the Welfare Reform Act in 1996 resulting in funding being made available for abstinence only education programmes. Such funding has increased from $60 million in 1998 to $168 million in 2005 (Santelli \textit{et al} 2006, p.75). ‘Abstinence only before marriage’ programmes present abstinence as the only acceptable option and mentions homosexuality only in relation to AIDS (based on the book for abstinence programmes: ‘Sex Respect: The options of true sexual freedom’).

Others, who oppose abstinence education on the grounds that it allows religious influence in State schools, have called for sex education programmes to adopt a comprehensive approach (Simson and Sussman 2000). Comprehensive based programmes offer a broad perspective on the role that sexuality plays in an individual’s personal development and focuses on developing: self esteem, personal responsibility, relationship skills, respect for self and others (National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League 1999). While comprehensive programmes promote delayed sexual activity, the attitude to premarital sex advanced in the programme ‘is more permissive than fundamentalists Christian and other religions that teach that such sex is sinful and necessarily avoided’ (Simson and Sussman 2000, p.273). It also treats abortion and homosexuality as more acceptable than abstinence based programmes do. The type of sex and sexuality education offered in schools varies from State to State and from school district to school district within States (Simson and Sussman 2000); with

\textsuperscript{55} The author is aware that the Exploring Programme dealt with additional social and personal issues other than sex education. However, the majority of literature relating to conflicting views relates specifically to sex education and its inclusion on the school curriculum. Therefore the majority of this section deals mainly with sex education.
local school boards deciding what form such programmes should take. For example, the Texas Board of Education has removed the majority of information about contraception from their health education books (Santelli et al. 2006, p.77). While parents have the right to remove their children from comprehensive sex education, 90% of middle school and high school parents in a nationwide study conducted in the USA viewed sex education as essential for their children to receive in school. 15% wished for this to be based on abstinence-only sex education (Dailard 2001).

Contestation between the Catholic Church and the Polish State in relation to the involvement of the State in social and personal education has tended to revolve around sex education and sexuality issues. For example in 1988, the Catholic Church opposed the introduction of a textbook for sex education class, which they viewed as too open and direct (Nowicka 1996). Under pressure from the Catholic Church, the Ministry of Education removed the textbook from schools. While sex education was reintroduced in 1993 (in line with new anti-abortion laws), criticisms were made of the unsatisfactory way in which this was done (Trawinske 1995). The main criticisms revolved around the fact that there was no official textbook or teacher development provided. The influence of the Catholic Church in relation to the provision of sex education in schools is evident in the fact that the majority of textbooks that are recommended by the State are based on family planning methods and indicate, for example, that contraception is ‘morally evil’ (Nowicka 1996, p.26). This contradicts the practices of the State, which subsidise a wide range of oral contraception’s to ensure members of the State were practicing safe sex (ibid, p.24).

Debate and contestation has occurred in England in relation to whether social and personal programmes should be based on ‘a moral framework’ (Thomson 1994, p.48). Again this tended to revolve around issues of sex education and sexuality. This is evident in the guidelines issued to school governors from the DOE in 1987 which stated that:
Teaching about the physical aspects of sexual behaviour should be set within a clear moral framework in which pupils are encouraged to consider the importance of self-restraint, dignity and respect for themselves and others

DOE (1987, p.4)

The same set of guidelines indicated that ‘there is no place in any school in any circumstances for teaching which advocates homosexual behaviour, which presents it as the ‘norm’ or which encourages homosexual experimentation by pupils…it must be recognized that for many people, including members of religious faiths, homosexual practice is not morally acceptable, and deep offence may be caused to them if the subject is not handed with sensitivity by teachers if discussed in the classroom’ (DES 1987). Amendments to Section 28 of the Local Government Act (as discussed in Chapter two) resulted in a ban being placed on local authorities ‘promoting homosexuality’ (this has now been lifted). According to Thomson (1994) the teaching of social and personal issues, particularly issues around sexuality, emphasized the development of morality within a religious framework. While all secondary schools students now receive sex education, parents are free to withdraw their children from this (as per 1993 Education Act).

Contrasting parental views on the teaching of health related issues

Contrasting parental views emerged within the current study in relation to the values (Catholic or secular) that should underpin the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle. Such contrasting views are not new and emerged following the introduction of Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) and the Exploring Masculinities Programme
wherein certain parent groups opposed these programmes on the basis that they did not uphold religious principles in the teaching of social and personal issues. In relation to the RSE programme, certain ‘antagonistic interest groups, mostly representing a traditional Catholic perspective’ (Inglis 1998, p.52) had reservations about the programme. Parents’ Network was one of three groups that opposed the introduction of RSE into schools (along with Human Life International Ireland\textsuperscript{56} and Tuisti). They opposed its introduction on the grounds that aspects of the content were inappropriate for young children to discuss. They also had concerns regarding ‘who gives [such forms of education], where it is given, when it is given’ (McKenzie cited in Inglis 1998, p.113). It was suggested that rather than the neutral approach adopted within RSE, children ‘must be give[n] firm moral teaching’ (McKenzie 1998, p.113).

An examination of parental views on EM was beyond the remit of both the External Evaluation (Gleeson \textit{et al} 2004) and the NCCA report (Mac an Ghaill \textit{et al}, 2004). Therefore, one cannot gauge the levels of parental support for EM at the time of its development and launch. What is clear, however, is that some parent groups were concerned about aspects of the programme. This is reflected in the fact that a father in one of the pilot schools took the DES to court on the basis that the introduction of the programme in his son’s school was unconstitutional (Mac an Ghaill \textit{et al} 2004). Furthermore, the Congress of Catholic Schools Parent Association (CSPA) asked for the removal of the programme from schools and indicated that ‘a Catholic school should not be expected to neutralise its principles in order to deliver a programme such as EM’ (CSPA undated, p.1)\textsuperscript{57}. However, as is evident in the current research findings, the majority of parents did not raise similar concerns in relation to the treatment of EM issues on the school curriculum.

\textsuperscript{56} Human Life International Ireland is a pro-family, anti-abortion, pro-life organisation who advocate natural family planning and chastity as methods to prevent against the need for abortion.

\textsuperscript{57} While CSPA produced a document outlining their views on EM, the Catholic Church (bishops and hierarchy) did not respond in any organised way to the programme.
These contrasting views can be related to the different approaches teachers can adopt when discussing controversial issues in the classroom, as outlined in chapter three. This raises questions regarding the role of the teacher in dealing with such issues in the classroom. Is the teacher there to provide an agreed correct position as outlined, for example, by the Catholic Church or are students provided with an opportunity to form their own views, irrespective of whether these contradict the teachings of the school, the home or a particular Church? If the latter approach is taken, it is likely that some groups will oppose it on the grounds that the values of their Church are not advanced, resulting in statements from political platforms and complaints to newspapers and school principals (Bridges 1986, p.21). This is evident in some of the reactions to the RSE programme and to the non-judgemental, neutral approach that teachers were encouraged to adopt when teaching EM. Such methods are at odds with the traditional approach to teaching in Ireland, wherein knowledge and information transfer were prioritised ahead of the development of feelings and emotions (Hannan et al. 1983, 33) and critical debate and questioning were stifled (OECD 1991; Gleeson 2004). Lessons on moral issues tended to be based on the teachings of the Catholic Church (Inglis 1998).

These differing parental views may also be reflective of the fact that, for a number of reasons, secularism appears to be growing within Ireland and we may be on our way to becoming a ‘post-Christian society’ (Hanafin 2001, p.1). This is mirrored in, for example, a study by Hardiman and Whelan (1998) who found that attendance at Mass and levels of confidence in the Catholic Church decreased in the 1990s in comparison to the 1970s. This was supported by Cassidy (2002, p.26) who found that across all age groups Mass attendance fell from 83% in 1981 to 59% in 1999. Taking the age group 18-26 on its own, Cassidy (2002) found that the decrease in attendance was more dramatic, with 75% attending Mass on a weekly basis in 1981 but only 23% doing so in 1999. Wren (2003) also noted a sharp decline in Mass attendance and she found that of those who did attend, two-thirds were over sixty years
of age. However, Ireland still maintains higher levels of Mass attendance than a number of other countries e.g. Switzerland, Poland, Northern Ireland, Italy, USA, and Sweden (ibid). It also appears that the publics’ view on the teachings of the Catholic Church have changed, with the public becoming more accepting of abortion, premarital sexual relations and same sex relations\textsuperscript{58} (based on a comparison of views from 1981 to 1998) (Cassidy 2002, p.25). The more recent publication of the Ryan (2009) and Murphy (2009) reports are likely to compound this situation further.

Increasing secular views and the rising pluralistic nature of Irish society impacts greatly on the Irish education system and may result in situations where ‘Roman Catholic parents and school staff themselves become less orthodox in their religious practices and more individualistic in their interpretation of church teaching, especially in relation to their personal lives’ (O’Sullivan 2005, p.213). This may result in schools adapting ‘their expectations, assumptions, exhortations and excoriations’ which may be in ‘conflict with Catholic parents who would have wished for a more ‘authentic’ assertion and modelling of church teaching’ (O’Sullivan 2005, p.213). Inglis (1998, p.52) supports this when he states that while the majority of Catholics send their children to Catholic run schools, there are many who disagree with specific Church teachings. This may create difficulties for parents, as reflected in the findings of the current study, who wish for a religious ethos to be maintained in their children’s schools but also for parents who send their children to, for example, a Catholic run schools but yet are not practising Catholics themselves. While it may be assumed that parents who choose a religious school do so for religious purposes, the fact remains that parents select schools for a number of different reasons, outside of its underlying ethos. For example, a study conducted by O’Malley (2008) found that while greater than half of the parents surveyed wanted primary schools to strengthen their children’s faith, the religious, moral and spiritual education

\textsuperscript{58} Abortion is always wrong: 74% agreement in 1981; 30% in 1999. Premarital sexual relations are always wrong: 36% agreement in 1991 to 8% in 1998. Same sex relations are always wrong: 68% agreement in 1991 to 19% in 1999
provided by the school was not an influential factor in their selection. In comparison, parents did identify the quality of education, discipline and the ability of the school to meet the needs of the child as more important factors in their decision. In saying this however, 50% of these parents did want a denominational education for their children. Walch (1996) found that ‘Catholic parents today do not value the spiritual development of their children as highly as their career development’ (p.245). This is reflective of the case referred to earlier in chapter two, where membership and attendance at religious ceremonies in England have declined yet demand for Catholic and Church of England schools continue to increase (Johnson 2000) due to the perception that these schools achieve better results and maintain better discipline.

The increasing secularisation of society is reflected in the growth of Educate Together schools with eighteen such primary schools now operating within the Republic of Ireland. Parents selecting such schools do so, not because it is the most convenient school, but because of the principles adopted within these schools. This is reflected in the comments of Hyland (1996), when she indicated that ‘lack of choice for parents who did not want to send their children to specifically denominational schools was the driving force behind the Educate Together movement’ (p.242).

How can the wishes of all parents be accommodated?

The Irish Constitution permits parents to provide for their children’s education in a school of their choice or in the home (GOI 1938, Article 42, No.2). The Constitution pledges that the state will not require parents to send their children to a school whose ethos goes against that of the home\(^{59}\). This is mirrored in the European Convention on Human Rights (1952) and the

\(^{59}\) It is important to note that changes to Article 41 and 42 of the Irish Constitution have been proposed and will be put to a referendum in the near future (as of yet no date is set). If these proposed changes are agreed, the emphasis will change from parents rights to the rights of the child and any decision regarding children will be made based on their rights and interests (Kilkelly 2010). The title of section 42 will also change from Education to Children.
United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (1948) referred to earlier. In line with these rights, parents can (in theory) choose to send their children to whatever type of school they wish: if they desire a Catholic education they can send their children to a Catholic run secondary school and if they desire, for example, a Protestant or Jewish or a non-denominational education they can in theory choose a suitable school type to meet their needs.

In addition to this, the Education Act (DES 1998, Section 30, 2e) states that school authorities ‘shall not require any student to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent of the student or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18 years’ nor can the state require schools to provide curriculum that opposes the ethos of the school. While the Education Act (DES 1998) requires schools to ‘promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them’ it requires them to do so while having ‘regard to the characteristic spirit of the school’. Therefore the patrons of privately owned schools may put their own particular stamp on programmes that transcend traditional subject boundaries therefore ensuring that their ethos remains intact. This ultimately means that while all post-primary schools within the Republic of Ireland must educate their students on ‘moral, spiritual, social and personal development….and health education’ they are permitted to deal with these issues in a manner that is consistent with the characteristic spirit of the school. So while SPHE and RSE are mandatory subjects, they do not have a mandatory curriculum (Inglis 1998) in a context where, for example, the teaching of homosexuality or contraception in a school with a Catholic ‘spirit’ may prove problematic.

Therefore, the views expressed by some parents in the current study that ‘within Catholic schools, Catholic views should have primacy’ (David Hegarty’s representative of CSPA interviewed in the current study) are supported by the legislation and as long as such

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60 Although parents in theory can choose whatever type of school they wish for their child, limited choice may be available when parents of certain minority groups are located in areas where their preferred school type is not available.
legislation remains parents who choose a Catholic education for their children are entitled to ensure their children’s educational experiences are in line with such teachings. So in fact parents who were critical of the introduction of EM into Voluntary Catholic Secondary Schools were entitled to argue that its introduction, without prior consultation with parents, goes against the Education Act (DES 1998), the European Convention on Human Rights (1952) and was ultimately unconstitutional.

How then can a school satisfy the demands of both sets of parents (both those who do and do not want teaching on, for example, homosexuality, to be based on Catholic principles) while still respecting their constitutional rights? No matter how many different programmes are introduced into schools, these conflicting views will continue to exist and schools will be expected to navigate the minefield of differing opinions. How can parents with conflicting views be accommodated?

In recent times, in light of the publication of the Ryan (2009) and Murphy (2009) report, calls have been made for the removal of all religious influence from Irish schools (see for example O’Halloran 2010) – with the majority of this debate being played out in the realm of the media. However, perhaps rather than removing the religious influence from schools entirely and introducing secular education across the board, the solution could lie in providing ‘real choice’ (O’Brien 2010) to parents and students. This would ultimately result in a situation were non-religious run schools would present a secular perspective on social and personal topics, would not deal with EM issues from a Catholic standpoint and would be free to permit teachers to adopt a non-judgemental neutral approach when teaching about such issues. Voluntary Catholic Secondary Schools and other religious school types would be free, if they so desired, to provide social and personal programmes based on the teachings of the individual churches and could present an agreed position that concurs with the teachings of the particular church. This would, assuming parents have choice when selecting a post-primary school, result
in a situation where parents who choose a non-religious education for their children are secure in the knowledge that their children’s educational experience would be secular in nature. Likewise, those who select a religious school are ensured that their children are actually receiving this.

This would be more desirable as merely providing secular education for all ‘denies the right to parental choice’ (O’Brien 2010) and goes against their rights at national, European and International level. Ensuring the availability of a diverse range of school types (e.g. Voluntary Secondary schools, Community schools, Educate Together schools etc) would ensure that parents would be able to select a school that reflects their values (McCormack 2000, p.159). Finally, if this argument is to progress and be resolved there is a need to establish the Working Group on the provision of multidenominational and secular education that was proposed by the National Education Convention in 1994 (Coolahan 1994), which as yet has not been formed.

**Conclusion**

The Catholic Church has played a significant role in education in Ireland. Considering its role to involve promoting and maintaining the morality of people, the involvement of the State in health education (and hospitals) was a significant concern for the church. Conflict between the Church and the State in Ireland occurred anytime the State attempted to become involved in health related issues e.g. the Mother and Child Scheme, the Stay Safe Programme. Contrasting views emerged within the current study in relation to whether or not school based social, personal and health education programmes should be based on religious teachings. Some demanded that this be the case while others requested the opposite. The legislation (for

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61 However, such an approach could result in a ghettoised education system, as referred to earlier in Chapter two in relation to religious run schools in England.
example: Irish Constitution; Education Act (DES 1998) and the European Convention on Human Rights (1952)) protects parents rights to have their children educated in a school of their choice, religious or otherwise. Therefore, having social and personal programmes based on secular values may be problematic for parents and students who wished for, for example, a Catholic education (or visa versa). Within the current legislation, the only viable option is to provide ‘real choice’ (O’Brien 2010) so that parents who want a secular education for their children have such an option open to them and those who want a religious education can choose such a school. There is now an urgent need for the Working Group on the provision of multidenominational and secular education that was proposed by the National Education Convention in 1994 to be established.

**Teacher development and the exploration of masculinities**

The current study found that parents had concerns regarding the lack of teacher development in relation to dealing with the exploration of masculinities (and social and personal issues in general) with young men at senior cycle. For example, parents believed that teachers are not ‘trained’ to take on this role as ‘they do not study such issues when in college’. These parental fears appear to be well founded if one acknowledges a number of other Irish based studies, as outlined in Chapter Three e.g. Geary and Mannix McNamara (2003); Norman (2004); Mayock et al (2007). In relation to the specific programme of EM, parental concerns are justified seeing as teacher development on EM was neglected (Gleeson et al 2004) due to the overemphasis placed on the development of curriculum materials. Teachers also appear to concur with the parental concerns expressed within the current study, as Norman (2004) found that teachers themselves identified lack of adequate teacher development as a concern, believing that greater teacher development was essential (see also Geary and Mannix McNamara (2003)).
Parental concerns regarding teacher development have clear implications for pre-service education and for the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of teachers insofar as new skills and alternative pedagogical approaches (such as the adoption of a non-judgemental neutral chairperson approach in dealing with controversial issues in the classroom) are required to address these topics in a sensitive and appropriate manner. However, even if levels of teacher development in social and personal areas improve, a number of studies have identified concerns with the current approach to teacher development, both in Ireland and internationally (see for example Sugrue et al. 2001; Villegas-Reimers 2003; Conway et al. 2009; OECD 2009). Within this section the author will explore the issue of teacher development under the following headings: emphasis placed on subject knowledge, the need for emphasis on teacher’s personal development, lack of focus on social, personal and health education programmes, the need for a ‘sustained and intensive approach’ and selection and involvement of teachers in social and personal programmes.

**Emphasis placed on subject knowledge**

Reflective of the dominance of the technical paradigm (Carr and Kemmis 1986), teacher development programmes in Ireland have traditionally been centrally prescribed/developed and their implementation has followed a top-down approach (Granville 2005, pp.56-57; see also Marker 1999; Halton 2004). This approach is functional and instrumental in nature (Sugrue et al. 2001) with emphasis placed on subject specialism and content mastery. For example, a study by Villegas-Reimers (2003) found that pre-service teacher education was taken up with subject specialism and subject pedagogy. Similarly, CPD tends to focus on imparting cognitive knowledge to teachers. Sugrue et al. (2002) suggested that teacher development in Ireland tends

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62 Including the following: content/subject matter, foundation of education courses, professional studies (pedagogy and method courses), child development and practicum
to be based on ‘knowledge-for practice’ wherein emphasis is placed on the acquirement of subject knowledge. This knowledge is ‘generated by experts’ (Sugrue et al 2001, p.18) and then ‘disseminated by teacher educators to students and experienced practitioners’ (ibid). The providers of teacher development, be it at pre-service or in-service level, are viewed as experts passing on knowledge to teachers who merely apply this in their own classroom (Van Dreil et al 2001). Teacher development consists of experts advising teachers on the newest developments in teaching (Eisner 1992, p.614; see also Nasseh 1996) while teachers are treated as mere technicians who simply instruct their students on the prescribed curriculum. The premise underlying ‘knowledge-for practice’ is that teachers who know more will ultimately be more effective teachers (Conway et al 2009, p.32)

Focusing mainly on subject content results in a situation where the teacher is viewed as a subject expert and ‘teaching one’s subject becomes a matter of conveyance, the authority and communicative competence lying only with the teacher who is positioned as a knowledge broker of sorts’ (Phelan 2001, p.588). The TALIS study (OECD 2009) found this to be true of Irish teachers as they tend to hold strong transmission beliefs in relation to teaching and learning in comparison to teachers in other OECD countries. This could result in a situation where, as outlined in chapter three, teachers are encouraged to present information on controversial issues to students as either right or wrong, with limited opportunities being provided for students and teachers to develop their own views.

Such methods of teacher development are viewed as ineffective and have minimum impact on practice, for ‘just as ‘top-down transmission of facts from teacher to student is inappropriate, so ‘top-down’ delivery of teacher development from ‘expert’ to teacher is inappropriate’ in providing teachers with opportunities to reflect on their own needs, learning and practices (Gray and Bryce 2006, p.187). Such approaches to teacher development are ineffective in altering belief systems (Granville 2005) as it is only through ‘being confronted
with the issues and their own beliefs, and being given opportunities to articulate and reflect on these beliefs and issues with other colleagues, will they be able to reassess what this means for their teaching and the approaches they adopt in the classroom’ (Gray and Bryce 2006, p.187). Provider driven, content focused teacher development does not permit such learning to take place, and therefore limited alternations are made to teachers’ belief systems and everyday practices.

A more effective approach to teacher development would involve ‘knowledge of practice’. Knowledge of practice aims to empower the teacher and the learner through the learning process. Teachers are viewed as constructors of their own knowledge, who play a central role in generating knowledge through inquiry (Conway et al 2009, p.33). What is perceived as knowledge and who is responsible for generating knowledge is continuously subject to questioning (ibid). Teachers are encouraged to develop a critical awareness that enables them to question previously taken for granted assumptions, as per the critical paradigm (Carr and Kemmis 1986).

Empowerment of the learner is central to ‘knowledge-of practice’; therefore teachers are viewed as ‘critical policy consumers rather than passive implementers of reform agendas set by others’ (Sugrue et al 2001, p.29). Within such a model of teacher development, teachers would be, through the learning process, inducted into the subject matter, encouraged to question the content and pedagogy that is advanced and to construct their own understanding of the subject matter. Such an approach is in line with the approaches outlined in EM and RSE for dealing with controversial issues in the classroom, wherein teachers allow students to construct their own understanding and opinions. Adopting such an approach within teacher development, would enable teachers to do likewise in their own teaching.

It is time for a shift from the current focus on ‘knowledge-for practice’ to one that emphasises ‘knowledge-of practice’ so that teachers can become active participants in their
own development, are empowered as a result of the learning process and are encouraged to question aspects of schooling and their own teaching that they previously took for granted (Carr and Kemmis 1986). They would hopefully in turn encourage their own students to do likewise. Such an approach would result in more effective learning during a teacher’s development and would have a greater impact on their practices and beliefs and values.

The need for emphasis on teachers’ personal development

As a result of the emphasis on subject and content knowledge, teachers own personal development can be a neglected aspect of their education. Within the context of societal changes, such as new family structures, teaching roles are altering and are encompassing areas previously considered the sole remit of the home (OECD 2005). As a result teachers are now viewed as more than just subject experts and are expected to be providers of moral education, to be role models for their students and help promote students self confidence and esteem. Effective teaching, therefore, involves more than having a comprehensive understanding of ones subject area but also involves the use of feelings, emotions and the ability to form positive relationships. This is reflected in the fact that Conway et al (2009) stressed the importance of a teacher being a caring person. Such aspects are at the heart of good teaching (Goleman 1995; Berry 2001) and have been referred to as the ‘emotional geography’ of teaching (Hargreaves 2000). The need for teachers to become more than mere subject experts is clear with Sugrue et al (2001) outlining the increasing demand on schools to become ‘caring and nurturing institutions’ (p.6). As well as instructing students in the subject matter, it is acknowledged that teaching also involves counselling and motivating students. The multi-dimensional role of the teacher is reflected in the Core Values outlined by the Teaching Council of Ireland (undated), which stresses the importance of focusing on holistic development, cultural values, social justice, equality and inclusion in ones role as a teacher.
If teaching involves more than just having an understanding of one's subject area, then there is a need to focus on both the personal and professional side of teachers' lives during their development, be it at pre-service or in-service level. If teachers are to care for and nurture their students, they need to develop personal skills that will enable them to do so. The need to focus on personal development is stressed in the White Paper on Education (DES 1995) where the importance of finding a balance between the personal and professional development of teachers is highlighted. The significance of personally developing teachers has also been highlighted by a number of different sources (see for example Waters 1998; Day and Leitch 2001, Sugrue 2002). The latter believes that teacher development programmes need to encompass personal development rather than being functional and instrumental in nature, as they are at present (Sugrue 2002, p.334). There is a need to include opportunities to develop personal qualities and self-understanding in teacher development programmes (Fullan and Hargreaves 1992) and as a result it is important to view teacher development in conjunction with personal development, which does not occur at present. As teaching encompasses both professional and personal domains, teachers require a deep understanding and knowledge of the self (Day and Leitch 2001, p.414). As a result, issues around self-esteem, stress management and self-awareness need to be included in teacher education programmes (Waters 1998). When a personal growth model of teacher development is adopted, teachers tend to have a greater sense of self-understanding, become more reflective, are more sensitive and ultimately become better teachers (Vogt 1995, p.291). This highlights the importance of focusing on issues such as personal development within teacher education programmes, yet the current approach where emphasis is placed on subject knowledge results in a situation where personal issues of relevance to teachers, e.g. understanding of the self and their feelings of self-esteem and confidence, are placed as secondary to their understanding of the content.
Within the context of the current study, focusing on the personal development of teachers is essential if they are going to be able to teach social and personal issues effectively in the future. The importance of focusing on personal development is significant when one considers that teachers are not adequately prepared personally nor professionally to teach Relationship and Sexuality Education (Walsh 1999). Teachers themselves acknowledged the importance of personal development training for new teachers (Millar 2003) while Geary and Mannix McNamara (2007, p.45) also stressed the importance of focusing on esteem building, personal development and self care of teachers of affective education. A number of the issues explored within social and personal programmes are sensitive in nature and one must not forget that teachers carry with them their own prejudices and discriminations (Ferfolja and Robinson 2004, p.11). Therefore these discriminations need to be identified and examined prior to any teacher becoming involved in social and personal education. The importance of personal development for teachers of social and personal programmes is clear when one acknowledges the fact that high levels of discomfort on the part of the teacher is a considerable barrier to dealing with sensitive and potentially embarrassing topics within social and personal programme. Within this context, the importance of focusing on the personal development of teachers is clear.

**Lack of focus on social, personal and health education programmes in pre-service courses**

While levels of CPD on social and personal education has increased (the DES provided £1.8m (Ir) for CPD for relationship and sexuality education in 1996 – the highest level of funding in comparison to all other CPD courses (OECD 1999)), the majority of pre-service teacher programmes fail to prepare pre-service teachers adequately for dealing with social and personal topics within their classroom or school. For example a study by Mayock *et al* (2007,
p.136), referred to in Chapter Three, found a ‘virtual absence’ of SPHE training from most pre-service teacher education courses in Ireland. Calls have been made for the inclusion of social and personal issues in pre-service teacher training ‘as a matter of concern’ (Minton et al 2008, p.187). The importance of this is highlighted when one considers that lack of adequate teacher development and high levels of teacher discomfort were found to be considerable barriers to teaching RSE and SPHE (Mayock et al 2007) inhibiting teachers from dealing with all issues within SPHE. What’s more, studies have found that pre-service teacher development does not adequately prepare their students for dealing with controversial issues in the classroom (Oulton et al 2004).

Despite relatively high levels of investment in CPD for teachers of social and personal programmes, numerous concerns exist in relation to the CPD of SPHE teachers. Particular concerns relate to the “one-off” nature of SPHE CPD and the lack of in-school support provided to SPHE teachers (Mayock et al 2007, p.44). Further difficulties emerge when one considers the high turnover of teachers of SPHE (Egan 2004; Mayock et al 2007) resulting in continuously high demand for teacher development in these areas. This could also result in a situation where high numbers of untrained teachers are teaching the subject (See for example Millar 2003).

The neglect of teacher development in social and personal areas is not unique to Ireland as reflected in the calls for enhanced provision to develop teachers’ ability, knowledge base and confidence in discussing such issues in other jurisdictions (Minton et al 2001; Buston et al 2002; Walker et al 2003; Walker and Milton 2006). For example, Walker and Milton (2006) found that in England and Australia ‘teachers are busy professionals expected to have expertise in many areas. Yet teachers invariably need more training opportunities if they are to be effective sexuality educators’ (p.425). The study concluded that greater attention on issues of sexuality is needed at pre-service level if teachers are to develop competence, confidence and a
strong knowledge base in social and personal areas. An interesting approach is adopted in England, based on the assumption that all teachers will at some stage in their career teach social and personal education (Personal, Social and Health Education), all teachers need to be familiar with the programme of study for PSHE prior to being recommended for Qualified Teacher Status (TDA 2006 cited in Evans and Evans 2007, p.43).

Within an Irish context, accreditation of teachers who participate in development on social and personal education is badly needed (Mayock et al 2007; Nic Gabhainn and Barry 2007; see also Granville 2005 for accreditation of CPD in general). Such accreditation could alleviate some of the concerns of parents within the current study and could ensure that those who teach such classes are in fact ‘trained’ to do so. Also, it would be beneficial if schools could inform parents when teachers have participated in related teacher development, for as the current study found the majority of members of the various parent associations did not possess enough information to determine whether teachers received sufficient development on such issues. Having a lack of information could result in increased parental concerns regarding the involvement of the school in social and personal education. As was seen in chapter three, parents who receive more information on what is happening in schools are more likely to view the school and teachers in a positive light (see for example Delgado-Gaitan 1991; Coleman 1998). This increased parental confidence could have a positive impact on teacher self esteem (Rosenholtz 1991) and would hopefully result in improved social and personal education for students.
The need for ‘a sustained and intensive approach’

Concerns have been raised in relation to the ‘one-off’ approach to CPD and the fact that follow up support and development are not provided for teachers (Mayock et al 2007). This relates also to the induction of newly qualified teachers into the school environment. This can result in a fragmented and incoherent approach to teacher development (Fullan 1999, p.27; see also GOI 1995) where there is limited linkage between pre-service and in-service teacher development and a lack of continuity between various CPD sessions.

To counter this, it has been suggested that there is a need to have a sustained and intensive approach to teacher development (Garet et al 2001, p.917; see also Sugrue 2002). Teachers would be exposed to a series of related experiences, hopefully begin at pre-service level and continue throughout the remainder of a teacher’s career. This is important as learning to teach is a journey that ‘happens over a number of years’ (Conway et al 2009, p.xiv) and pre-service is only the first step on that journey. Teacher development needs to be viewed as a continuum encompassing pre-service, induction and CPD. Unlike Northern Ireland, Great Britain and other European countries, Ireland does not have an established induction programme for newly qualified teachers (Drudy 2004, p.34). While an induction programme was established in 2002, this continues to run on a pilot basis, with only approximately 20% of newly qualified teachers participating in this (Burke 2004). Both the OECD (1999) and Conway et al (2009) view teacher induction as essential and called for greater support to be provided to new qualified teachers during their first few years of teaching. For example, Conway et al (2009, p.203) believe that induction:

63 Steps have been taken in Ireland to reduce the fragmented approach to CPD through, for example, the attempted co-ordination of the various independent Support Services in 2002
Is a crucial stage of learning to be a teacher and a comprehensive induction programme is needed in order to shape newly qualified teachers (NQT’s) professional engagement in lifelong learning and to help them become competent, effective professionals.

Furthermore, following participation in CPD, follow up support for teachers within schools and classroom is essential. This would result in, what Mayock et al (2007, p.44) referred to as, ‘a balance between out-of-school in-service and in-school support’. This would ensure that teachers experience professional development and guidance in a variety of settings. Such an approach has been deemed an ‘indispensable catalyst of the change process’ (Schifter et al 1999, p.30). An evaluation of the implementation of SPHE into Irish post-primary schools recommended that whole school development be provided so that, amongst other things, SPHE teachers would be supported within their school. Again this is particularly important in areas of social and personal education, when one acknowledges the impact school culture (and school type) has on the social and personal development of students (see for example Hannan 1983; Smyth 1999).

Selection and involvement of teachers in social and personal programmes

While a number of parents within the current study drew attention to the importance of appropriate development for teachers involved in social and personal programmes, others noted that it was equally, if not more important, for teachers to have a suitable personality in order to engage adequately with social and personal issues e.g. ‘any teacher who is sensitive, kind,
caring, and a good listener. You can have all the training in the world but you may never be able to deal with these issues adequately’. The importance of teachers having a suitable personality, as outlined in chapter three, has been highlighted by a number of other studies with, for example, both Mayock et al (2007) and Evans and Evans (2007) stressing the need for care when selecting teachers of affective education. A principal in the study conducted by Mayock et al (2007) indicated that the success of relationship and sexuality education in schools is ‘hugely down to the personality of the people who will take part in this programme’ (p.28). The report concluded that ‘not all teachers had the degree of openness, confidence and/or comfort to deliver classes in RSE’ (Mayock et al 2007, p.29). Evans and Evans (2007) supported this when they argued that a successful SPHE programme was dependent on a sensitive and trusting relationship between teacher and pupil.

The need for teachers to have a suitable personality to engage adequately in teaching social and personal issues (as outlined by parents in the current research) highlights the need for care to be taken when selecting teachers to teach social and personal programmes. It is desirable that participation in such programmes would be voluntary and that this selection is made in collaboration with teachers (Nic Gabhainn and Barry 2007); however this does not appear to be the case within Ireland. For example, Geary and Mannix-McNamara (2003) found that in some schools all teachers are given one class of SPHE a week and are only informed of this when they receive their timetable. Such an approach to assigning SPHE classes to teachers could impound the views help by parents in the current study that teachers teaching such classes are ‘merely filling in teaching hours’. Mayock et al (2007, p.29) found that while schools were aware of the need for participation of teachers in SPHE to be voluntary, only a very small number of schools involved in the study adopted such an approach. Ultimately the current practice where principals select teachers at random or where all teachers are given one class of SPHE per week (Geary and Mannix McNamara 2003) is hardly the way to ensure that
these teachers are, as one parent in the current study called for, ‘sensitive, kind, caring [and] good listeners’.

A further concern regarding the selection of teachers to teach social and personal education, as previously outlined in chapter three, relates to the lack of male teachers involved in such programmes. The absence of male teacher involvement in SPHE/RSE was noted by Geary and Mannix-McNamara (2003; 2007). The study found a general reluctance amongst male teachers to become involved in social and personal programmes (please see Chapter two of thesis for more details). Such reluctance relates not only to social and personal programmes but also to citizenship education (Gleeson and Munnelly 2003) and development education (McCormack and O’Flaherty 2010). There is a need for teacher education programmes to challenge these assumptions (Mills 2004). According to Francis (2008) there is a need for both male and female teachers to be involved in such forms of education as students do better when there is ‘match between characteristics of pupils and teachers in terms of gender’ (Francis 2008, p.109). Increasing the number of male teachers involved in social and personal education (who will work in conjunction with other male teachers and female teachers) could encourage young men to acknowledge that such programmes are relevant to male concerns (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998, p.240).

If principals are the main selectors of social and personal teachers and the majority of teachers of such programmes are female, this means that principals are mainly selecting female teachers. This raises concerns regarding the principals’ perceptions of who is responsible for affective education, a form of education often considered a female domain (Geary and Mannix McNamara 2007). This would suggest the need (as suggested by Geary and Mannix-McNamara 2007; NicGabhainn and Barry 2007) for CPD to be provided for principals so that they can examine their own perceptions and views of social and personal education and
develop a greater awareness of the important issues they need to consider when selecting teachers for such classes i.e. select a mixture of sensitive and caring men and women

Conclusion

The issue of teacher development was a concern for parents within the current study. Parents feared that teachers were not adequately ‘trained’ to deal with certain sensitive issues in an appropriate manner. In order to reduce parental fears teacher development must become a policy priority. However, before this can happen a number of changes need to be implemented to current practices for CPD and pre-service education programmes. Firstly, social and personal education needs to be included in pre-service education programmes. These programmes need to focus on both the personal development of teachers and also on teachers understanding of social and personal programmes. Secondly, changes need to be made to the current approach to CPD. Teachers need to be offered support and guidance, both during the CPD days but also within their school setting. Furthermore, while there will always be a need for provider-driven teacher development, the needs and concerns of teachers must also be considered. Finally, principals also need to participate in CPD so that they can develop a greater understanding of the factors that influence their selection of teachers to teach SPHE/RSE and to ensure that their approaches to selecting teachers are based on best practice.
The need for a positive discourse on masculinities in Ireland

Within this discussion piece, the author will explore the possibility of promoting a positive discourse on masculinity with Irish young men, wherein they would be encouraged to examine positive aspects of being a man. In doing so the author will examine the journalists views on this issue in relation to EM; will draw on both parent and journalists suggestions for the future and will relate these issues to previously published work. This issue is discussed under the following headings: focusing on positive male identities, developing an understanding of what it means to be male and the construction of positive male identities and the culture of single sex boy’s schools.

Positive male identities

As boys move from childhood to adolescence they may struggle to deal with issues relating to sexual maturation, sexual orientation and gaining acceptance from their peers. This is reflected in the views of parents in the current study, who believed that young men experienced pressure to live up to hegemonic forms of masculinity, wherein they feel under pressure to be heterosexual and to be like their peers. During this stage of their development, young men experience strong emotional and physical needs (Snowman and Biehler 2000). According to Erikson, at this stage the young man may be experiencing identity versus role confusion, wherein a major challenge for them is to establish a positive identity and to develop ‘a feeling of being at home in one’s body, a sense of ‘knowing where one is going’ and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count’ (Erikson 1968, p.165). However, rather than forming a positive sense of self an adolescent may develop a negative identity where they may be viewed and treated as delinquents and failures by society. This negative
identity, if short lived, can be an effective learning experience for the adolescent - however if it is maintained, long term negative consequences could ensue. The young person may feel rejected by society (e.g. family, peers etc) and ‘may well put his energy into becoming exactly what the careless and fearful community expects him to be’ (Erikson 1968, p.196)

The Exploring Masculinities Programme was an attempt to assist young men in forming positive identities, as reflected in the following two aims of the programme:

- To help boys realise their worth as individuals
- To explore concepts of masculinity, leading to positive and meaningful understanding of male roles

However, there appears to be a disparity between the stated aims of EM and what the journalists felt EM aimed to do. Within the current study, concerns were expressed in relation to what the journalists saw as the portrayal of a negative view of masculinity within EM. For example, Breda O’Brien (one of the four journalists interviewed in the current study) felt that the programme ‘paint[ed] a really dark picture of masculinity’ while Kevin Myers perceived that EM presented one side as all good and the other side as all bad. These journalists felt that such an approach resulted in ‘misplaced resentment, accusation and guilt [being] heaped on our young men’ (John Waters interview). Focusing solely on negative aspects of masculinity could result in a situation where young men may not develop a positive identity and may not be comfortable in who they are (Erikson 1968).

Authors who have examined this issue believe that focusing solely on the negative aspects of maleness has detrimental effects on young men and ultimately results in masculinity being viewed as ‘a bad small in the room’ (Farrell 2000, p.116) or as a ‘terminal illness’ (Waters 2004, p.60). Focusing solely on the concept of the ‘flawed man’ could result in feelings of social exclusion and could have a negative impact on the well-being of young men (Men’s Health 2002, p.2). Consequently, young men may not know whether they should feel
ashamed of being male and a situation could arise where, as outlined by a father in the current study, young men feel very ‘insecure about what it means be a man’ with ‘the journey [for young men] to find an identity becoming an even more dangerous one’. Keen (1991, p.6) wonders whether if you were to ask a man:

How does it feel to be a man these days? Do you feel manhood is honoured, respected, celebrated? Those who pause long enough to consider their gut feelings will likely tell you they feel blamed, demeaned, and attacked.

Feeling ashamed about being male can have negative consequences for both young men and society and can result in young men feeling that ‘everyone is trying to tell me I am wrong’ (Askew and Ross 1988 cited in Jackson 1996, p.106).

Bly (1992) believes that all of the great cultures of the past, except modern day society, have maintained and celebrated ‘images of positive male energy’ (p.23). Parents and journalists in the current study suggested that the focus needs to be placed on ‘images of positive male energy’. For example, one mother indicated that she would like ‘the positive side of being a young man applauded more: their competitiveness, their logic, their feelings of invincibility and power’. Both parents and journalists suggested that in the future social and personal programmes for young men should focus on positive aspects of the lives of young men, wherein young men would be encouraged to explore ‘that it is good to be a guy’ (Breda O’Brien) and are ‘taught to be proud and to feel good about being young men’ (parent in current study). Adopting such an approach would encourage young men to become comfortable with themselves and their maleness (see for example Farrell 2000, p.218), encourage them to ‘love themselves warts and all’ and would:
Encourage young men to feel proud, rather than ashamed, of the accident of birth that provided them with a Y chromosome. As one’s gender is central to identity, positive perceptions of maleness are needed to help young men feel that they are valued and that they do belong to our society.


Such a discourse would draw attention to what is admirable in young men and masculinities and provide a sense of direction for them. Bly (1992) supports this when he suggests that when masculinities are discussed in a positive way there is ‘a low string… [in a man’s heart]….that makes his whole chest tremble’ (p.236) just like it does in women when femininity is honoured. It is important that young men experience such feelings in order to become positive and active members of society.

This does not suggest that the problematic aspects or difficulties associated with some forms of masculinity would not be examined, but just that this would be done in conjunction with an examination of the strengths of maleness. Such an approach was also supported by Brawer (cited in Hoff Sommers 2000, p.131) who questions how our society can effectively examine the problems of traditional forms of masculinity but also the potential strengths.
Developing an understanding of what it means to be male

Within the current study, John Waters highlighted the importance of assisting young men in their development into manhood. Drawing on the book *Iron John*, Waters suggested that boys ‘needs to be introduced into the idea of manhood because afterwards [older men] tell him all the rituals of manhood….he needs to know that there are stories, traditions and wisdom which are handed down to him formally and he becomes a man’. This is supported by the work of, for example Keen (1991). Keen (1991) argues that every tribe and nation have ‘formal rites and informal customs that are designed to turn males into men’ (p.28). For example, within Aboriginal culture, young men participate in Walkabout, wherein they must survive in the wilderness for a number of months and on successfully doing so are considered men.

However, Layman (cited in Keen 1991, p.34) believes that society today does not value initiation processes and as a result ‘we live in an age of uninitiated men’. Clare (2000), drawing on his own experiences, could not recall anybody, his father, teachers or peers informing him on what is means to be man, a father, a lover or a dad. By abandoning initiation processes young men may experience difficulties transitioning into manhood reflective of the comments from a parent in the current study that ‘nowadays the testosterone filled adolescence have no clear vision on what it is to be a man’. Due to lack of initiation, young men may take their male energy and instead of disciplining this energy and honouring it they may use this energy in ‘the form of street gangs, wife beatings, drug violence, brutality to children, and aimless murder’ (Bly 1992, p.179). Again, this was supported by the comments of John Waters, in the current study, who argued that lack of initiation results in young men ‘finding other uses for knowledge and forming other kinds of myths’. The involvement of fathers and older men in initiation processes are vital, in fact without such involvement ‘a boy cannot change into a man’ (Bly 1992, p.86-7).
Fathers were identified by parents and journalists as important individuals in helping young men form positive male identities. While not diminishing the important role played by mothers, one of the most influential male figures in a young man’s life is his father (Clare 2000). Parents in the current study noted the important role played by fathers in their son’s maturation and stressed the importance of a strong father-son relationship. An oversight within EM was, according to the journalists, the lack of emphasis placed on fathers and fatherhood within EM. The journalists deemed such issues to be relevant to young men’s future lives. These views are supported by a number of studies that have stressed the important and vital role played by fathers in their children’s development. For example:

Positive father images are very important…… [as they] allow the son to unite and reconcile opposing elements in the boys psyche Salisbury and Jackson (1996, p.278)

More recent research strongly suggests that preschool children whose fathers are substantially engaged with and accessible to them are more competent, more empathic, more self-confident and less stereotyped in terms of gender roles Clare (2000, p.169)

Therefore, in the future an examination of fatherhood within social and personal programmes for young men would be important. This would also have implications for the sex of the teacher dealing with affective education and for the involvement of fathers in educational programmes for their sons. Such an approach would be an investment in the future by helping the young men of today (and the possible fathers of tomorrow) engage with identity issues.

64 The Project Coordinator pointed out that a number of the extracts in the section called Ma and Da – and one Grandpa dealt with issues around fatherhood.
The construction of positive male identities and the culture of single sex boys’ schools

The culture of single-sex boys (and co-educational) schools in Ireland plays an influential role in determining the type of male identify developed, with schools being viewed as ‘masculinity making devises’ (Connell 1989). Schools play an influential role in challenging and maintaining certain gendered norms, with the structure, pedagogy, curriculum and relationships within the school being capable of supporting or challenging certain hegemonic forms of masculinity. It tends to be the norm that schools support rather than challenge stereotypical forms of masculinity, resulting in physical strength, heterosexuality and sporting prowess (Lynch and Lodge 2002) being dominant features of the male peer group in all boys and co-educational schools in Ireland. This was supported by parents in the current study who firstly believed that young men experienced pressures to live up to these norms and secondly, who described the macho culture present in their sons school, where ‘heroes [were made] of boys who played sport’.

Furthermore, GLB students continue to be ignored within Irish schools, with heterosexuality perceived to be the only legitimate sexuality present amongst students and teachers. This can result in homosexual or perceived homosexual students being subordinated and bullied. Again this was supported by findings from the current study, where parents indicated that young men ‘do not include homosexuals in their circle of friends’. What’s more, it is obvious from parental comments that schools are currently not doing enough to challenge gender stereotypes or homophobic views, with schools often reinforcing rather than removing such attitudes e.g., ‘boys calling each other names, especially “gay”, was somewhat accepted in my son’s school’ and ‘the education in Ireland’s single sex schools remains by and large filled with homophobia, sexual remarks, and personal put-downs’. This is supported by two Irish
based studies by Norman (2004) and Minton et al (2008) who found that over half of the gay, lesbian and bisexual respondents surveyed experienced bullying in the past three months (Minton et al 2008) and that the majority of teachers were aware of instances of homophobic bullying in their school (Norman 2004).

Such a culture does not provide a hospitable environment in which to challenge gender stereotypes nor support various different forms of masculinity (not just hegemonic forms) and does not bode well for developing broader positive male identities, as outlined above. While parents and journalists in the current study have stressed the importance of helping boys develop positive male identities, changes need to be made to the culture of boys schooling before this can occur. This is further reflected in the findings of the External Evaluation of EM (Gleeson et al 2004) which found that although EM was introduced into a number of single sex boys’ schools during the pilot phase, the culture of these schools often did not permit such issues to be easily explored. While the inclusion of programmes that challenge gender norms (e.g. EM, or Gender studies aspect of SPHE) should encourage young men to examine their own attitudes towards male identities, these lessons need to move beyond individual classes and instead permeate the entire ethos of the school. Whilst there is merit in the current tendency to examine such issues within the context of dedicated programmes, the reality is that gender stereotypes are deeply embedded within the culture of society and schools that it is unduly optimistic to hope that individual teachers in individual classrooms will tackle these issues on their own. If schools are to become effective in challenging stereotypical attitudes, they must adopt a ‘pervasive’, ‘whole school’ approach, such as that advocated by Gilbert and Gilbert (1998, p.240). This is particularly true when one considers that the politics of gender are normally worked out within the ‘gaps and crannies’ of formal schooling and the ‘informal peer group’ (Kessler 1985, p.40) and not just within the formal structure of classrooms. In practice, it requires close scrutiny of all aspects of school life, including the schools sports
fields, playgrounds, changing rooms, classrooms, staffrooms, principals’ offices, and approaches to discipline etc.

In this context, it is important to acknowledge the influential role of parents in the development of their children’s attitudes and values regarding gender and sexuality. Where schools do challenge stereotypical views, they must recognise that attitudes and prejudices learned in the home make a very deep impression on children (e.g. Cossman 2004; Cameron et al 2001). Therefore, if schools are to succeed in challenging such attitudes they must work in close partnership with parents to promote social and personal education and challenge gender stereotypes. This is particularly important when one considers that the majority of parents in the current study viewed heterosexuality as a vital characteristic in a ‘real man’ and fathers, who are influential characters in their sons development, place greater importance than mothers on the need for a ‘real man’ to be ‘good at sport’ and ‘tough and hard’. Providing education for parents on social and personal topics, as was suggested in the current study, may help provide a more supportive, effective environment for encouraging young men to explore their masculine identities.

**Conclusion**

As young men move from boyhood to adolescence and into manhood they may struggle to develop a positive identity. EM was an attempt to encourage young men to develop a positive understanding of male roles. However, the journalists in the current study did not believe that EM was attempted to do this but rather that it ‘painted a dark picture of masculinity’ (Breda O’Brien). The importance of focusing on positive aspects of maleness was highlighted by, for example, Keen (1991); Bly (1992) and Farrell (2000). Focusing on positive aspects of maleness is important as a persons gender is central to their identity and is needed to ensure a person feels valued and a part of society. A number of studies (Salisbury and Jackson
have also highlighted the important role played by fathers in helping young men form a positive male identity. In the future, when young men are encouraged to explore issues of masculinities it would be important that attention is paid to the positive aspects of their lives. Following on from this, concerns with certain masculine identities could then be explored more effectively. This is what Bly (1992) was referring to when he said that young men need to be informed of both the ‘light and dark side of manhood’ (p.25). It is also vital that if young men are encouraged to explore aspects of masculinity, they must examine one of the most influential roles they are likely to play in their lives, fatherhood. In saying this however, the author is aware that the culture of single sex boy’s schools that is currently evident in Ireland does not bode well for such discourses to be easily achieved.

**Conclusion of chapter**

Curriculum has long been considered ‘a selection from the culture’ (Lawton 1975). Such selection results in some views and values being represented within curriculum while others are ignored. Curriculum selection is influenced by the beliefs and values of the individual(s) that are responsible for this selection. In relation to EM, the selection group consisted of a writing group of eight individuals who did not consult with others prior to selecting content. This resulted in the EM content being selected based on the values of a small number of individuals. Criticism of this approach was advanced by parent groups at the time of EM and from journalists in the current study. In the future, the adoption of a more inclusive consultation process in advance of selecting curriculum for potentially controversial subjects
may help alleviate the contestation that occurs as a result of such selection. However, it must be acknowledged that curriculum selection, irrespective of how much consultation is conducted in advance, will always be a contested area and such debate should be welcomed and viewed as part of the process of curriculum reform. Therefore, those responsible for curriculum development need to view discussion on such issues as a central part of these initiatives.

Calls were made within the current study for the Irish education system to move beyond focusing on academic achievement to focus on education for life issues such as stress management, relationships, communication and issues around self-esteem. Factors that influence the current focus of post-primary schooling in Ireland include Classical Humanistic values and the economy, resulting in students focusing on subjects that are linked with the economy and competing with one another for jobs or college places. This form of education encourages egocentrism and individual competitiveness while affective education often goes ignored. There is now a need to recalibrate the balance and refocus the purpose of education so that it includes, for example, issues of respect, care, justice and equality. While the proposed changes advanced by the NCCA (2004) are a step in the right direction, the fact that the current Leaving Certificate Established (LCE) enjoys considerable public support may mean that drastic changes to the education system will be difficult to achieve.

The Catholic Church has played an instrumental role in education and has exerted a strong influence over the teaching of social and personal related topics in schools, with the Catholic Church opposing the introduction of any form of education they viewed as contradicting their teachings. Contrasting views emerged within the current study as to whether or not school based social, personal and health programmes should be based on religious teachings. The current legislation (e.g. Irish Constitution 1937; DESI 1998, Council of Europe 1952) protects parent’s rights to have their children taught in the type of school they want and ensures that parents can have their children educated in a school that protects their
religious views, if they so desire. As a result, having secular based programmes in religious run schools goes against this legislation. While in recent times calls have been made for the removal of all religious influence from schools, such a move would ultimately be unconstitutional. So as long as the current legislation exists, the only viable option is to provide ‘real choice’ (O’Brien 2010) so that parents who want a secular education for their children have such an option open to them and those who want a religious education can choose such a school.

An increase in the level of teacher development on EM issues would help alleviate the concerns of parents in the current study in relation to the lack of provision of adequate teacher development in this area. However, even if levels of teacher development in such issues are increased a number of concerns exist in relation to, for example, the lack of focus on teachers own personal development during their pre-service and continuing professional development (CPD). Changes are needed in terms of the provision of teacher development so that teachers are encouraged to focus on their own personal development and needs and are offered support in a variety of settings (e.g. both in and out of schools contexts). CPD needs to also be provided to school principals in order to ensure that their methods of selecting teachers for affective education are based on best practice.

While EM aimed to help young men develop a positive male identity, the journalists in the current study believed that it focused too much on the negative or ‘dark’ aspects of masculinity. While it is important that young men are encouraged to explore these ‘dark aspects’ they must also explore ‘the light side of manhood’ (Bly 1992, p.25). Therefore, when young men are encouraged to explore issues of masculinities this should focus on developing self confidence and self esteem and should encourage young men to feel comfortable in their gender identity. It is also vital that if young men are encouraged to explore aspects of masculinity, they must examine one of the most influential roles they are likely to play in their
lives, fatherhood. Prior to exploring positive male identities, changes need to take place in relation to the culture of single sex boys schooling in Ireland, so that a more hospitable environment can be created for challenging gender stereotypes.
Chapter Seven: Overall Conclusions

Introduction

Within this chapter, the author aims to briefly highlight the main issues emerging from the study and exploring the implications for curriculum policy and practice. These issues will be considered under the following headings:

- Underlying beliefs and values of education
- Curriculum policy development
- Teacher development
- The current vacuum in regard to the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle

The chapter concludes with a personal reflection, wherein the author questions what she would do differently if she were to undertake the project again.

Underlying beliefs and values of education

What parents say they want for their children’s education (focus on the social and personal development of the child) appears to be very different from the type of education their children actually receive (focus on assessment, academic subjects and academic achievement). This lends support to the NCCA (2004) proposals for senior cycle where it is envisaged that the development of communication skills and personal effectiveness will become integral parts of the education process. The high level of parental preference for
holistic education, taken at face value, also provides a valuable platform for the promotion of social and personal education in schools. However, before changes are made to individual subjects or programmes there is a need to examine and question the overall philosophy of the Irish education system. In Ireland, there has been a lack of understanding of what the purpose and philosophy of post-primary education in Ireland is (Mulcahy 1981; Dunne 1995). Rather than adopting a ‘fix the parts’ mentality, wherein individual social and personal subjects are introduced into schools, there is a need instead to examine what philosophy of life and set of values students will gain from their experiences in school. This philosophy would guide the development of, in this case, senior cycle, and would result in a more coherent and well developed understanding of what the overall aim of education is.

The fact that parents were so positively disposed towards the inclusion of EM issues on the school curriculum provides, yet again, a valuable platform for the inclusion of such topics at senior cycle. The fact remains, however, that within the current study (and also evident in the controversy surrounding the programme at the time of its development) a vocal minority often oppose the introduction of such issues. One of the main reasons why parents disagreed with the inclusion of EM issues was their concerns regarding the values that underpin such programmes. It is highly likely that these opposition groups will continue to exist and to resist the inclusion of such issues whenever the state attempts to intervene in social and personal education in the future. This raises a number of issues for curriculum policymakers and for the Minister for Education and Science. How can the needs of those parents (and students) that want such issues included on the school curriculum be met while ensuring consideration for those who don’t? While it isn’t fair that the majority should dictate curriculum, it is equally unfair that the minority should control the curriculum experiences of the majority, as reflected in the comments of the Polish Minister for Education that ‘the rights of the minorities must be guaranteed, but a situation cannot arise where a sensitivity towards minorities paralyses the
rights of the majority’ (Minister Stelmachowski cited in Eberts 1998, p.822). Such a situation raises important questions in relation to how opposing parental views can be accommodated and how future Ministers respond to ‘pressure groups’. While in the discussion chapter the author made some suggestions in relation to how this can be achieved it is clear that this remains a murky area that deserves further consideration and research and one that will not be easily resolved.

**Curriculum policy development**

The findings from the current study raise questions for future Ministers of Education and Science (now renamed Education and Skills) and those responsible for curriculum policy and development in relation to the process adopted in devising new curriculum. Consultation (with all interest groups) is needed in advance of determining the ideologies underpinning social and personal programmes. Such consultation would need to occur prior to selecting curriculum. While such an approach would be time consuming, it would ensure that a wider range of views are considered and taken on board when selecting curriculum and that a partnership approach is adopted. Such an approach would allow for debate on the particular initiative to occur. Those responsible for curriculum development need to acknowledge the importance of such contestation as part of the curriculum development process. Rather than viewing such debate as a burden, it should in fact be welcomed. If consultation and debate are to become integral parts of curriculum development, there is a need to re-examine the current centrally controlled approach to curriculum development. On this however, the author feels strongly about the fact that not all voices are heard or given equal air time during such consultation and contestation, resulting in some groups and individuals (i.e. parents) remaining voiceless (as outlined in Chapter Three). If the consultation process is to be adopted effectively, strategies need to be implemented to ensure that certain groups do not dictate the process. One such strategy could
be the adoption of the approach utilised by Your Education System (as outlined previously),
where all interested bodies and individuals were provided with opportunities to highlight their
main vision for education. Such an approach would acknowledge the increasing diverse nature
of Irish society and would recognise differences in relation to, for example, gender, sexuality,
religion and ethnicity amongst people in Ireland. This would move beyond the view of society
as consensualist (Lynch 1989), would acknowledge the presence of differing opinions and
values within Irish society and would permit curriculum and curriculum policy to be developed
based on these differing viewpoints. Involving a diverse range of views would enhance the
level of creative conflict that could occur when discussing curriculum issues as ‘from different
perspectives you get different inputs’ (John Waters)

Teacher development

Parental concerns in relation to the capability of teachers to deal with EM issues
underlines the need for greater attention to social and personal education, dealing with
controversial issues in the classroom and the development of appropriate teaching
methodologies during initial teacher education, teacher induction and continuing professional
development courses. This issue, which also arose from the External Evaluation report
(Gleeson et al 2004) and more recently in the context of the NCCA’s (2005b) consultation
regarding SPHE at senior cycle, raises fundamental questions in relation to the current
tendency to see post-primary teachers as ‘subject experts’ and to define their professional
contribution in subject terms. The tendency to focus on subject content results in a lack of
emphasis being placed on aspects of social and personal development of teachers during both
pre-service and CPD courses. From the perspective of teacher development there are further
issues to be addressed in relation to the reluctance of the male teaching force to become
involved in social and personal education (Geary and Mannix-McNamara 2007).
The current vacuum in the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle

As found by Gleeson and McCormack (2006) the Exploring Masculinities Programme is no longer being used in the majority of schools that piloted or ordered the programme. While ‘Gender Studies’ and ‘Relationships and Sexuality Education’ are included in the draft senior cycle SPHE programme (and Gender Studies is a suggested Transition Unit that schools might develop and offer students), it remains to be seen whether the SPHE programme will address all the issues dealt with in EM. While the NCCA proposal to develop a ‘short course’ in SPHE should help, the likelihood is that students who take TY will have more opportunities to explore social, personal and health education issues than their peers who progress directly to Leaving Certificate. Approximately 40% of a year cohort takes TY with vocational schools, boys’ schools and disadvantaged schools being under represented. This has implications for the cohort of students that are exposed to such issues. Meanwhile there is a vacuum in relation to the exploration of masculinities, which raises concerns regarding whether the particular social and personal needs of young men are being addressed in schools.

When education programmes to meet the social and personal needs of young men are being explored in the future it is important to focus on the positive aspects of maleness and encourage young men to explore ‘that is it good to be a guy’ (Breda O’Brien). Once this ‘light side’ of manhood has been examined, young men can be facilitated to explore the ‘dark’ or troublesome aspects experienced by some. Focusing on the positive aspects of masculinity is vitally important as a person’s gender is central to their identity and one needs to feel secure in this identify in order to feel valued within society.
Personal reflection

To conclude, the author wishes to reflect on how her own views on the research project have evolved during the study and what she would do differently if she were to conduct the research again.

On beginning the research project, the author, perhaps due to the fact that the study was funded by the Gender Equality Unit, was of the opinion that criticisms of the Exploring Masculinities Programme were unjust and unfounded. The author believed that those who opposed the introduction of EM into schools did so mainly because they were conservatives, who did not want issues such as sex and sexual orientation discussed with their children. However, once the author started the research project, she soon realised that this was a much more complex situation than previously considered and she recognised that it was not her role as a researcher to decide on the merits and flaws of EM. Instead, she was there to uncover the views and opinions of those being studied. Adopting this approach allowed her to take on board and present all views that were advanced in a non-judgemental manner.

On reflection, having completed the research project and having acknowledged and presented all aspects of the arguments made, the author believes that the Exploring Masculinities Programme did have certain merits. For example, it aimed to provide a space for young men to explore issues that may be of relevance to their lives, space that to date has rarely been provided to boys in single sex schools. It is now clear to the author that objections from parents occur for a variety of reasons, a number of which the author had not considered in advance of conducting the research. Finally, while the author believes that aspects of EM were positive, the author believes that a number of concerns advanced within the media debate on the programme, could have been pre-empted or even prevented had a more inclusive consultation process been adopted. The author now wishes to briefly explore aspects of the study she would do differently, if she were to do the research again.
The author originally began to work on this research project because she received funding from the Gender Equality Unit and was entrusted to complete a specific research brief. While this funding was welcomed by the author, it had the impact of narrowing the focus of the research. At this initial stage the focus of the study was on determining parental attitudes towards the exploration of masculinities with young men at senior cycle. When the author and supervisor came to discussing the possibilities of transferring to the PhD register, difficulties were initially experienced in terms of broadening the research focus, as the original research project did not easily allow this. Much time and energy were spent on determining a broader research topic. In hindsight, the author should have considered the possibility of completing the research to PhD level when proposing the initial research project.

The original requirement to complete a specific brief involved determining the views of parents towards the inclusion of EM topics on the school curriculum. Looking back now, the author is aware that looking beyond the mere attitudes towards inclusion of topics on the school curriculum to the ideologies that parents would like to underpin the teaching of these topics would have enhanced the research. However, this was not part of the brief outlined by the GEU and was not considered at the time. There were also concerns about the accessibility of the survey questions for all parents and achieving adequate returns. However, if the author was completing the research project again, she would have looked in more depth at whether, for example, parents would like gender to be advanced as a social construct or whether they would like domestic violence presented as being perpetrated mainly by men/women or both.
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Appendices
Appendix 1:
Additional results in relation to the level of usage of the Exploring Masculinities Programme in schools

Schools involved in the piloting of EM (including Writing Group)

Of the 23 (26) such schools that responded to this questionnaire the Exploring Masculinities programme was still being used in five schools during the 2004/5 school year. Only one of the remaining 18 (retired) schools where EM had been discontinued indicated that the programme might be reintroduced in the future.

EM was being offered as a stand-alone programme in one case with the remaining schools using the material in the context both of TY and Leaving cert.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Group</th>
<th>Number of schools using EM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transition year</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth year</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth year</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Year groups offered EM in pilot schools

As for EM topics Health and Sexuality was taught most frequently while Role Models and Men & Power were used least. EM was only offered to senior cycle students.

The majority of respondents from the pilot schools indicated that parents had not raised any objections to the programme. One respondent indicated that some parents had objected to the provision of the programme. Two respondents (both from schools where the programme had been discontinued) indicated that ‘a few parents’ had objected on the grounds that such programmes interfere with achievement in the state exams and that these objections influenced the decision to discontinue the programme in the school.

Several respondents indicated that a positive relationship exists between the parents and the school and that parents had been positive towards the programme when it was running

*Parents who contacted me were very pleased with issues raised and awareness provided on concerns raised*

*A good relationship exists between school and parents body. Difficulties, which arise, are resolved by consultation*

The majority of respondents (16) indicated that the media reaction to EM had not influenced the provision of the programme in their school. Three respondents (two from schools where EM was discontinued) indicated that the media reaction did affect the provision of the programme in their schools.

*Understandably the prolonged media debate made school management nervous about providing and supporting the programme*
It created a negative perception of what the programme stood for

The majority of the retired schools indicated that the programme had been discontinued sometime between 2000 and 2004. The most common reason for the discontinuation of EM was that the ‘main’ teacher involved had either left the school or changed position within the school.

The teacher who was involved has left the school. The teachers who were using EM (in TY) were assigned to other classes with “formal” syllabi and the new TY teachers were not au fait with EM

Because the teacher moved to another school and it was difficult to get another teacher to take it.

Pressure on the timetable and unforeseen timetable changes resulted in the discontinuation of EM in some schools.

It was a module in our transition year programme. We had to discontinue our transition year programme due to lack of uptake

The absence of related in-service for teachers was another reason for discontinuation and a small number of respondents indicated that such provision is essential to the continuation of EM in schools.

After the initial one day in-service I never heard from anyone again. I thought that the programme had folded

Only one respondent indicated that the programme had been discontinued as a result of parental objections

A parent who was not directly involved in the programme took a legal action against the programme

Fourteen respondents indicated that the discontinuation of EM had never been discussed at staff meetings, while four respondents indicated that such discussion had occurred at least once.

A number of respondents made suggestions on possible positive alterations that could be made to the EM programme if it were to be introduced again in the future

The American type influence in the design of the programme was not suitable for the Irish setting, especially rural Ireland

When I was teaching the programme I called it Gender Studies, as I felt more comfortable with title. EM was not easy to teach to boys, as a number did not engage with the material. Some sections had to be edited

Basically some of it is good; some of it is silly and immature. It attempts to be cool with some of the lingo and believe you me; “attempting” cool with adolescent boys can fall flat on its face.

All of the schools surveyed were offering SPHE to students at junior cycle while only three were offering SPHE at senior cycle.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classes offered SPHE</th>
<th>Number of schools (19)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Junior cycle</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition year</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior cycle</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: Year groups offered SPHE in pilot schools

Respondents were asked to respond to the statement that ‘all of the issues in the Exploring Masculinities programme are adequately dealt with in SPHE’. Three respondents (19) agreed, more than half disagreed and the remainder felt they didn’t know enough about SPHE to comment.

_There are some issues, covered by EM, not dealt with elsewhere_

_Not all SPHE topics/issues are male specific/orientated. Exploring Masculinities is therefore in some areas more relevant/interesting for students e.g. macho male image myth_

The remaining six respondents were unsure since they were not fully aware of the contents of the SPHE programme.

Summary

1. Five pilot schools were still using the programme in 2005
2. Parental objections and media reaction influenced the continuation of the programme in a very small number of schools
3. Main reasons for discontinuation of EM in pilot schools included changes in staffing, pressure and unforeseen changes on the timetable and lack of in-service

Schools that ordered the programme

Surveys were returned by 64 of the 86 schools that had asked the DES for a copy of the EM materials. (The reader should note that 2 of the 64 schools were all girls’ schools and 1 was a primary school, therefore the EM material was not relevant to the school). The most common reason given for ordering the programme was for use with Leaving Certificate Applied, TY or as part of SPHE or some other social education programme specific to the school

_I was teaching social education to L.C.A and T.Y.O. I was involved in giving in-service to L.C.A teachers. I was curious about it and used it as part of research in preparation for social background classes_

_I teach life skills in Transition Year but I am also a year head and feel very strongly the need to target masculinity issues_

A number of respondents ordered the programme because they believed that the issues highlighted in EM were important and would be helpful for their students.

_I am very concerned about young men’s education in “SPHE” especially Health. Two recent past pupils from the same class group have been diagnosed with cancer – one testicular_
I am very concerned about communication skills etc in relation to the rising rate of young male suicides

A small number of respondents had ordered the programme to see what it was about.

The majority of respondents (42) indicated that the programme had not been used in the school while 22 respondents indicated that the programme had been used in the school. 40 respondents indicated that they did not intend to use EM in the future while 20 respondents indicated that it may be used in the future and four respondents were unsure. Some respondents were using the EM material as a resource in other subject areas rather than as a stand-alone programme.

Lack of time/space on the timetable was the reason most commonly given for non-usage of the programme

There really are too many programmes available – many gathering dust on shelves

I never had the time to examine it properly

One respondent made the interesting observation that teachers are simply unaware of what’s available

Sending something to staffrooms doesn’t help, as most people do not know what material is present in staffroom. I was amazed at the great material I found when looking around the staffroom but most people don’t know it’s there

Lack of in-service for teachers was also given as a reason for non-usage.

No in-service training on the use of the programme available when I looked for this. I was unable to get a complete copy of the programme, videotape for example

Nobody was giving in-service on it.

A few respondents mentioned the controversy surrounding EM, parental objections and the belief that the material was not challenging as reasons for non-usage.

I am under the impression that there were problems surrounding its use in schools, a lot of negative comments in media, DES had cooled in its attitude towards the programme

Legal threat by one parent was intimidating and worrying
Appendix 2:
Questionnaire for Phase one with national sample of parents

Before you begin to complete the questionnaire, I would like to assure you that all information received is confidential. Your name will not be mentioned in the research report and the completed questionnaire will only be seen by the researchers in the University of Limerick.

To begin with, we need to establish some information about you

Please √ the appropriate boxes for the following statements:

ABOUT YOU:

Q1. (a) Are you
   ☐ Male
   ☐ Female

   (b) What is your relationship to the student who brought this survey home?
      ☐ Parent
      ☐ Guardian

   (c) Age group
      ☐ 30-39
      ☐ 40-49
      ☐ 50-59
      ☐ +60

   (d) Where do you live?
      ☐ City
      ☐ Town
      ☐ Rural area
      ☐ Other
      (Please specify) ________________________________

   (e) (i) Is your son attending a
      ☐ Single-sex boys’ school
□ Co-educational school

(ii) Why did you choose this type of school for your son?
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

(f) Is your son attending a
□ Secondary School
□ Comprehensive School
□ Community School
□ Vocational School/ Community College
□ Not sure

(g) What religion or denomination do you belong to?
□ Roman Catholic
□ Church of Ireland
□ Other
(Please specify) ______________________
□ None

(h) At what stage did (i) You (ii) Your partner/spouse (where applicable) complete your/their formal education (Please tick the appropriate box in each column)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>(i) You</th>
<th>(ii) Your partner/spouse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior/Intermediate/ Group Certificate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving Certificate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Diploma Course</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Degree Course</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Graduate Degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Please specify):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(I) Are you/ have you ever been a member of any of the following committees in a post-primary school?

- Board of Management
- Parents Council
- Other (Please specify) ______________________
- None of the above

(j) From the statements below, please tick the box to the statement that applies to you

- I never attend parent-teacher meetings
- I always attend parent-teacher meetings
- I attend some parent-teacher meetings

(k) Outside of parent-teacher meetings, how often did you discuss the education of your child with the post-primary principal/teachers in the 2003/2004 school year?

- 0 times
- 1 time
- 2 times
- 3 times
- +4 times

(l) Are you a member of any education committee elsewhere?

- Yes (Please specify) ______________________
- No
(m) (i) Please fill in the following table relating to your occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>You</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current or most recent occupation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Title</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind of Work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(ii) Where applicable, please fill in the following table relating to the occupation of your partner/spouse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Your partner/spouse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current or most recent occupation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Title</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind of Work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n) Do you have a medical card?

☐ Yes

☐ No
Q2. Please read the following statements and answer the question that follows by ticking √ the appropriate box

STATEMENT 1: The primary purpose of education is the holistic personal growth of the student and preparation for life

STATEMENT 2: The primary purpose of education is for students to achieve good exam results leading to a job or college place

Which of the above statements do you agree with the most (please tick one box only)?

☐ Statement 1
☐ Statement 2

Q3. “School league tables based on students’ performance in the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations should be published in the national press”

What is your reaction to the above statement?

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

Why did you choose this response?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Exploring Masculinities:

Q4. (a) From your perspective as a parent/guardian, how important are the following characteristics in a “real man”?

*3 means very important and 1 means not important
*Please circle the appropriate number for each characteristic

Caring/Sensitive 3 2 1
Good at sport 3 2 1
Heterosexual 3 2 1
Shares problems/emotions 3 2 1
Takes school seriously 3 2 1
Tough/hard 3 2 1
(b) Now let’s look at the same issue from the perspective of young men. In your opinion, adolescent young men see a “real man” as someone who is:

*Please use the same rating scale as outlined in part (a)*

- Caring/Sensitive 3 2 1
- Good at sport 3 2 1
- Heterosexual 3 2 1
- Shares problems/emotions 3 2 1
- Takes school seriously 3 2 1
- Tough/hard 3 2 1

Q5 (a) ‘There is strong pressure on young men at post-primary school to conform to male norms e.g. physical strength, heterosexuality, sporting prowess’”

What is your reaction to this statement?

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

Why are you of this opinion?
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

(b) “My son feels under pressure to conform to the norms of masculinity that prevail in wider society e.g. physical strength, heterosexuality, sporting prowess”

What is your reaction to this statement?

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

Why are you of this opinion?
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

Q6. I would like to get your views on whether certain topics should be addressed with students who have completed the Junior Certificate (age 15 +)

Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements by ticking √ the appropriate box

(a) Sex Education should be provided in schools

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

(b) Male/Female relationships should be addressed on the school curriculum

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree
(c) Sexual orientation should be addressed on the school curriculum

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

(d) Attitudes of men towards women should be addressed on the school curriculum

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

(e) Attitudes of women towards men should be addressed on the school curriculum

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

(f) Attitudes towards gay people should be addressed on the school curriculum

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

(g) Attitudes towards the role of men and women in the home should be addressed on the school curriculum

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

(h) Attitudes towards perceptions of suitable jobs for men and suitable jobs for women should be addressed on the school curriculum

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

(i) Attitudes towards male and female participation in sport should be addressed on the school curriculum

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

(j) Issues relating to male depression should be addressed on the school curriculum

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

(k) Issues relating to suicide should be addressed on the school curriculum

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

(l) Issues relating to bullying should be addressed on the school curriculum

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

(m) Attitudes towards ethnic minorities should be addressed on the school curriculum

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree
If you have any comments you wish to make on any of the questions above, please do so in the space below:

_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

**Q7. Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements by ticking √ the appropriate boxes**

(a) The majority of victims of school bullying are female  
[ ] Strongly Agree  [ ] Agree  [ ] Unsure  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Strongly Disagree

(b) The majority of victims of school bullying are male  
[ ] Strongly Agree  [ ] Agree  [ ] Unsure  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Strongly Disagree

(c) Equal numbers of males and females are victims of school bullying  
[ ] Strongly Agree  [ ] Agree  [ ] Unsure  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Strongly Disagree

(d) The majority of victims of street violence are female  
[ ] Strongly Agree  [ ] Agree  [ ] Unsure  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Strongly Disagree

(e) The majority of victims of street violence are male  
[ ] Strongly Agree  [ ] Agree  [ ] Unsure  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Strongly Disagree

(f) Equal numbers of males and females are victims of street violence  
[ ] Strongly Agree  [ ] Agree  [ ] Unsure  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Strongly Disagree

(g) The majority of victims of domestic violence are female  
[ ] Strongly Agree  [ ] Agree  [ ] Unsure  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Strongly Disagree

(h) The majority of victims of domestic violence are male  
[ ] Strongly Agree  [ ] Agree  [ ] Unsure  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Strongly Disagree

(i) Equal numbers of males and females are victims of domestic violence  
[ ] Strongly Agree  [ ] Agree  [ ] Unsure  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Strongly Disagree
Q8. (a) Should schools help SENIOR CYCLE BOYS (age 15+) to understand and deal with the possible impact of domestic violence on their lives?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don’t know

Please give a reason for your answer:
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

(b) If YES, how should domestic violence be addressed on the school curriculum?
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Q9. (a) Do you believe that the following ‘agencies’ have a role to play in educating your son about sensitive topics such as sexual orientation, domestic violence and other topics mentioned in question 6?

Please tick the appropriate box for each:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agencies</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
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<td>Home</td>
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<tr>
<td>School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Group</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

What other agencies or individuals (if any) should have a role in teaching boys about these topics? __________________________________________

(b) What is your most preferred source of education for your son on these sensitive topics?

Most preferred source: __________________________________________
(c) In the **school setting**, who should be responsible for preparing your son to deal with sensitive topics such as sexual orientation, domestic violence and other topics mentioned in question 6?

1= your most preferred source  
2= second preference etc.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Member of staff</th>
<th>Preference</th>
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<tr>
<td>Chaplain</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Class tutor/year head</td>
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<td>Guidance Counsellor</td>
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<td>Religion teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social and Personal Health Education (SPHE)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What other individuals in the school (if any) should have a role in teaching boys about these topics? __________________________________________________

**Q10.** “I would trust my son’s teachers to treat sensitive issues in confidence and with sensitivity”

☐ Strongly Agree  ☐ Agree  ☐ Unsure  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Strongly Disagree

If there are any other issues you wish to raise about the education of young men, please do so in the space below:

_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________


Appendix 3: 
Letter to parents

FG-OP-01, 
Foundation Building, 
University of Limerick.

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a postgraduate student at the University of Limerick working in collaboration with Dr. Jim Gleeson, Department of Education and Professional Studies. I am carrying out research for the Gender Equality Unit of the Department of Education and Science in relation to parents’ views on the education of their sons in relation to certain aspects of social and personal education. This study has the approval of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Limerick.

As you have a son currently attending post-primary school, I would greatly appreciate it if you could fill in the enclosed questionnaire and return it directly to me using the stamped addressed envelope provided before DATE.

While the principal of your son’s school has granted permission for this study, I am requesting your participation on a voluntary basis. Needless to say, the more surveys I get back, the better the validity of my findings.

You will note that the survey is anonymous. I wish to assure you that all information received will be treated in the strictest confidence.

Your assistance with this research project would be greatly appreciated. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any queries in relation to this letter.

Regards,

________________________
Orla McCormack
Phone: (061) 213460
Email: orla.mccormack@ul.ie

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact

The Chairman of the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee
C/o Vice-President Academic and Registrar’s Office
University of Limerick
Limerick
Phone (061) 202022
Appendix 4: Letter to principals

UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

FG-OP-01,
Foundation Building,
University of Limerick.

Dear ___________________,

I am a postgraduate student at the University of Limerick working in collaboration with Dr. Jim Gleeson, Department of Education and Professional Studies. I am carrying out research for the Gender Equality Unit of the Department of Education and Science in relation to parents’ views on the education of their sons on certain aspects of social and personal education.

This research is being carried out on a national level and involves approximately 80 schools throughout the Republic of Ireland. Your school has been chosen at random to take part in this research.

This research will be conducted from mid-September until the end of November approximately. This research will involve me, or a member of the research team, entering the school for one or two class periods on a date and time that suits you and your staff members. Questionnaires will be distributed to transition and fifth year boys. The distribution of questionnaires will be unobtrusive and take up very little time. The boys will be asked to present the questionnaire to their parents that evening, which the parents will then complete at will and return to the researcher by post. Therefore, the distribution of questionnaires will take up very little time and will present the minimum of disruption to you and your staff members.

I wish to assure you that all information received will be treated in the strictest confidence and your name or that of the school will not appear on any research report. Therefore, I request your permission and that of your staff to carry out my research in your school. Your cooperation would be greatly appreciated and is essential for the success of this research. Please contact me as soon as you can, using the number provided below, to let me know if you would be agreeable. I have also enclosed the questionnaire and cover letter that will be presented to parents.

Regards,

Orla McCormack
Phone: (061) 213460
Email: orla.mccormack@ul.ie

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact
The Chairman of the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee
C/o Vice-President Academic and Registrar’s Office
University of Limerick
Limerick
Phone (061) 202022
Appendix 5:
Expression of interest for interview

UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

INTERVIEW SESSIONS – EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

After the preliminary collection of data, it is anticipated that a selection of parents/guardians will be interviewed to gain a greater insight into some of the information gathered. The interview sessions will be completely confidential and at no time will the name of any participants appear in the research report.

It is anticipated that the interviews will be short in duration, lasting approximately twenty to thirty minutes and would either take the form of a telephone interview or on a one-to-one basis with the researcher, Orla McCormack, whichever is more convenient for you.

Participation in this research is entirely on a voluntary basis. If you would be interested in volunteering to take part in an interview session, would you please fill in your contact details in the appropriate spaces provided and return this sheet using the stamped address envelope. If you wish, you may return this sheet separately to the completed questionnaire

As I have stated above, all information obtained will be dealt with in the strictest of confidence and the anonymity of all individuals involved in this research will be preserved at all times

NAME: ___________________________

CONTACT TEL. NO: ___________________________
Appendix 6:
Interview questions for phase two interviewees
Just to refresh your memory about what the survey was about: This survey was looking into your views on the social and personal education of your teenage son. You were asked to indicate your level of agreement with certain topics being dealt with in schools: These topics were Sex Education, male/female relationships, Sexual orientation, Attitudes towards gay people, depression, suicide, bullying and domestic violence. Ok, so now I just want to assure you that all information will be treated with the strictest confidence and you will remain anonymous. Would it be ok if I recorded this interview? It is only been recorded to make it easier for me to transcribe the answers later

Question pilot 2 (Thursday 26th Jan)

1. What type of school does your son attend?

2. Why did you choose this type of school for your son?

3. Depending on answer:
   a. If no other choice: If you had a choice would you still pick the same type of school?

   b. If you were picking a school again would you make the same decision? Why?

4. How do you think being a young man today is different from 20 years ago?

5. What do you think are the biggest issues facing young men today? WHY?

Any other issues that would be specifically related to young men

6. Like a lot of parents, you believed that there was strong pressure on young men in general to live up to male norms like being strong and heterosexual. However, you felt that this same pressure did not apply to your own son. Why do you have one view for young men in general and another view for your own son (where applicable)

7. The majority of parents believed that the home has a role to play in the social and personal education of their teenage sons. How difficult is it in practice to deal with these issues with young men?
8. Do you think the school should play a role in addressing the social and personal education needs of young men? Why/Why not?

9. How would you like the school to address these needs?

10. Who would you like to deal with these issues in schools? Why?

11. How would you feel about teachers dealing with these issues in schools? Why/Why not?

12. If NO to question 9 ask how would they like these issues dealt with?

13. The majority of parents felt that schools should provide for the social, personal education of their children in topics like sex education, sexual orientation and bullying. As a parent do you think that your consent should be sought before your son takes part in such a programme? Why? How frequently (every term, year, once off?). What is the best way of doing this e.g. ask each parent? Through the parents’ council? What about those who don’t want it?

14. What role if any should parents play in this social and personal education that occurs in school? Why?

15. What do you think are the most important social and personal education or general topics that should be dealt with in schools? Why?

16. Are there any particular topics you would not want the school to deal with with young men? Why?

17. Like a lot of parents you indicated that you did not want sexual orientation and attitudes towards gay people dealt with in schools. Why did you not want these topics dealt with in schools (topic changes depending on respondent)?

18. Question on DV – see what they answered and ask them why?

19. Any thing else you would like to say about the education of young men
Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a PhD student at the University of Limerick working in collaboration with Dr. Jim Gleeson, Department of Education and Professional Studies. My research is examining the views and attitudes of Irish parents towards the role of the school in the social and personal development of young men at senior cycle.

I have already completed a national survey of parents of young men where some 2000 responses were submitted. This survey sought their views on the role of the school in the social and personal development of young men at senior cycle. I have also conducted 24 follow-up telephone interviews with a sample of these parents.

In order to further enhance the research, I wish to get the views of parents who are involved in the various parent organisations. Through the coming weeks I hope to attend all of the conferences of the various parents’ organisations in order to research their respective views.

I would greatly appreciate your cooperation in completing this short questionnaire dealing with parents’ attitudes towards the role of the school in the social and personal development of young men at senior cycle.

While I have been granted permission to attend this conference, your participation in my research is voluntary. Individuals will not be named in the thesis or in any associated publication. Where you do not wish for an aspect of your response to be used in the thesis or any associated publication please indicate this on the questionnaire itself or to me in person.

I would also be interested in conducting follow-up interviews with some parents. If you are interested in participating in these interviews, please fill in your contact details at the end of the questionnaire.

If you wish to discuss any of these issues further please contact me at any stage during the day or at a later stage on (061) 213460/ (085) 1471703 or orla.mccormack@ul.ie

Thanking you

Orla McCormack
The views and attitudes of the members of parent organisations regarding the role of the school in the social and personal development of young men at senior cycle

Questions:

1. (a) Are you: □ Male □ Female

   (b) Age group
   □ 25-34 □ 35-44 □ 45-54 □ 55-64 □ +65

   (c) Which religious denomination, if any, do you belong to?
   □ Roman Catholic □ Church of Ireland □ None □ Other
   Please specify other: ____________________________________________

   (d) Please indicate which organisation you are a member of:
   □ COMPASS □ CSPA □ FEDCBS □ NPAVSCC □ PACCS

   (e) In what capacity are you attending today’s conference?
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________

2. Please read the following statement and answer the question that follows by ticking √ the appropriate box

STATEMENT 1: The primary purpose of education is to develop personal growth, happiness and development for life

STATEMENT 2: The primary purpose of education is for students to achieve good exam results and ultimately obtaining a job or college place

Which of the above statements best represents your view?

□ Statement 1

□ Statement 2

3. What topics, if any, would you like schools to address with young men at senior cycle?
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________

   (b) Why would you want the school to deal with these topics?
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________

4. What topics, if any, would you not want the school to address with young men at senior cycle?
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________

   (b) Why would you not want the school to deal with these topics?
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________

5. Please tick √ the appropriate box in relation to the following statements and justify your reasons for doing so:
(a) ‘I am happy that schools are providing Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) at junior cycle’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Why did you choose this rating?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

(b) ‘I am happy that Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is being introduced at senior cycle’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Why did you choose this rating?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

(c) ‘Teachers are adequately trained to deal with social and personal education issues’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Why did you choose this rating?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

(d) ‘Schools should consult parents about the content of social and personal programmes before introducing such programmes’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Why did you choose this rating?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

(e) ‘Parents should be consulted regarding the participation of their own sons in social and personal education classes’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Why did you choose this rating?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

(f) ‘Parents should be consulted about the teaching methods used in social and personal education classes’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Why did you choose this rating?</th>
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</thead>
</table>

6. (a) What teaching methods would you like the school to adopt when examining social and personal issues with young men at senior cycle?

   (b) Why would you like the school to use these methods?

7. (a) What teaching methods would you **not want** the school to adopt when examining social and personal issues with young men at senior cycle?
b) Why would you not want the school to use these methods?

8. Please indicate your level of agreement with the inclusion of each of the following topics on the school curriculum:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex Education</td>
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<td>Male-female relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male-Male relationships</td>
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<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitudes towards gay people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male depression</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Attitudes towards ethnic minorities</td>
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<td>Issues relating to Domestic Violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender Stereotyping</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The role of society in constructing male identities</td>
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</table>

If there are any comments you wish to make on this question, please do so in the space provided below:

_______________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________

9. Should social and personal education be part of (a) school subject(s)?

☐ yes ☐ no ☐ Don’t Know which subject(s)?

If yes

_______________________________________________________________________________________

If not, why not?

_______________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________
10. What other concerns, if any, do you have with the school playing a role in the social and personal development of young men?
Appendix 8:
Interview Questions for journalists

(a) Its almost 10 years now since EM, what can you recall about the Exploring Masculinities Programme now?

(b) Issues/concerns you had with Exploring Masculinities during the time of its development/launch? WHY?

(c) Do you feel that schools should get involved in social and personal education of young men at all? Why/Why not? Other alternatives?

(d) On what did you base your views on at the time?

(e) What alterations would you have made to the Exploring Masculinities programme? WHY?

(f) Were there aspects of EM that you liked? WHY did you like these aspects?

(g) What do you think are the most important social and personal needs of young men today?

(h) Views on the fact that TODAY the programme is only being used as a resource in a very small number of schools.

(i) Any regrets about the effect of the media coverage? Why did the media debate die so quickly?

(j) What would you like to happen in the future in relation to the school based social and personal education of young men? Areas of particular interest e.g. domestic violence, homosexuality etc…

Any other comments
Appendix 9:
Interview questions for Project Coordinator of EM

Introduction/ previous experiences/ organisation of writing group
1. What do you view as the primary purpose of education?
2. Prior to EM you were working on programme for young women and gender equality issues. Why EM? How do you think your previous work influenced your work in EM
3. What was it about EM that hooked you? Or made you want to get involved? Did the meaning of the programme change for you over time?
4. How did the writing team emerge? How were people identified?

Media reaction
5. Reaction towards the media criticism of EM?
6. Reaction towards the intervention of Michael Woods?

Values
7. How would you classify the values/ideologies underpinning EM?
8. Reaction towards claims that EM was feminist/ anti-male (particularly when a number of aims for EM were focused on forming positive identities)?
9. Gender as a social construct
10. Looking back now, would you have changed anything in relation to the underlying values in EM?

Content
11. You mentioned the other day that the group had spent a lot of time preparing material. Why was this? Views on this looking back?
12. Who was responsible for teacher development/dissemination etc?
13. What process did the writing group go through in selecting content/ topics?
14. Reaction towards claims that content of EM was selective in nature?
15. Reaction towards claims that the content was imbalanced in nature?
16. Looking back now, would you have changed anything about the process of selecting content?

Consultation
17. Attitude towards the continued involvement of the state in social and personal areas
18. Was there any process of consultation prior to developing EM?
19. Looking back now, would you have changed anything in relation to the process of consultation?

Future

What would you like to see happen in the future in relation to the social and personal development of young men?
Appendix 10:  
Principles and procedures for interview

**Research Principles and Procedures:**

This research is being undertaken for the purpose of preparing a Ph.D. thesis on the topic of ‘Exploring Masculinities –the sequel’ for submission to the Department of Education and Professional Studies at the University of Limerick.

As part of this research, I am proposing to conduct interviews with approximately 5 ‘key’ journalists who participated in the media debate surrounding the Exploring Masculinities Programme.

With a view to promoting a relationship between researcher and interviewees which is collaborative, critical and constructive, the following protocols will apply:

1. The researcher will forward a copy of the Interview Schedule and the Principles and Procedures of the research to the interviewee in advance.

2. Permission to audio-tape interviews will be sought in advance of the arranged meeting.

3. The researcher is committed to open discussion and reporting and wishes to present accounts, which acknowledge the identity of individuals and institutions.

4. Unless the interviewee indicates otherwise, it is assumed that all exchanges between the researcher and the interviewee are on the record.

5. The researcher will submit interview transcripts for comment and clearance to those interviewees who wish to receive them. Such comments will be used to ensure the accuracy of the overall research report and to verify the researcher's interpretation of the interviewee’s responses.

6. The researcher may request clarification on certain issues, which arose during the interview.
Appendix 11:
Comparative views of members of the various National Parent Associations

The comparative views of members of the parent associations
Within this section, the views of the members of the five parent associations are compared and contrasted. The piece begins by comparing members views on SPHE and teacher training. Comparative views on attitudes towards parental involvement in school based social and personal education are then explored. The piece concludes by comparing the various members’ views on the inclusion of certain EM topics on the senior cycle curriculum.

SPHE at junior and senior cycle
As one can see from the chart below, members of COMPASS showed the highest level of agreement towards the inclusion of SPHE at junior cycle. CSPA indicated the lowest level of agreement. PACCS and COMPASS showed the highest level of agreement with SPHE being introduced at senior cycle, while members of CSPA were the least likely to do so.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Association</th>
<th>Agreement SPHE at Junior Cycle</th>
<th>Agreement SPHE at Senior Cycle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMPASS (n=8)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSPA (n=6)</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEDCBS (n=21)</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPAVSCC (n=15)</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PACCS (n=19)</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 5 associations are as follows: The Congress of Catholic School Parents Association (CSPA), Parents Association for Vocational Schools and Community Colleges (PAVSCC), Federation of Christian Brothers and other Catholic Schools Parents Councils (FEDCBS), Parents Association for Community and Comprehensive Schools (PACCS) and Co-operation of Minority Religion and Protestant Parents Association (COMPASS)
Teacher Training

As can be seen from the chart below, COMPASS were the most likely to agree that teachers are adequately trained to teach school based social and personal programmes. NPAVSCC and CSPA portrayed the highest level of disagreement with this statement while COMPASS and PACCS were more likely to indicate that they were unsure. No member of COMPASS disagreed that teachers were adequately trained to teach such issues.

Home-school relationship

As can be seen from the chart below, members of FEDCBS were less likely to want to be consulted on the content of social and personal programmes, on their son’s participation in such programmes or on the teaching methods used.

Members of PACCS were more likely to indicate that parents should be

- Consulted on the content of these programmes (closely followed by members of COMPASS & NPAVSCC),
- Consulted regarding their son’s participation in such programmes (along with members of NPAVSCC and CSPA)
- Consulted on the teaching methods used in such programmes (closely followed by members of CSPA)
Curriculum Content

The table below portrays the level of agreement of members of each association towards certain EM topics being included on the school curriculum. As can be seen from the table, all members of COMPASS were in agreement with the listed topics being included on the school curriculum. Members of PACCS also indicated a very high level of agreement in relation to this. While still high, members of CSPA showed the lowest level of agreement with the inclusion of these topics on the school curriculum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of agreement with the inclusion of the following topics</th>
<th>COMPASS (n=8)</th>
<th>CSPS (n=6)</th>
<th>FEDCBS (n=21)</th>
<th>NPAVSSCC (n=15)</th>
<th>PACCS (n=19)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation Attitudes towards gay people</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Depression</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide:</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Minorities</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Violence  Gender  Stereotyping
100%  83%  91%  85%  100%

The impact of society on the construction of male identities
100%  67%  95%  93%  100%

Concluding remarks
Members of COMPASS were more likely to agree with the inclusion of SPHE at junior and senior cycle and with EM topics listed above being included on the school curriculum. Members of CSPA were least likely to agree with the inclusion of SPHE at junior and senior cycle and with the EM topics listed above being included on the school curriculum. Members of FEDCBS were the least likely to require consultation with parents on aspects of school based social and personal programmes, while PACCS were the most likely to require this consultation.
Appendix 12:
Copy of paper by author and supervisor published in Gender and Education

Research Article

Attitudes of parents of young men towards the inclusion of sexual orientation and homophobia on the Irish post primary curriculum

Orla McCormack* and Dr. Jim Gleeson
Department of Education and Professional Studies, Faculty of Education and Health Sciences, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland.

The ‘Exploring Masculinities’ (EM) programme was piloted in some twenty-two Irish single sex boys’ post-primary schools during the late 1990s. Following objections from some influential journalists and an organisation representing parents whose sons attended Catholic secondary schools the Minister for Education and Science put the planned dissemination of the programme on hold. The concerns of the objectors included the proposed treatment of sexual orientation and homophobia in the context of the school curriculum. The authors researched the views of a national sample of the parents of young men regarding the inclusion of social and personal education issues on the school curriculum. The vast majority of parents would welcome the inclusion of all EM topics including sexual orientation and homophobia, the focus of the current paper, on the school curriculum. However, parents did express concerns in relation to the adequacy of teacher development for dealing with such sensitive topics and possible conflict between school and parental values.

Keywords: Parents; young men; sexual orientation; homophobia; masculinities; schools

Introduction

The ‘Exploring Masculinities’ (EM) programme was developed and piloted by the Gender Equality Unit (GEU) of the Irish Department of Education and Science (DES) in twenty-two single sex boys’ post-primary schools during 1996-1999. Immediately after the pilot and prior to dissemination, the programme was the subject of an unexpected amount of media attention that was largely negative in nature. Much of this opposition came from one particular parents’ organisation as well as two high-profile journalists and AMEN, a voluntary group that provides a support service and information for male victims of domestic abuse. In response to this pressure the Minister for Education and Science referred the programme for review to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

In view of these negative reactions the GEU commissioned the study of parental views towards the inclusion of ‘EM’ topics such as domestic violence, suicide, depression as well as sexual orientation and homophobia on the school curriculum. The latter two issues are the particular focus of the current paper, which begins with an outline of the background to EM and the subsequent media debate. It then outlines some relevant literature and research regarding masculinities, sexuality and the school. Given that ‘curriculum is contextually shaped’ (Cornbleth 1990, 6), some relevant aspects of Irish post-primary schooling are examined, followed by a description of the research methodology and discussion of the main findings.

* Corresponding author: Email: orla.mccormack@ul.ie
The Exploring Masculinities Programme

There has been an increasing focus on masculinities over the last two decades as reflected in the growth of international research in the area (e.g., Mac an Ghaill 1994; Connell 1995; Salisbury and Jackson 1996; Gilbert and Gilbert 1998; Epstein and Johnson 1998; Lynch & Lodge 2002; Renold 2004; Martino 2005), so that ‘the untraversed frontier has become gold rush territory’ (Newton 1998, 574).

Within the Irish context, up to the late 1990s the focus was on equality for young women, as pointed out by Lynch and Lodge (2002, 92) with a number of related initiatives developed for use in post-primary schools in the context of the 1985 EC Resolution on Equal Opportunities for Boys and Girls in Education. These included the FUTURES and Balance: Who Cares? programmes, which aimed, *inter alia*, to challenge sex stereotyping in career choices.

By comparison, gender issues of relevance to males received little attention prior to the development of the EM programme. This programme, developed for use with young men at senior cycle (age 15-18 approximately), addressed issues such as communication skills, power, violence, relationships, mental health, sexual orientation and homophobia and its aims were to:

- Explore different perceptions and experiences of masculinity
- Promote understanding and respect for diversity
- Promote healthy lifestyles
- Promote equality among and between the sexes
- Provide opportunities for young men to develop enhanced interpersonal and social skills
- Explore concepts of masculinity that encourages a positive and meaningful understanding of male roles (DES 2000, vi).

While the independent evaluation report (Gleeson et al. 2004) was broadly positive, the proposed dissemination, as noted earlier, provoked an unprecedented amount of largely negative media attention, for example:

- Design of boys programme intrinsically flawed (O’Brien 2000)
- Let young men tackle growing pains on their own (Byrne 2000)
- Big Mac feminism on the education menu (Waters 2000)

The report commissioned by the Minister for Education and Science (Mac an Ghaill, Hanafin and Conway, 2004) noted that some parents had been among the most vocal critics of EM, particularly members of the Congress of Catholic School Parents Associations (CSPA), the parent body for Catholic secondary schools. Their concerns included the failure to officially consult the parent bodies regarding the development and implementation of the programme, a point also noted in the independent evaluation report (Gleeson et al. 2004), and the perceived detrimental effects on the family. Some parents were critical of what they saw as overemphasis on homosexuality on the grounds that only two pages in the programme resource book were devoted to heterosexuality while ten dealt with homosexuality. Others felt that the programme did not portray marriage as the norm, while others argued that ‘many parents would find the assertion that masculinity is a “social construct” is difficult to accept’ (CSPA undated, 3). The Association demanded the withdrawal of EM because it ‘undermined young boys by asking them to disclose their feelings about private and personal matters in the classroom; offered group therapy and overemphasised homosexuality’ (Mac an Ghaill, Hanafin and Conway 2004, 123). This is effectively what has happened insofar as the result of the hiatus caused by the Minister’s intervention is that very few schools have provided the EM programme over recent years (Gleeson and McCormack 2006).

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66 Originally called ‘Girls into Technology’
Masculinities, sexuality and the school

Masculinity takes multiple forms and ‘at any given time, one form of masculinity [may be] culturally exalted’ (Connell 1995, 77). These hegemonic forms set the benchmark for what it means to be a ‘real man’. Understandings of hegemonic masculinity are ever changing and must be constantly renegotiated and re-enacted (Salisbury and Jackson 1996). According to Connell (1995, 76) masculinity is ‘not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable’. New groups may challenge hegemony and construct an alternative version therefore it is never complete and consists of ‘ebbs and flow’ (ibid, 77).

In modern Western society (Kenway and Fitzclarence 1997) hegemonic forms of masculinity tend to be based on physical strength, emotional neutrality, assertiveness, competitiveness, and rationality (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998). Recently, Connell’s (1995) theory of hegemony has been subject to debate, for example Paechter (2006), Warin (2006) and Francis (2008).

However, very few men can live up to the high standards set by these forms of hegemonic masculinity and many fail to conform. As a result such forms are not only oppressive and destructive to others (such as women and other ‘weaker’ men), but also to men themselves. Having to live up to the ‘ideals’ of manhood can often pressurise boys into acting in specific ways and can affect the way they talk, dress and interact with others.

Masculinity can be looked on as a badly fitting coat. You bought the coat because there were no better coats on the rack or you thought you would be laughed at in an unusual coat. So you adjust your posture until the coat fits. After some time you come to think it really fits, while you are really just hobbling about (Woltring 1995, 45)

In this context, other forms of masculinity are repressed and many boys respond by distancing themselves from all things feminine (Martino 1999) often resulting in homophobia becoming an integral part of heterosexual masculinities.

Strict adherence to the traditional male gender role can be linked to strong homophobic tendencies resulting in fear or avoidance of homosexual men. This means that young men may ‘develop negative attitudes towards homosexuality as a core dimension to achieving a masculine identity’ (Nayak and Kehily 1997, 5). Boys who are perceived as weaker, smaller or feminine are likely to be subjected to homophobic bullying. Young men do not necessarily have to be homosexual to be labelled as such and those who do not conform to hegemonic forms of masculinities are likely to be subjected to ridicule and bullying by their peers (Renold 2004).

Schools, frequently referred to as ‘masculinity-making devices’, are one of the most influential institutions in the formation of masculine identities, with Epstein and Johnson (1998, 108) describing schools as ‘important sites for the production and regulation of sexual identities’. Salisbury and Jackson (1996) suggest that schools are institutions where masculinities are negotiated, controlled and renegotiated and contribute to the formation of hegemonic forms of masculinity while aiding in the subordination of other forms. Those who adhere to gender stereotypes in these competitive arenas are rewarded (Connell 1989). The culture and structures of schools can strengthen and encourage unequal power relations (Capper 1999) while ‘studies have shown that the daily worlds of our schools teach scripts for what is considered to be appropriate gender behaviour during adolescence and later on into adulthood’ (Norman 2004, 4).

The topic of homosexuality tends to be ignored in schools and ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (see, for example, Epstein and Johnson 1998; Renold 2000) is taken as the norm. This results in the situation identified by Lynch and Lodge (2002, 102-117) that gay and lesbian students are the most invisible people in Irish education. Insofar as homosexuality is discussed, this takes place within a heterosexual context where it is seen as an illness rather than a way of life (Ellis and High 2004) and heterosexuality ‘is encoded in language, in institutional practices and the encounters of everyday life’ (Epstein & Johnson 1994, 198).
Numerous studies (Telljohan and Price 1993; Hatton and Swinson 1994; Rivers 1995; Epstein 1997; Blumenfield 2000; Norman et al. 2004; Barnes 2007, Minton et al. 2008) have revealed high levels of homophobic bullying in schools, occasionally originating from teachers. Norman (2004) found that 79 per cent of teachers were aware of instances of homophobic bullying in their school, often on a continuous basis. Hatton and Swinson (1994, 285) found that 25 per cent of lesbian and gay students leave school because of harassment and there is evidence (e.g., Bagley and Tremblay 2000; D’Augelli et al. 2001) that gay and lesbian students are among the high risk for suicides. According to Blumenfield (2000) gay and lesbian teenagers are four times more likely to be threatened with a weapon at school with such bullying resulting in loss of confidence, reduced self-esteem, declining academic achievement and early school leaving (Norman 2004). A study of the experiences of homophobic bullying of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) young people in Ireland (Minton et al. 2008) found that over half of the respondents had experienced bullying in the past three months. Such levels of homophobic bullying can result in ‘schools [being] unhappy, painful places for… boys who do not conform… who have to struggle against the macho behaviour of significant numbers of boys’ (Epstein 1997, 113).

**Some relevant aspects of the Irish education system**

For the purposes of the current paper three contextual issues relating to Irish post-primary education are discussed here: the role of the churches in Irish education, the dominance of single sex schooling, and a reluctance to officially involve parents in their children’s schooling.

The main churches have exercised strong control over education in post-Independent Ireland and successive governments did not ‘challenge the Church’s teachings’ (O’Donoghue, 1999, 45). The Catholic Church viewed ‘control of schooling as its prerogative’ (Coolahan 1981, 72) as shown by Ó Buachalla (1988), Fuller (2002) and reflected in the Council of Education’s (1954-1960) assertion that the main role of Irish education was the ‘the inculcation of religious ideals and values’ (Coolahan 1981, 80).

Irish post-primary schooling prioritised knowledge and information transfer ahead of the development of feelings and emotions (Hannan et al. 1983, 33), while critical debate and questioning were stifled (OECD 1991; Gleeson 2004). Moral education was provided under the umbrella of Religious Education, where syllabi and appointments were controlled by the relevant religious authorities. For example, the Catholic Church feared that the introduction of health education programmes would encroach on ‘important moral questions on which the Catholic Church has definite teaching’ (O’Donoghue 1999, 50). There was a reluctance to challenge church authorities on moral and sexual education and the introduction in 1991 of the Stay Safe programme to reduce vulnerability to child abuse and bullying became ‘the first real challenge by the state to the veto which the Catholic Church exercised over sexual and moral education’ (Inglis 1998, 53).

More recently, the DES has introduced a number of school-based social and personal programmes, including Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE).

Reflecting traditional Catholic thinking, there is a strong tradition of single-sex schooling in Ireland. In 2002 some 38 per cent of Irish post-primary students were attending single sex schools and, one-third of all post-primary schools were privately owned and single sex (Department of Education and Science 2003). While single-sex schooling is gradually on the decline, some 16 per cent of boys attended single sex post primary schools in 1999-2000 when EM was being developed. The focus of these schools is on ‘peer regulation and sporting prowess’ (Lynch and Lodge, 2002) and academic achievement in a relatively narrow range of subjects while music, home economics and social and personal development programmes are less likely to be provided (Looney and Morgan 2001).

The Irish Constitution recognises the home and the family as the primary and natural educators of children and guarantees to respect the rights of parents to provide ‘for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children’ (Article 42.1). This recognition is reflected in the Education White Paper (DES 1995) and the Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998), both of which acknowledged the important role played by parents in their children’s education. In saying this however, the Irish National Parents Council was not established until 1985 and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and
Development (OECD 1997) commented that Ireland lagged well behind other developed countries in making formal provision for parental involvement in education, with the result that Irish ‘families traditionally played little part in their children’s formal schooling’ (OECD 1997, 143) and education was left to the experts.

**Methodology**

In the context outlined above the researchers set out to determine the views and attitudes of parents/guardians of young men towards the inclusion of EM topics including sexual orientation and homophobia, on the senior cycle curriculum. The first phase of data collection involved the distribution of a customised survey to the parents/guardians of male students in Transition Year and fifth year (aged between 15-17 approximately) in a representative national sample of 120 single sex and co-educational schools. The researcher visited each school, asking the young men to bring the survey home to their parents/guardians for completion. Of the 9,678 surveys distributed, 1,915 were completed, giving a response rate of approximately 20 per cent.

77 per cent of survey respondents were female, 23 per cent were male and the majority were aged between 40-49. While the vast majority of respondents (99 per cent) were the mothers/fathers of the students who brought the survey home, a small number of guardians also responded (both parents and guardians are referred to hereafter as either parents or mothers/fathers). The vast majority (93%) of respondents classified themselves as Roman Catholic.

The second phase of the study involved 24 telephone interviews with a randomly selected group of carefully stratified survey respondents that included parents who had completed their education at various stages and equal representation from the co-educational and single-sex school sectors. Given the strong feelings generated by EM, this sample was equally divided between those who had expressed different views on the substantive issues in the survey i.e. agreed/disagreed with the inclusion of certain topics on the school curriculum. It included equal numbers of mothers and fathers. These interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and lasted approximately 20-30 minutes.

**Main Findings**

The findings of the GEU funded study (Gleeson and McCormack 2006) addressed all topics included in EM. This paper deals with parents’ attitudes towards the inclusion of sexual orientation and homophobia on the school curriculum.

**Sexual Orientation**

 Asked to rate the importance of heterosexuality as a characteristic of a ‘real man’, almost 60 per cent of parents indicated that in their own opinion heterosexuality was an important characteristic in a “real man” while the remainder disagreed. Fathers were more likely than mothers to regard heterosexuality as important in a “real man”. The importance placed on heterosexuality increased with the age of the parent, with 21 per cent of 30-39 year olds believing it to be very important compared to 33 per cent of 50-59 year olds and 36 per cent of 60+.  

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67 Transition year is a voluntary, one-year, enrichment-type, school-based programme that is provided between the Junior Certificate (junior cycle) and Leaving Certificate (senior cycle). It is taken by some 40% of a year cohort.

68 Heterosexuality is regarded as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ within Irish schools while homosexuality tends to be ignored (Lynch and Lodge 2002). The Exploring Masculinities programme however included a specific focus on sexual orientation with particular reference to homosexuality.

69 The authors acknowledge that the inclusion of a question regarding the characteristics of a ‘real man’ may have led parents to respond in terms of the stereotypical characteristics of a ‘macho man’. However, while acknowledging this limitation, the authors believe that the findings remain interesting.
By way of comparison, almost 90 per cent of parents believing that young men regarded heterosexuality as an important characteristic in a ‘real man’ with three out of every four believing that young men viewed it as very important. The results can be seen in the Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Importance of heterosexuality in a ‘real man’**.

Asked whether they believed young men felt under pressure to be heterosexual, 70% of parents agreed that this was the case. Some typical comments included:

- Sexuality is of extreme importance for boys; the fear of being homosexual is a serious worry, both for themselves and how they are perceived by their pals (mother)
- Heroes on television and video games are always strong and heterosexual (mother)

Some felt that such pressure is handed down from elders e.g. ‘we are a country with a strong tradition of this and it is expected by older generations’ (mother). One mother commented that ‘my son’s father wouldn’t be very tolerant of homosexuals and this has rubbed off on him. I think my influence has diminished, as he has become a man. He thinks it’s just not macho to be gay’.

Some parents felt that young men’s’ fears of being labelled homosexual were linked with their poor communication skills on the grounds that young men who are open and honest about their feelings are easier targets for homophobic bullying. They suggested that in this context young men keep their feelings, emotions and concerns to themselves. The comments of two mothers were particularly illuminating: e.g. ‘it is more difficult for boys to express their feelings and emotions without being seen as less masculine’ and ‘it is vital for the well being of our young men that they are able to form relationships where talking about personal issues with friends/mentors is seen as healthy not “gay” or “soft”’.

**School curriculum**

The majority of parents were in favour of the inclusion of sexual orientation (82% agreement) and homophobia (90% agreement) on the school curriculum with mothers slightly more positive than fathers in both cases, while 75% indicated that they would trust their sons’ teachers to deal with these issues in confidence and with sensitivity. Some typical comments included:

- Not to discuss the above issues is to create a narrow-minded homophobic society (father)
- [Schools should] stop young men from thinking that any person who is different or sensitive has to be gay (father)

Three main lines of argument emerged in favour of the inclusion of these topics on the school curriculum. Firstly, a number of parents welcomed the inclusion of such topics because of the frequency of bullying and personal ‘put-downs’ relating to sexuality in schools, with children as young as ten ‘calling each other such derogatory terms as gay and lesbian…. it now appears to be the greatest insult to call one another a girl, woman or gay’ (mother). Some parents believed that ‘young men would prefer any label other than homosexual’ (mother) while others indicated that young men ‘do not include homosexuals in their circle of friends’ (father). One father told the story of his son who ‘is a sensitive soul was labelled gay by one of the other students’.

Secondly, some parents believed that schools are currently not doing enough to examine and challenge such issues. For example:
My son’s bullying could have been avoided if the predominance towards macho-ism was challenged (father)

Principals are not dealing with the verbal put-downs that exists each day in schools (mother)

Boys calling each other names especially gay was somewhat accepted in my son’s school. The school did very little to help and my second son is beginning to have to put up with the same treatment all because they are involved in music, drama and can speak about feelings (mother)

The education in Ireland’s single sex schools remains by and large filled with homophobia, sexual remarks, and personal put-downs. (mother)

Thirdly, those parents who did not feel comfortable discussing such issues with their sons in the home, welcomed support from the school. For example, one mother explained how it was ‘nearly impossible’ to discuss such issues with her son: ‘we were never taught how to talk about these things or how to talk to them. We are awkward about these topics ourselves’. In relation to discussing social and personal issues with their sons at home, a small number of male interviewees suggested that the relationship between young men and their fathers could never be as close and open as that between young women and their mothers. One father explained how:

We had three girls after my son. My wife would talk far easier to the girls about things than I would to my son about things. We don’t discuss personal matters at all. I think it is harder for men to talk to each other. I know if I go in to my son’s room to talk we would probably end up wrestling rather than talking. You seem to show more aggression rather than sitting around a table talking.

Other parents reported that they did not experience difficulties conversing with their sons on such issues with one father indicating that ‘we always talked about things like sexual orientation. They are just talked about in a different way now than ten years ago’. Others provided practical advice on how they address such issues with their sons, with one father indicating that ‘the practical way to talk to them is to go off for a drive. At sixty miles per hour they can’t exactly jump out of the car!’

There was also a feeling that the school might help parents understand the issues addressed in social and personal programmes and help them develop the skills necessary to communicate with their sons on such issues, for example ‘schools could arrange sessions for parents at the same time that the boys are having sessions in school. In this way communication could be opened up at home. Maybe joint sessions could eventually take place if people had got to that stage of being comfortable with this’ (mother).

Parental concerns
While the vast majority of respondents were supportive of the inclusion of sexual orientation and homophobia on the school curriculum, some of them voiced concerns. The inclusion of twelve parents from the Disagree category among those who were interviewed allowed the researchers to probe such concerns further. Four main concerns emerged.

Firstly, parents were concerned that the school may not transmit the attitudes and values taught in the home. For example, one father remarked that he ‘would be of the minority view and what we as a family think wouldn’t be a standard issue. I wouldn’t want someone else coming along telling me it’s one-way or the other. They would be dictating what my moral view is or should be’ (father). Others believed that in school you are obliged to take the politically correct view and this may contradict their own beliefs and values. For example:
In schools you are obliged to take the politically correct line on such issues and I don’t think that is what a number of parents want. I think tolerance should be taught without an “anything goes” attitude. Is it ok to pass on to schoolchildren that this is ok sexual practice, just because a lot of people do it? I don’t think that is ok. It is the politically correct anything goes view. I think when stuff like sexual orientation gets taught in a school environment it does teach anything goes because they cannot say this is wrong (mother)

Secondly, some believed that these issues are too sensitive to address in a school environment e.g. ‘school climate would not allow this discussion for fear of ridicule and bullying’ (father). Some respondents feared that addressing such topics may be frightening for homosexual young men and ‘in a class of 30 students, one or two may be gay. I think they would have more of a chance of being victimised. Others who say that it is their choice and indicate that they have no problem with them being gay, would be more likely to be tarred with the same brush’ (father). Another parent advised young men to ‘never come out to your peers or in school. It is a proven disaster’ (mother).

Thirdly, some respondents believed that young men at the beginning of senior cycle may not be mature enough at this stage of their development to deal with these issues appropriately, with one mother pointing out that ‘it depends on the maturity of students. I believe some of them would be able to discuss these issues and some wouldn’t’. These parents feared that this immaturity may result in a ‘more jokey approach’ (mother) to discussion at school and it would make it more difficult to get ‘beyond the silly responses’ (mother).

Finally, lack of adequate teacher development was one of the main concerns expressed by parents in relation to the school-based social and personal development of young men on sexual orientation and homophobia. Parents believed that ‘teachers are not trained to take on this role’ (father) as ‘they do not study such issues when in college’ (mother). Some feared that teachers who teach such classes are merely ‘filling in teaching hours’ (mother). Some typical comments include:

Some guy who is normally a biology or woodwork teacher been told to go in there and teach SPHE. This person doesn’t know how to deal with these issues and may be passing on more error than fact (mother).

A geography teacher taking a religion class is not qualified to handle such issues (father).

Others felt that ‘in the absence of proper training and support for teachers these topics would be better off not included’ (mother) as ‘untrained people could do more harm than good’ (mother). Concerns were also expressed regarding the absence of specific protocols for teachers to follow, with one father indicating that ‘there are no protocols for teachers on how to deal with these issues generally’.

While a number drew attention to the importance of appropriate teacher development issues others noted that it was equally, if not more important, for teachers to have a suitable personality in order to engage adequately with social and personal issues e.g. ‘any teacher who is sensitive, kind, caring, and a good listener. You can have all the training in the world but you may never be able to deal with these issues adequately’ (father).

Discussion
Themes emerging from the current study include the difficulties experienced by some parents in communicating and discussing social and personal issues with their sons; the development of teachers to engage in social and personal education or the teacher’s personal disposition for dealing with such issues. For the purposes of the current paper three main issues have been identified for discussion: challenging homophobic bullying, parental attitudes, support and involvement and teacher development.
Challenging homophobic bullying

Parents were almost unanimous in their belief that young men feel that it is important to be seen as heterosexual e.g., ‘young men do not include homosexuals in their circle of friends’. Parents also believed that levels of homophobic bullying were high in their sons’ schools and those presumed to be homosexual, particularly the weak, were being subjected to various forms of bullying. These views are supported by two Irish-based studies: Minton et al. (2008) concluded that over half of the gay, lesbian and bisexual respondents surveyed experienced bullying in the past three months, while Norman (2004) found that the majority of teachers were aware of instances of homophobic bullying in their school.

A number of respondents in the current study suggested that schools are generally reluctant to challenge homophobic behaviour e.g., ‘boys calling each other names, especially “gay”, was somewhat accepted in my son’s school’. While the inclusion of topics such as sexual orientation and homophobia in social and personal education programmes should encourage schools to examine such issues and challenge such behaviour, the reality may not always match the rhetoric:

Teachers who are maybe not comfortable with it shy away from Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) within Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE). So they can say, ‘Yes we’re doing SPHE’ but they never quite get around to the RSE section (Morgan 2007, 25).

Whilst there is merit in the current tendency to examine such issues within the context of dedicated programmes e.g. EM, SPHE etc, the reality is that sexual orientation and homophobia are deeply embedded within the culture of society and schools that it is unduly optimistic to hope that individual teachers in individual classrooms will tackle them on their own. If schools are to become effective in challenging homophobic attitudes, they must adopt a ‘pervasive’, ‘whole school’ approach, such as that advocated by Gilbert and Gilbert (1998, 240). This is particularly true when one considers that the politics of gender are normally worked out within the ‘gaps and crannies’ of formal schooling and the ‘informal peer group’ (Kessler 1985, 40) and not just within the formal structure of classrooms. In practice, it requires close scrutiny of all aspects of school life, including the schools sports fields, playgrounds, changing rooms, classrooms, staffrooms, principals’ offices, and approaches to discipline etc.

Furthermore, an examination of such attitudes should begin at primary level due to the fact that, as found in the current study, children as young as ten are now calling each other ‘gay’ and ‘queer’ and using homophobic bullying in the formation of their masculine identity (see also Epstein 1997; Renold 2000, 2002, 2004). It may be too late to challenge homophobic views during senior cycle by which stage homophobic tendencies would be well established. However, the reaction of some parent groups to EM does not bode well for the introduction of such topics in primary schools.

In this context, it is important to acknowledge the influential role of parents in the development of their children’s attitudes and values regarding sexuality. Where schools do challenge homophobic views, they must recognise that attitudes and prejudices learned in the home make a very deep impression on children (e.g. Cossman 2004; Cameron et al. 2001). Therefore, if schools are to succeed in challenging such attitudes they must work in close partnership with parents to promote social and personal education and challenge homophobic attitudes. This is particularly important when one considers that the majority of parents in the current study viewed heterosexuality as a vital characteristic in a ‘real man’.

Parental attitudes, support and involvement

One of the most important finding in the current study was that parents are overwhelmingly in favour of the inclusion of issues relating to homophobia (90% agreement) and sexual orientation (82% agreement) on the
post-primary school curriculum. Respondents advanced a number of reasons why the school should play a role in this regard, including their own feelings of inadequacy in discussing such issues with their sons. While a small but vocal minority of parents objected in principle to the involvement of schools in such issues, most parental concerns related to the adequacy of teacher development as will be discussed in the next section.

The EM experience illuminates the politics of parental involvement in curriculum matters. While the demise of the programme highlights the power of vocal, articulate, minorities, the umbrella post-primary National Parents Council and some of its constituent bodies have expressed very positive attitudes towards EM (Gleeson and McCormack 2006, 56-59; Mac an Ghaill, Hanafin and Conway 2004, 158). This dichotomy raises important questions for future Ministers in relation to how they should respond to ‘pressure groups’ in the context of social and personal education. The current findings suggest that there is an onus on policy-makers to revisit the issues included in the EM programme in view of the overwhelming levels of parental support.

Nor can the legislative framework be ignored. While the Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998) obliges schools to promote the social and personal development of students ‘in consultation with their parents’ (Part 2 Section 7), the external evaluation of the EM programme (Gleeson, Conboy & Walsh 2004) found that little or no attempt was made to involve parents in the development or piloting of the programme. While this reflects the tendency of the Irish education system to keep parents at arms length, the current study highlights the need for educationalists to work more closely with parents at national and local levels.

It must also be recognised that the patrons of privately owned schools may put their own particular stamp on programmes that transcend traditional subject boundaries, as reflected in the case of citizenship education (Gleeson 2009). For example, the Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998, Section 30, 2e) states that the school authorities ‘shall not require any student to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent of the student or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18 years’. Seen in this context, the reluctance of schools to engage more extensively with parents regarding social and personal education matters is somewhat puzzling.

Teacher development

The current study highlights the concerns and fears of parents regarding the need for ‘teacher training’ in relation to issues such as sexual orientation and homophobia. These concerns have clear implications for pre-service education and for the continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers insofar as new skills and alternative pedagogical approaches are required to address these topics in a sensitive and appropriate manner.

In view of the ‘virtual absence’ of SPHE from most initial teacher education courses in Ireland (Morgan, Kitching and Mayock 2007, 136), there have been calls for the inclusion of issues around homophobic bullying in pre-service and in-service teacher training ‘as a matter of concern’ (Minton et al. 2008, 187). Meanwhile CPD provision in relation to SPHE/RSE has mostly been ‘one-off’, as reflected in the call of Morgan, Kitching and Mayock (2007, 44) for ‘a balance between out-of-school in-service and in-school support’. Almost half the Irish post-primary teachers who did experience related CPD felt that it did not prepare them to teach the topics effectively (Geary and Mannix McNamara 2003, 28), e.g. ‘teachers feel that they are not properly trained to teach/deal with specific areas of course’.

In order to reduce their levels of discomfort when addressing SPHE, teacher development must become a policy priority. This is particularly true in the case of dealing with topics such as sexual orientation and homophobia, which tend to be avoided in schools (Norman 2004; Morgan, Kitching and Mayock 2007). The neglect of teacher development for social and personal education is not unique to Ireland as reflected in the calls for enhanced provision to develop teachers’ ability, knowledge base and confidence in discussing such issues in other jurisdictions (Milton et al. 2001; Buston et al. 2002; Walker, Green and Tilford 2003; Walker and Milton 2006).
The particular needs of young men, who are labelled ‘hard to reach’ and whose behaviour has been categorised as ‘counterproductive’ (Walker 2001, 123), deserve particular attention. Although young men are often slow to engage and participate in relationships and sexuality classes, they can pick up quickly on discomfort and insecurity on the part of teachers and this may account for their ‘jokey approach’ and ‘silly responses’ mentioned by respondents in the current study. It is hoped that growth in teacher confidence will lead to increased levels of parental confidence.

From the perspective of school leadership, teacher selection for involvement in personal and social education is also important, as reflected in parents’ comments regarding the suitability of the teacher’s personality to address sensitive issues. The current practice where principals select teachers at random or where all teachers are given one class of SPHE per week (Geary and Mannix McNamara 2003) is hardly the way to ensure that these teachers are, as one parent called for, ‘sensitive, kind, caring [and] good listeners’.

**Conclusion**
The positive reactions of the majority of respondents in the current study provide a valuable platform for the promotion of the social and personal education of young men in Irish post-primary schools. Parental concerns regarding the professional preparation of teachers for dealing with issues such as sexual orientation and homophobia underline the need for greater attention to the development of relevant and appropriate teaching methodologies throughout the continuum of teacher education. When one considers the perceived prevalence of homophobic bullying within Irish post-primary schools, the challenges for the future appear great. They were well summarised by one participating mother:

> Attitudes of boys to homosexuality are still in the dark ages. I am very often shocked with their attitudes to known homosexuality in the school. They are afraid to be associated with their boys – for fear of been labelled. I often think they would prefer any label other than homosexual

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