

**GROWING UP MALE:  
A SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL PROGRAM  
FOR GRADE 11 MALES WITH BEHAVIOURAL NEEDS  
IN A BC SECONDARY SCHOOL**

by

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## ABSTRACT

Male adolescents in Canada face an array of messages from society regarding the appropriate social and emotional norms for masculinity. Whether consciously perpetuated or not, the consequences of societal pressures for males to be emotionally stoic, dominant, aggressive, and to avoid association with traits more aligned with the feminine, can be linked to a number of problematic social and emotional behaviours. In schools, male adolescents who have severe social and emotional problems, known as “students with behavioural needs” or “students at risk”, are some of the most vulnerable students in schools today. Often behavioural difficulties can be displayed with various types of gendered characteristics. To meet the pressing need of helping such students, a gender-conscious 9-session intervention course was developed and implemented by the researcher for nine grade 11 male students with behavioural needs for and at a public secondary school in British Columbia. Exit interviews with participants suggest that participants enjoyed and valued the connection they gained with one another through the intervention, appreciated the chance to share their stories, and developed genuine empathy for one another. Eight participants identified specific new social and emotional insights that they felt would help them in the future, and a number described tangible ways these insights already have made a difference. Teachers and principals also reported an overall improvement in participants’ behaviours. Quantitatively, participants filled out the *Gender Role Conflict Scale for Adolescents* to self assess three variables associated with emotional health, while their teachers used the *Conners 3-TS* to assess for two variables related to social health. Only one variable, Restricted Emotionality, was found to be statistically significantly ( $p < .05$ ) from the start to end of the semester.

However, within this study's ethnographic framework, the researcher's interactions with the young men revealed their frustrations regarding their feelings of being marginalized in schools as well as the desire for their stories to be heard and respected by teachers and principals. These mixed method findings also suggest that male students with behavioural needs connect well to issues made relevant by discussing masculine gender role conflicts, and that their own journeys with understanding and redefining masculinity is complex yet necessary. Ultimately, the implications for school-based interventions for male students with behavioural needs include more awareness of masculine norms and pressures on the part of teachers and principals and the importance of relational connections with students who struggle with behavioural needs in today's classrooms.

*Keywords:* masculinity, adolescents, at-risk, behavioural issues, gender role conflict, intervention, social and emotional health, mixed methods

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| ABSTRACT.....   | 2  |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS.....  | 4  |
| LIST OF TABLES .....  | 8  |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....  | 9  |
| CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....                                   | 10 |
| 1.1 Rationale for the Current Study.....                        | 11 |
| 1.2 Definition of Terms.....                                    | 13 |
| 1.3 The Purpose of the Study and Research Question.....         | 14 |
| CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....                              | 18 |
| 2.1 Inclusive Education.....                                    | 18 |
| 2.1.1 Attitudes Towards Inclusion in BC.....                    | 20 |
| 2.2 Behavioural Needs.....                                      | 21 |
| 2.2.1 Attitudes Towards Behavioural Needs .....                 | 23 |
| 2.2.2 Challenges Facing Students with Behavioural Needs.....    | 25 |
| 2.2.3 Disproportion of Males.....                               | 27 |
| 2.3 Factors Contributing to Behavioural Disorders in Males..... | 29 |
| 2.3.1 Gender Role Strain.....                                   | 31 |
| 2.3.1.1 Discrepancy Strain.....                                 | 33 |
| 2.3.1.2 Trauma Strain.....                                      | 36 |
| 2.3.1.3 Dysfunctional Strain.....                               | 37 |
| 2.4 Resistance to Masculine Norms.....                          | 38 |
| 2.5 Types of Interventions.....                                 | 40 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 2.6 Invitational Schools.....                                  | 43 |
| 2.7 Measuring Improvements.....                                | 43 |
| 2.8 Literature Summary.....                                    | 45 |
| CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....                                   | 47 |
| 3.1 Research Paradigms: Quantitative and Qualitative .....     | 47 |
| 3.1.1 Pragmatism.....  | 48 |
| 3.2 Mixed Method Methodology.....                              | 48 |
| 3.2.1 Ethnography.....   | 49 |
| 3.2.2 Rationale for Ethnography.....                           | 50 |
| 3.2.3 Rationale for Quasi-experimental.....                    | 51 |
| 3.3 Context for This Study.....                                | 52 |
| 3.3.1 The Stakeholders.....                                    | 54 |
| 3.3.2 The Researcher.....                                      | 55 |
| 3.3.3 The School.....  | 55 |
| 3.3.4 Sampling Procedures and Participant Characteristics..... | 57 |
| 3.4 Measures and Covariates.....                               | 58 |
| 3.4.1 Gender Role Conflict Scale for Adolescents (GRCS-A)..... | 58 |
| 3.4.2 Conners 3-TS Test.....                                   | 60 |
| 3.5 Qualitative Research Design and Data Analysis.....         | 62 |
| 3.6 Quantitative Research Design and Data Analysis.....        | 62 |
| 3.7 Quasi-Experimental Intervention .....                      | 63 |
| 3.8 Exploratory Research and Feasibility.....                  | 67 |
| CHAPTER 4: DATA.....   | 68 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 4.1 Qualitative Data and Analysis.....   | 68  |
| 4.1.1 RQ #1 How Did Participants Experience The Social Emotional<br>Intervention.....  | 70  |
| 4.1.2 RQ #2 Did Participants Feel That They Themselves Had<br>Learned Anything Socially Or Emotionally That Has Helped<br>Or Will Help Them..... | 76  |
| 4.2 Quantitative Data and Analysis.....  | 85  |
| 4.2.1 Group GRCS-A and Conners 3-TS Results.....   | 86  |
| 4.2.2 Quantitative Results Analysis.....   | 87  |
| CHAPTER 5: MIXED METHODS DISCUSSION.....   | 93  |
| 5.1 Individual Results and Analysis.....   | 94  |
| 5.2 Summary Synthesis.....   | 102 |
| CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION.....   | 105 |
| 6.1 The Experience of the Researcher.....  | 105 |
| 6.2 The Program.....   | 106 |
| 6.3 Implications of Research.....  | 109 |
| 6.4 Strengths and Limitations of the Study.....  | 112 |
| 6.5 Considerations for Future Research.....  | 114 |
| 6.6 Concluding Thoughts.....   | 115 |
| REFERENCES.....  | 118 |
| APPENDICES.....  | 124 |
| Appendix A Sample Exit Interview Questions for Participants, Teachers<br>and Principals .....  | 132 |

Appendix B Individual's Means and T-scores for all Variables Before  
and After Intervention.....133

Appendix C Sample Parental Consent Form.....134

## LIST OF TABLES

| Table |   | Page |
|-------|---|------|
| 1.    | Overview of Intervention by Session.....  | 66   |
| 2.    | Summary of Participants.....  | 69   |
| 3.    | Participants' Change in GRCS-A and Conners 3-TS Scores Before and After Intervention..... | 95   |

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

“When I was 10yrs old, my dad would take me to the gym with him on the weekends. Kick my ass and "stretch" the hell outta me on the wrestling mats. Then he'd kick my ass some more on the weights. He'd always say, "If you throw up, go outside. And if you cry, then go home to your mother." Yeah, that's my upbringing which taught me there will never be another substitute for hard work. And crying in the gym ain't allowed. Even if you're 10.. with a big ass afro.”

–Dwayne Johnson aka “The Rock”, 2015

In Canadian public school systems, students with behavioural needs are the most vulnerable out of any special needs category (Armstrong, 2012). These students can suffer from a multitude of social, emotional and behavioural issues that not only affect their academic achievement but their overall health and wellbeing (BC Ministry of Education, 2013). As such, male students with behavioural problems are of special interest to educators. A number of studies have found that teachers view students with behavioural needs more negatively when compared to students with other special needs designations (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Cassady, 2011), which compounds the problem. Due to the often disruptive types of behaviour (such as lack of impulse control, poor social skills, aggression, and defiance) it is understandable why such students in classroom settings can cause major challenges and significant frustrations for teachers (Naylor, 2002). However, since students with behavioural needs are the most at risk for harmful behaviours and continue to pose serious concerns in the classroom, then school interventions to help such students cope and manage their own emotions and behaviours must be prioritized in schools today.

### 1.1 Rationale for the Current Study

In addressing these concerns, the issue of gender is significant. Proportionally, there are considerably more male students who are identified as having behavioral needs than females (McIntyre & Tong, 1998; Nelson, Benner, Lane, & Smith, 2004). This over-representation is likely related to the fact that teachers tend to identify boys' behaviours as being more disruptive in class than girls', even starting from as young as age 3 (Merrett & Taylor, 1994). Although this is not to suggest that female students are not in equal need of social and emotional interventions, it does highlight how the consequences of male manifestations of social and emotional problems in schools may be more externalized. For this reason, this research is male-exclusive in order to better focus on and observe social and emotional issues that are unique to the male experience at school. Seminal work from Joseph Pleck's (1981) concept of male gender role strain and James O'Neil's work that same year on studying male gender role conflict are particularly relevant to the current study as their research isolates and defines the distinctive social and emotional factors facing males. Both "gender role strain" and "gender role conflict" seem at the centre of such discussions. Pleck (1981) and O'Neil's (2015) work both expose how society's gendered script for males requires them to be tough, autonomous, and emotionally repressive; these pressures have severe psychological consequences for adolescent males. These consequences occur when boys try to live up to such ideals and/or when they inevitably fail to do so (O'Neil, Challenger, Renzulli, Crapser, & Webster, 2013; Pleck, 1995; Pollack, 1998). Furthermore, how society constructs masculinity and perpetuates an "appropriate" male identity keep boys and men from knowing how to express their emotions in healthy ways and may be deeply

connected to why many male students have behavioural needs in the first place. Growing up male is complicated.

Based on my personal experience<sup>1</sup> as a 26 year-old Caucasian male, one does not need to look hard to find examples of society's messages regarding masculinity. For example, the quote at the beginning of this chapter, a popular Instagram post from Dwayne Johnson (aka "The Rock"; 2015), negatively associates both emotional vulnerability and physical weakness with being feminine and, therefore, shameful for a man. I am deeply concerned with the prospect of boys growing up idolizing this hyper masculine attitude because of the demand for emotionally restrictive ways of being without awareness that this narrow male image causes damage to themselves and others.

It is my view, in agreement with masculinity's research regarding boys and men, that any intervention based on increasing the social and emotional literacy of male adolescents must address the multiple and complex issues surrounding the social construct of male identity (O'Neil & Luján, 2009; Pollack, 1998). Male identity has immense bearing on male adolescents' health and wellbeing. To date, there have been a very limited number of studies regarding secondary school intervention programs for male adolescents that include the concept of male gender role strain or conflict as helpful to increasing their social and emotional health. O'Neil et al.'s (2013) study and the recent initiative of The Representation Project's (2015) documentary *The Mask You Live In* are some notable exceptions because they directly challenge the traditional male gender norms of North American society. However, after conducting a literature review, to my

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<sup>1</sup> I am intentionally using first person here to indicate my own voice in this ethnographic research. This is discussed more thoroughly in chapter 3.

knowledge there have not been any studies that have assessed the social and emotional impact of a similar intervention for male students with behavioural needs.

Herein lies the gap of knowledge that this study wishes to address, observe, and engage with, offering more insight for future research and interventions with students who arguably have the most to gain from such school interventions.

## **1.2 Definition of Terms**

In order to explain and explore the experiences of young men in the intervention program, it is necessary to clarify terms used.

*At-Risk* – A general term used to describe youth who are particularly vulnerable or susceptible to participating or being involved in delinquent or harmful activities, such as crime, which puts them in danger of not becoming successful adults.

*Behavioural disorders* – Students who have social and emotional difficulties “whose behaviours reflect dysfunctional interactions between the student and one or more elements of the environment, including the classroom, school, family, peers, and community” (BC Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 56). This term is quite present in international academic research.

*Behavioural needs* – Students who are formally assessed by a school psychologist and are found to have a behavioural disorder requiring intensive support fit in the special needs category of “Behavioural Needs/Mental Illness.” However, for the purposes of this study this term “behavioural needs” is used to represent all the participants, as some are not officially labeled in the special needs category. Nonetheless, all participants have a behaviour disorder because they have dysfunctional relationships with at least one part of their school environment, which indicates the need for additional support.

*Gender role strain* – A term developed by Pleck in 1981 that refers to the strain that results as an individual tries to meet society's standards for their gender. This can have severe negative psychological and emotional consequences for the individual, especially for males, as the standards of masculinity are often unobtainable and can be innately harmful (Pleck, 1995).

*Gender role conflict* – A well-researched phenomenon described by James O'Neil in the early 1980s that refers to specific measurable consequences that arise in the psychological state of males due to gender role strain they face (O'Neil, 2008).

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study and Research Question**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of a gender-conscious, psychoeducational, and teacher-led intervention for a group of nine grade 11 males with behavioural needs in a British Columbian public secondary school. I was part of the team from this secondary school that applied and received funding from the BC Ministry of Justice to implement a program for students who are presently or are at risk of being involved in future delinquent behaviours. I was, as a result, personally responsible for designing and implementing the intervention. This was a relatively rare opportunity that I wanted to thoroughly investigate using a mixed methods research approach.

Succinctly, this research sets out to answer the question: *In what ways does a teacher-led gender-conscious social and emotional intervention for a group of male secondary school students with behavioural needs impact their social and emotional health?* To respond to this question, this study primarily utilizes three types of data: qualitative exit interviews with participants, a quantitative measure of participants' self-reported levels of gender role conflict, and a quantitative measure of participants' in-class

behaviours as reported by their teachers. In particular, I am using these questions to guide the study:

1. How did participants experience the social emotional intervention?
2. Did participants feel that they themselves had learned anything socially or emotionally that has helped or will help them?

Firstly, creating an intervention that grade 11 boys with behaviour needs actually enjoy would be a significant feat in and of itself, which was a goal of O'Neil and his team's (2013) for a boys' intervention program in an American middle school. While experiencing the intervention positively does not guarantee that participants' social and emotional health would be impacted, positive responses by the boys themselves greatly improves this possibility. Secondly, and more importantly, the ability for participants to reflect on their own sense of behavioural change could suggest a deeper awareness of emotional intelligence and self-awareness. Asking participants what they learned from the intervention provides evidence concerning whether there was a change in their social and emotional health.

To quantitatively assess the intervention's impact on participants' social and emotional health, participants' gender role conflict and in-class behaviours were monitored at the beginning and end of the first semester. Gender role conflict and in-class behaviours have been identified throughout the literature as valuable variables to assess as gender role conflict is significantly correlated to overall psychological health (Pleck, 1995; O'Neil & Renzulli, 2013) and in-class behaviours are deeply connected to a student's success in the classroom (Runions, 2014). Therefore, any significant improvements in either of these areas could serve as evidence that this intervention offers

some benefit in the young men's lives. To explore gender role conflict, I used the Gender Role Conflict Scale for Adolescents (GRCS-A; Blazina, Pisecco, & O'Neil, 2005) and assessed in-class behaviours using the *Conners 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition Teacher Short Form (Conners 3-TS)*. The GRCS-A breaks down into four subtests, three of which were applicable to the goals of the study: restricted emotionality (RE); restricted affection between men (RAM); and conflict between work, school and family (CWSF). These variables, especially RE, are indicators of emotional health (Blazina et al., 2005). Specific gender role conflict research questions that contribute to the overall research question for this study are:

3. Do participants' restricted emotionality change over the course of the semester?
4. Do participants' restricted affection between men change over the course of the semester?
5. Do participants' conflict between work, school and family change over the course of the semester?

Similarly, the *Conners 3-TS* divides in-class behaviours into five measurable categories: inattention, hyperactivity, learning problems/executive functioning, aggression/defiance, and peer relations. The last two, aggression/defiance (AG), and peer relations (PR), are related to the research purposes for this study as these subtests are a good indicator of social health concerning the ability for positive interpersonal relationships. Thus, the related research questions for in-class behaviours are:

6. Do participants' aggression/defiance change over the course of the semester?
7. Do participants' peer relations change over the course of the semester?

Because research regarding a gender-conscious intervention for male students with behavioural needs was unique, as much exploratory data was collected as possible. Exit interviews were conducted with the principals and with many of the participants' teachers to better assess the feasibility and any additional nuances or outcomes of the intervention. Also, given the ethnographic nature of this study, themes or insights that emerged directly from hearing and witnessing participants' ongoing experiences are voiced. Lastly, as the researcher and intervention leader, I seek to share practical insights and personal reflections about implementing a gender-conscious intervention for secondary-aged males that will hopefully be of some benefit to those wishing to implement a similar in-school program elsewhere. What follows now is an overview of academic literature related to at-risk adolescent boys at school and the possibilities of school-based interventions.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

This research project considers the social and emotional needs of male secondary students who struggle with behavioural needs. In order to more clearly understand the foundation, relevance, and scope for this study, a review of relevant educational literature is needed. In this chapter, the basis for intentional support for students with behavioural needs in the public school system is discussed, as are the unique attitudes and problems facing such students in today's BC schools. This chapter then explores the factors related to behavioural needs and, in particular, the literature pertaining to how gender roles<sup>2</sup> impact behavioural disorders. Society's male gender norms are considered, specifically in regards to how "gender role strain" and "gender role conflict" impact males' social and emotional health. Other programs concerned with relevant school-based interventions for meeting males' social and emotional needs are also highlighted. Finally, this chapter reviews common measures used to assess an individual's level of social and emotional health, which are applicable to the goals of this research.

### 2.1 Inclusive Education

The general history of special education in British Columbia is quite similar to the progression of inclusion in the rest of the Western world. Prior to the 1950s, students with physical or mental impairments, those known as having special needs, received little to no education at all (Naylor, Fast, D'Angelo, & Champion, 2012). Then, in large part due to parent-led outcries, segregated educational programs were developed (Inclusion BC, 2015). This attention given to students with unique educational needs eventually resulted in a formal inclusive education philosophy in the late 1980s and led to the most

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term "gender roles" instead of "gender" to focus more clearly on the behaviours rather than other aspects of gender, such as sexual identity.

recent paradigm of special education—full inclusion (Inclusion BC, 2016; Winzer & Mazurek, 2011). The BC Ministry of Education (2013) best outlines the current tenets of full inclusion:

British Columbia promotes an inclusive education system in which students with special needs are fully participating members of a community of learners. Inclusion describes the principle that all students are entitled to equitable access to learning, achievement and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their educational programs. The practice of inclusion is not necessarily synonymous with full integration in regular classrooms, and goes beyond placement to include meaningful participation and the promotion of interaction with others. (p. 2)

Importantly, this philosophy of inclusion in BC values and emphasizes the social purpose of using inclusion to increase the “interaction with others” (p. 2). Furthermore, the BC Ministry of Education legally requires school districts to provide “special education services and programs... [to be] delivered to any of their students who require them” (p. 6). Additionally, at the core of the new curricula that is currently being transitionally implemented into all schools in BC, there is now a stronger emphasis on explicitly teaching skills that builds all students’ personal and social competencies (BC Ministry of Education, 2015). This new direction of curricula focuses on the ability for students to “thrive as individuals, to understand and care about themselves and others, and to find and achieve their purposes in the world” (BC Ministry of Education, 2015). Meaning there is currently a shift in BC schools from the traditional knowledge-based outcomes of school curricula to ones that more holistically instruct and benefit the student as a whole

person. It is with this understanding of the new focus of education in BC, of the mandate of BC schools to provide special educational services to those that need them, and the fact that full inclusion is intended to promote social interactions, which supports and propels this current research to implement a social and emotional intervention for students with behavioural needs.

**2.1.1 Attitudes towards inclusion in BC.** Improvements in special education policy or rhetoric have not always meant a ground level change in attitudes towards inclusion. As much research has shown, the attitude and abilities of the teacher is central to the success of inclusion in schools (Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2014; Gal, Schreur, & Engel-Yeger, 2010). Research over the past thirty years regarding the need for full inclusion concerning the inclusion of students with special needs within the mainstream classroom are primarily positive. However, negative attitudes towards the inclusion of specific students, particularly those with behavioural needs, were noted consistently throughout the literature.

A series of research reports and studies conducted by Naylor (2002, 2005) and by Naylor, Fast, D'Angelo and Champion (2012) on behalf of the BC Teachers' Federation, give valuable insights as to the special education situation in BC over the past decade. In Naylor's 2002 study, surveys were mailed home to a population representative of teachers in BC that specifically assessed teacher attitudes towards special education. Overall attitudes increased positively since full inclusion started, but at least 56% of respondents did not feel professionally prepared to work with students with special needs. The two major hindrances and sources of frustration cited by teachers were the lack of time and the negative impact that disruptive students, who displayed aggression or other

behavioural problems, had on the rest of their students. Three years later, Naylor's 2005 report found that almost half of teachers from the 380 sample group still did not feel confident in teaching learners with special needs, and Naylor quite honestly remarked that "pervasive inclusion in BC's public schools is clearly still ongoing, and the destination arguably further away now than it was three years ago" (p. 24). Because of this lack of progress, in the most recent study, Naylor et al. (2012) changed their focus and were primarily concerned with how to practically help teachers and schools become more inclusive through collaboration. What to glean from these reports is that positive teacher attitudes regarding the philosophy of inclusion have been only marginally increasing, and many teachers in BC, the reality of including students with special behavioural needs continues to be a major stressor and obstacle to full inclusion.

## **2.2 Behavioural Needs**

In British Columbia, the special needs category for students who have social and emotional issues is known as "Behavioural Needs or Mental Illness" (BC Ministry of Education, 2013). The BC Ministry of Education (2013) characterizes students with "Behavioural Needs or Mental Illness" as those who have social and/or emotional problems resulting in a dysfunctional relationship with at least one aspect of their environment. These students may exhibit behaviours such as aggression, hyperactivity, and/or delinquency (p. 56). There are a range of disorders that students with "Behavioural Needs or Mental Illness" can be diagnosed with, such as: oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, schizophrenia, depression, anxiety disorder, eating disorders, attention deficit disorder, and posttraumatic stress disorder (Walkley & Cox, 2013; Westwood, 2002). Although the description of "Behavioural Needs or Mental

Illness” aptly describes all participants in this study, there are some who are not officially diagnosed in the category of “Behavioural Needs or Mental Illness.” It is the professional judgment of teachers that has identified these non-diagnosed participants as having behavioural needs. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the term “behavioural needs” will be used, not as an official special needs category but as a descriptive label to best highlight the types of behaviours characteristic of the participants.

Canadian data regarding students with behavioural needs is complex and hard to find. This is mainly because each province has autonomy regarding education. Dworet and Maich (2007) sought information about emotional and behavioural disorders<sup>3</sup> in students across Canada and found large discrepancies in almost every area surveyed. Each province and territory had differences regarding the “definitions, diagnosis, identification, prevalence, eligibility, placement, services, administration, funding and teacher training” (p. 33) for students with emotional and behavioural disorders. The authors compared their data to the United States, which reports that 3-6% of students have emotional and behavioural needs requiring special education services, whereas their results from the provinces and territories in Canada reported prevalence levels between <1% to 12.6%. Because of this large variance, Dworet and Maich speculate that there are likely a higher number of students with emotional and behavioural disorders than reported but most Canadian provinces do not prioritize categorizing such students. This may be especially true for BC as it only reported a percentage slightly above 1%, and in 2013 the BC Ministry of Education reported the prevalence rates as less than 1%.

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<sup>3</sup> Since there is no cohesive term for behavioural needs across Canada, the researchers used the term “emotional and behavioural disorders” to best describe what they were looking for.

Dworet and Maich ultimately conclude that it is essentially impossible to determine whether students in Canada with emotional and behavioural disorders are receiving the support they need, which adds importance to this current research.

**2.2.1 Attitudes towards behavioral needs.** The negative attitudes found in BC as mentioned in the BC Teachers' Federation reports discussed earlier, coincides with the literature elsewhere that maintains teachers' attitudes towards learners with behavioural needs are the most negatively biased of any of the special need categories (Armstrong, 2012; Hirsch, 2013). An older Canadian study from 1997 by Jordan, Lindsay and Stanovich was highlighted in Avramidis and Norwich's (2002) meta-analysis because that study identified an important factor in teachers' perceptions and how that influenced their attitudes towards students with special needs. The healthiest and most effective attitudes of teachers were observed when teachers perceived student problems as a conflict between the student and the environment and not only within the student. Teacher attitudes were most harmful when teachers believed that the disability was intrinsic to the student (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). This insight may help explain why students with behavioural needs are perceived more negatively than students with physical disabilities, since it is more complicated to understand behavioural needs as requiring environmental accommodations. This appears to be the case with an American study that found teachers were the most accepting of students with a physical disability and least receptive and most hostile towards students with either a learning disability or a behavioural disorder (Soodak, Podell, & Lehman, 2002). In a similar vein, a study by Cassady (2011) gave 25 American teachers a fictitious student profile, one for a student with autism and the other a student with a behavioural disorder. They were then asked a

series of survey questions on a Likert-type scale as to whether they would prefer including a student with non-verbal autism or with behavioural needs. Cassady's study found that the majority would feel significantly more comfortable teaching and including a student with autism in their classroom than with someone who would likely be more disruptive.

It is not surprising then that teachers who are enthusiastic about teaching students with behaviour needs are rare to find and can be difficult to keep (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013).<sup>4</sup> These apprehensive attitudes of teacher towards students with behavioral needs are also found in most pre-service teachers, some of whom have never had any actual experience teaching such students (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000).

Therefore, not only are misgivings towards students with behavioural needs coming from seasoned teachers, but also from those new to the profession. All this potentially indicates the extent to which students with behavioural needs face preconceptions and assumptions from their teachers regarding what type of student they will be.

Whether real or perceived, there is much agreement in the literature that students with behavioural needs pose difficulties to teachers in British Columbia and elsewhere. Because physical disabilities have fewer implications for teachers' classroom management, accommodation is less daunting for teachers than those involving disruptive behaviours. Yet, although students with behavioural needs may need to contend with the covert or overt negative attitudes of their teachers, this vulnerable student population has

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<sup>4</sup> Although there is no available official data, it is well known in this study's school district that finding and keeping special education teachers is difficult. In part, this is evidenced by personal conversations with multiple principals having a hard time finding someone who is qualified to teach special education.

many other social, emotional and behavioural factors they need to overcome in order to achieve success in education.

**2.2.2 Challenges facing students with behavioural needs.** According to the BC Ministry of Education's (2013) definition, students with behavioural needs experience ongoing difficulties with their social and/or emotional health, and this often has consequences on their academics as well as other aspects of their lives. They are the most likely to fail classes and have the highest dropout rate out of any special needs category (Armstrong, 2012). This was researched thoroughly by American researchers Reid, Gonzalez, Nordness, Trout, and Epstein (2004). They conducted a meta-analysis looking at the relationship between the academics of students with behavioural disorders compared to the academics of students without. Out of the 25 studies they analyzed, which altogether included 2486 participants with behavioural disorders, they found a moderate to large effect size ( $d_+ = -.69$ ,  $p < .05$ ) discrepancy in students with behavioural disorders achieving lower academic scores. Overall, 75% of students with behavioural needs scored below the average of students without disabilities, with the average score of students with behavioural disorders being at the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile.

Besides academic challenges, there are often many social difficulties with peers and adults that students with behavioural needs experience. Part of this is due to the dysfunctional nature of behaviours that students with behavioural needs exhibit, which limits their ability for positive social connections, such as: poor social functioning, hyperactivity, and withdrawnness (BC Ministry, 2013; Lunk & Merrell, 2001). These can be broadly categorized as either externalizing or internalizing behaviours. The foremost are behaviours that are more visible and manifest outside the individual like hyperactivity

or aggression while the latter are behaviours that manifest within the individual such as hypoarousal, tiredness or withdrawnness (Gravener et al., 2012).

Sadly, research by Buhs, Ladd, and Herald (2006) and Lester and Cross (2014), reveals the cyclical interplay that emotions, social functioning, externalizing, and internalizing behaviours can have on one another. Both show the pattern that social rejection, which may or may not initially be attributed to poor behaviours, increases the levels of problematic behaviours that leads to further social rejection. Buhs et al. (2006) performed a longitudinal study on participants from kindergarten to grade 5 that started by measuring students' peer acceptance ratings. Every spring onwards, peer exclusion, peer abuse, aggression, and withdrawnness were measured and from grade 3-5; levels of classroom participation and school avoidance was measured as well. After testing for significance, Buhs et al. found that students who were less accepted in kindergarten experienced more chronic abuse, which in turn led to increased levels of school avoidance and classroom disengagement. Furthermore, aggression was found to be a significant predictor of peer exclusion and abuse.

Similarly, Lester and Cross' (2014) longitudinal study was from grade 7-9 and measured whether participants' bullying levels in grade 7 would predict emotional and behavioural problems in grade 8 and 9. Over 3000 males and females participated, and based on the frequency and severity of being bullied that they self-reported, they were placed into a specific trajectory group. These categories, in increasing severity, were *not bullied*, *low stable*, *low increasing*, and *medium stable*. Categories with "stable" describes the fact that there was bullying but it was not getting worse or better. At four points during the study, Goodman's (1997) Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire was

used to assess participants' emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity levels, peer problems, and pro-social behaviours. Results showed that males who were in the *low-increasing* and *medium stable* trajectory group experienced significantly higher emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity levels, and poor prosocial behaviours than males who were in the *not bullied* trajectory group. Males in the *low stable* group had significantly higher peer problems but none of the other symptoms just listed. Interestingly, females who were bullied when compared to those who were not only had higher levels of emotional symptoms and peer problems. This gender difference of females not exhibiting increased conduct problems, hyperactivity levels, or poor prosocial skills when bullied, is important to note as there is much evidence found elsewhere that the presence of these behaviours may be more socially acceptable for males than females (Levant, 1996; Pleck, 1995; Pollack, 1998).

**2.2.3 Disproportion of males.** One of the more unique aspects about the behavioral needs category is the fact that it is heavily disproportional when it comes to gender. Males are far more frequently reported to have disruptive behaviours in class and be diagnosed with behavioural needs than females (Callahan, 1994; McIntyre & Tong, 1998). National data from the United States indicates that 81% of students with behavioural needs are male, which is the exact same proportion found in the school involved in this research<sup>5</sup> (Nelson et al., 2004). This disproportion is also reflected in the research, as one of the major meta-analysis discussed earlier discovered that even 80% of the 2486 students with behavioural disorders studied were male (Reid et al., 2004).

Numerous studies have shown that males are more prone than females to exhibit

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<sup>5</sup> This stat is true as of June 30<sup>th</sup> 2016. To my knowledge there was no data from BC available that showed the amount of students with behavioural needs split by gender.

externalizing behaviours, such as conduct problems, hyperactivity, and poor social-skills within a school setting (Garaigordobil, Maganto, Pérex, & Sansinenea, 2009; Perren, Stadelmann, Von Wyl, & Von Klitzing, 2007; Mercurio, 2003). This gender difference is significant because externalizing behaviours are a major predictor of a teacher-child relationship, which, in turn, greatly determines how positive the school experience is for the child (Jerome, Hamre, & Pianta, 2009).

A recent study by Runions (2014) assessed whether a teacher's behavioural expectations of a student changed depending on gender. He found that teachers viewed males as more aggressive, hyperactive, emotionally problematic, and had less positive social skills than females. Runions also found that these types of hyperaroused behaviours would gain the attention of teachers far more than withdrawnness. This study also found that teachers responded differently to the same behaviours based on the gender of the student exhibiting it, although this varied by grade level. Since this study was of young elementary students, Runions hypothesized that as grade level increase there is more time for gender-typical expectations to be established and teachers' divergent expectations of gender to likewise expand.

Once again, all this does not mean that females have less behavioural problems, but rather misbehaviours can take multiple forms. One prominent and well-cited study by Crick and Grotpeter (1995) hypothesized that girls should not be so underrepresented in having social and emotional issues related to aggression because there are different types of aggression that have not been considered for females. They found that although males had more overt aggression and were much more likely to be on the extreme end of physical aggression, females had higher amounts of relational aggression, which involves

things more like alienation, manipulation, ostracism and character defamation (p. 711). Therefore, as Crick and Grotpeter conclude, part of the gender discrepancy for behavioural needs is due to the lack of assessments that identify the more nuanced forms of aggression and behaviour.

Evidently, the literature points to a gender difference that makes male students more prone to disruptive and noticeable behaviours in the classroom than females. Although somewhat controversial, the prevalence of these behaviours in males can be explained by the unique pressures males face to conform and maintain the masculine gender norms promoted by society (O'Neil, 2015).

### **2.3 Factors Contributing to Behavioural Disorders in Males**

Exploring the factors related to behavioural disorders is important because understanding their causes can lead to insights on how to best intervene and devise programs that will more effectively help students with behavioural needs. As the literature seems to indicate, being male is a contributing factor for behavioural disorders. Therefore, exploring behavioural disorders quickly brings up the debate about whether gender differences are more due to biological genetics (nature), or environmental factors (nurture). Additionally, there is also a field in evolutionary biology known as epigenetics, which explains how environmental factors can alter gene expression, essentially explaining how nurture can actually change nature. The arguments for behavioural disorders being wholly nature-related are not relevant and do not add meaningful discussion for this research since the purpose of an intervention itself assumes that individuals can change. This research assumes that an effective intervention can cause social and emotional changes to occur, not just merely causing individuals to

manage innate behaviours. This assumption is also made due to the strong evidence that nurture and socialization plays a significant role in gender differences regarding males' social and emotional behaviours.

In regards to evidence for nurture, admittedly, there is a vast amount of research regarding the early child-caregiver attachment known as *attachment theory* developed by Bowlby (Bowlby, 1988) and added onto by many other researchers, most notably Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) and Main and Solomon (1986). While this research is critical in understanding the foundations of behaviour, how certain learned behaviours might be assimilated by a child, and also connects with epigenetics, it is not pertinent for understanding this current study.<sup>6</sup> The reason for this is because discussing or exploring participants' early attachments is not tenable or appropriate for a non-trained teacher to discuss in an in-school group setting.

Therefore, one possible nurture explanation for why males exhibit more unruly or maladaptive behaviours in schools when compared to their female counterparts is the way schools are set up. Research from the UK, Australia and North America by Davison and Frank (2006) and Martino and Berrill (2003) points to how there is a common assumption that schools and classes have been feminized to the detriment of males. It is important to note that the authors of both articles reject this and the binary division of gender. Instead they contend that gender differences are much more nuanced and are related to societal pressures. In particular, Davison and Frank (2006) discuss how critiquing the socially established gender norms that appear to be obviously true for much of the population, is assumed to be damaging to males simply because it is itself a feminist approach of

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<sup>6</sup> My worldview is deeply informed by “attachment theory” and is personally relevant as I feel that it helps me to bring a heightened understanding and empathy for all students.

viewing gender.<sup>7</sup> The perceived feminization of schools is believed to occur in the curricula, the types of activities students partake in, and the fact that there are many female teachers (Martino & Berrill, 2003). The Australian government established a report in 2002 to “help” correct this, with a report called, *Boys: Getting it right* (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training as cited in Martino & Berrill, 2003). In it they recommend that boys more than girls need hands-on activities, more structure, and less content in favour of more relationships with their teachers. In addition, Martino and Berrill (2003) highlight how a male teacher is often more likely to reinforce these gendered beliefs in their students rather than challenge them.

Even if some levels of disengagement and behaviours of boys could be attributed to schools catering more towards females, the severity of behaviours found and the large disproportional amount of boys with behavioural needs is not convincingly explained. However, if gender is largely socialized, then there is a theory or model that describes how the socialization process can be responsible for creating many of the maladaptive behaviours that seem to be exhibited by males, particularly those with behavioural needs.

**2.3.1 Gender role strain.** The impact of traditional male expectations society espouses has been well researched, as have the impacts of this on males’ behaviours and social and emotional health. Joseph Pleck, currently a professor of human development and family studies at the University of Illinois, and major leader and contributor in the field of male gender roles, formulated the well-respected concept of male gender role strain published in 1981. In 1995 he updated his research and proposed three main ways

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<sup>7</sup> It is called a feminist approach to gender simply because it is feminist research that challenges the traditionally views on gender and seeks to explore and restore power imbalances.

gender role strain can occur. These he labeled as: (a) discrepancy strain, (b) trauma strain, and (c) dysfunction strain. The discrepancy strain occurs when males do not live up to the traditional standards or norms of masculinity. For example, this strain could be felt if a male is homosexual, not physically strong, or athletic, all of which could lead to feelings of inferiority or social condemnation because they are violating these norms (Pleck, 1995, p. 13). The trauma strain occurs when the actual process of socializing to the norms of masculinity are in themselves traumatic. An example of this is when boys are called “faggots” or “gay” in order to push them towards a masculinity norm, like becoming more athletic. The final strain, the dysfunction strain, is when the ultimate goal of achieving a gender norm is “inherently dysfunctional” (Pleck, 1995, p. 17). An example of this is emotional stoicism leading to the inability to healthily maintain healthy relationships (Levant, 1996). Each of these three types leads to negative psychological consequences that impacts both intra and interpersonal relationships as individuals strive to overconform to the violated norms, hence the term gender role *strain* is used as males are *straining* to meet gender expectations (Pleck, 1995, p. 12).

Pertinent to this current study is researcher James O’Neil, whose model on male gender role conflict is theoretically founded on Pleck’s model of gender role strain (O’Neil, 2015). O’Neil is a well-known name in male gender studies and is a licensed psychologist. He is currently a professor of educational psychology and family studies psychology at the University of Connecticut. His passion for men’s gender role conflict started in the late 1970s with his desire to “explain how men’s restrictive gender roles contribute to violent, abusive, and controlling behaviors in relationships” (O’Neil, 2015, p. 31). Interestingly, at the start of his journey he was frequently mocked by other

academics that he was gay, even though he was not, simply because he was studying men. O'Neil's research on gender role conflict goes beyond why there is gender role strain to identify what are the outcomes of men's gender socialization. Six outcomes were hypothesized: (a) restrictive emotionality, (b) health care problems, (c) obsession with achievement and success, (d) restrictive and affectionate behavior, (e) socialized control, power, and competition issues, and (f) homophobia (O'Neil, 2015, p. 34). Later, as he developed a quantitative scale for measuring gender role conflict in order to add validity to the field of feminist men studies, these six factors were synthesized into four: (a) success, power, competition, (b) restrictive emotionality, (c) restrictive affectionate behaviour between men, and (d) conflict between work and family relations (O'Neil, 2015).

Although Pleck and O'Neil's research was rooted in the United States, many Canadian gender role studies use their models, suggesting that these tenets of masculinity are very much present in Canadian society as well (McCreary, Saucier, & Courtenay, 2005; Webster, Kuo, & Vogel, 2006). O'Neil's website shows that the gender role conflict scale he created has been adapted for 11 different languages, and used in a variety of countries. Of these, researchers in Canada and Australia have used the gender role conflict scale the most (O'Neil, ca. 2016), perhaps indicating that these countries have the most similar male gender role socialization process. The wide usage also suggests that the relevance of masculine issues extends much farther past the United States.

**2.3.1.1 Discrepancy strain.** Closely resembling O'Neil's six socialization outcomes and heavily influenced by Pleck's gender role strain, psychologist Ronald

Levant, former president of the American Psychological Association, succinctly describes traditional masculinity in seven main tenets:

The requirement to avoid all things feminine; the injunction to restrict one's emotional life; the emphasis on toughness and aggression; the injunction to be self-reliant; the emphasis on achieving status above all else; nonrelational, objectifying attitudes toward sexuality; and fear and hatred of homosexuals (1996, p. 261).

Although these traditional masculine norms may seem dated, current research strongly suggests that these ideas of masculinity are still found in society today. A recent study by Fischer, Eagly, and Oosterwijk (2013) poignantly shows these stereotypical gender norms and the values that contribute to Pleck model of discrepancy strain. They exposed 146 first and second year university students to a number of pictures of female and male faces; some were crying and some were neutral. The participants were first given no context for the emotion of the faces. In the neutral photos, women were deemed to have more of the "feminine" characteristics of warmth and sociability, whereas the male neutral faces were seen to be more competitive and aggressive. In the crying pictures, participants identified women as having more inherent sadness than the males, who were seen as having greater stoicism. Interestingly, in the second part of the study the context of the photos was manipulated to specify a workplace environment. Based on that slight change, the men in the crying photos became seen as the more emotional and more incompetent of the genders. Fischer et al. (2013) contribute this to the significant breaking of gender norms that a crying man at work would entail. Of further interest, this study analyzed the gender differences of the participants' responses. Males overall saw

crying as significantly more negative and inappropriate than female participants did. This study strongly supporting the belief that crying is a less acceptable male behaviour.

Perhaps there is no clearer summary of the expected male gender norms than in adolescents' own perceptions of masculinity. Chu and Tolman (2005) devised an Adolescent Masculinity Ideology in Relationships Scale (AMIRS), which measures different aspects of masculinity and their effects on adolescents. In order to create the AMIRS, the researchers thematically gleaned narratives of masculinity from 65 ethnically and socially diverse boys (12-18 years old) and found very common ideas. "Being a man" was understood by the boys to be synonymous with acting tough, being emotionally invulnerable, and being in control. These things Chu and Tolman refer to as heterosexual dominance. Watts and Borders (2005) similarly interviewed adolescents and found that most reported feeling societal pressure to shun their emotions and affection towards other males. Interestingly, some participants reported that they did not feel any tension with being unable to express their emotions because they denied ever having felt any emotions anyways—except for anger.

The traditional definition of masculinity is again found in the findings of McCann, Plummer, and Minichiello's (2010) qualitative study regarding adult male perceptions of what it means to "be a man". Their study is filled with narratives of adult males expressing their disdain at the idea of a man crying in public. This study also exposes the homophobic culture of masculinity, discussing how males use homophobic slurs as jokes to humiliate each other and maintain a power dynamic. This revelation adds a serious dimension in understanding how males view healthy emotionality, as, typically, the

aspects of male homosexuality that are made fun of are the aspects that are deemed feminine, such as being sensitive or emotional.

**2.3.1.2 Trauma strain.** The socialization process of adhering to male gender norms can be overt or almost imperceptible. One study by Fivush, Brotman, Buckner, and Goodman (2000) exemplified how this male role socialization process can be subtly introduced to young children by assessing how parents discussed four specific past events with their own 3-year-old children. Each event corresponded with one specific emotion in which their child experienced happiness, anger, sadness, or fear. It was shown that mothers talked significantly more about the emotional aspect of the events than fathers did, as well as used more emotional language. Furthermore, how the young children discussed their past events was also assessed by the study. The only difference between the genders at this level was that males had a significantly lower use of emotive language when discussing the fearful event. The authors speculated this was because the boys already knew at a young age that fear was a less acceptable emotion for males to acknowledge. Interestingly, when discussing sad events with their daughters, both parents were more in touch with their emotions and discussed the emotional aspect of these sad events as well as the causes of sadness. This suggests that girls, unlike many boys, are being brought up in an environment that encourages more emotional discussions and awareness. The impact of this dichotomy is pointedly stated by a young boy in a different study: “[it] might be nice to be a girl, then you wouldn’t have to be emotionless” (Way et al., 2014, p. 242).

Six examples of this traumatic socialization process are shown in a recent Canadian psychological study of adult males who had been hurt in their relationships

with their fathers. All six participants connected to experiencing trauma strain as they told the emotional injuries and consequences incurred on them by their fathers' masculine behaviours (Dadson, 2013). Some themes that stood out most from these stories is the desire but lack of connection participants felt with their fathers, the inability for fathers to express their emotions, and fathers using their physical strength for control. These themes all harken back to negative outcomes surrounding male's experiencing gender role strain.

**2.3.1.3 Dysfunctional strain.** The things that masculinity admires, such as dominance, power, aggression, and invulnerability, can cause severe harm. Males are often taught to avoid emotions, or at very least to never let those feelings show (emotional-stoicism), but this can deeply damage their social and emotional health (Mercurio, 2003; Way et al., 2014; Wong, Pituch, & Rochlen, 2006). For example, numbing the emotions of fear and sadness, which are two things males typically are taught to not express, have been shown to strongly correlate with an increase of delinquent behaviours (Allwood Bell, & Horan, 2011). Furthermore, if males are not as familiar or practiced with feeling their emotions then males can be limited in their understanding of emotional intelligence. Having a high emotional intelligence is a marker of a healthy individual and it typically refers to: a person's ability to reflect on their own and others' emotions; ability to express their own emotions; an ability to regulate their emotions; and finally, being able to use emotions to help direct and influence thought patterns and actions (Morand, 2001; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). As such, the benefit of having a high emotional intelligence has been linked to many positive interpersonal and intrapersonal traits such as being a transformational leader (Mandell,

2003) or having the ability to work positively in group settings (Barczak, Mulki, & Lassk, 2010; Moore & Mamiseishvili, 2012). Therefore, males without the skills of knowing their emotional needs have a more difficult time understanding the emotional needs of others.

Pleck (1995) does not intend to suggest that all males negatively experience gender role strain. Viewing traditional gender roles as unimportant, being able to positively cope with not fitting into the traditional gender role, or the fact that not fitting into to masculinity standards may also bear positive attributes, all minimize the effect of gender role strain (Pleck, 1995). He recognizes that the expectations of masculinity are fluid and can vary greatly depending on the culture (pp. 14-15). Yet, in spite of this, traditional masculinity in North American culture is still a very poignant and visible force.

#### **2.4 Resistance to Masculine Norms**

With the increasing awareness of the consequences for male gender role strain, there is a push and/or realization of the importance for increasing males' resistances to masculine norms (Chu, 2014; Feder, Levant, & Dean, 2010; O'Neil & Luján, 2009; O'Neil & Renzulli, 2013; O'Neil et al., 2013; Pollack, 1998; Way et al., 2014). As a disclaimer, Chu (2014) importantly mentions that not all masculine norms are negative, such as respect and honesty, and therefore not all masculine norms should be resisted. However, it has been shown that male adolescents who are able to resist the unhealthy norms of masculinity have been found to enhance their psychological and social adjustment (Chu & Tolman, 2005; Way et al., 2014). To build resistance to the masculine norms of toughness, stoicism and autonomy, there is common agreement in the

literature on which skills need to be focused on. Boys need to be taught how to be self-aware, attuned to their own feelings and to the feelings of others; how to healthily express their emotions; how to be comfortable with and dependent on close relationships; and how to communicate and develop warm interpersonal relations (Chu, 2014; Garaigordobil et al., 2009). Essentially, males need to be encouraged in areas of prosocial skills, emotional intelligence and vulnerability. Research has shown that the paternal relationship and ability of the father to model these things is one of the best ways to counter the narrative of masculinity espoused by society (Benbassat & Priel, 2014). Regrettably, providing a positive father is not a realistic approach for a secondary school level intervention, however having positive older male role models that embody healthy masculinity may be a beneficial approach.

A Canadian study by Coulter (2003) gives an insightful perspective to the unique and sometimes contradictory experiences of adolescent males who are already on the road to building resistance to masculine norms. Coulter interviewed male secondary students aged 15-20 who already voluntarily participated in a gender equity club and found that even though participants expressed believing in gender equality, they were reluctant to challenge the sexist behaviours of their friends and would pass it off as “‘guys just joking around’” (p. 142). Coulter also points out the irony that sometimes participants would use their masculinity, such as athletic prowess or muscular build, as a way to convince their peers about gender equity. Clearly, as seen by the male adolescents in this study, challenging the deeply held masculine norms and building a healthy resistance to it is not simply understood or quickly achieved. Rather resistance building is a complex and ongoing process.

## 2.5 Types of Interventions

Although not abundant, research has been conducted on interventions at the secondary school level designed to encourage adolescents, often of both genders, to grow in these aforementioned areas (Garaigordobil et al., 2009; Nochajski & Schweitzer, 2014; O’Neil et al., 2013; Pollack, 1998). James O’Neil, alongside Luján (2009), thoroughly outlines 27 thematic areas that should be implemented in a school psychoeducational program for boys. These topics cover a range of social, emotional, and behavioural areas such as: conflict management skills, self-control and centering, positive and healthy masculinity, listening skills, power in relationship, emotional awareness and expression, and dealing with loss (p. 262). Although they make it very clear that any intervention will be unique and specific to its schools and its participants, O’Neil and Luján (2009) maintain, based on experience and research, that a constant of every program should be to focus on the positive traits of masculinity rather than on how the socially constructed perceptions of masculinity are wrong or bad.

Garaigordobil et al.’s study (2009) focused on a program that used a multi-faceted, three-month, 10-session in-school program. It was called “A Society That Builds Peace” and it utilized debates, role-playing scenarios, videos, and brainstorming to increase the social and emotional levels of adolescents. Findings revealed that by the end of the intervention male and female students, each separately, had significant increases in their: rejection of violent behaviour; understanding of societal values of justice, forgiveness, dialogue and regret; awareness of what can cause violence; and how to effectively and positively manage others’ aggressiveness. Moreover, at the end of the

three-months, participants' desires to manage conflict autonomously and with aggression declined.

Another intervention introduced to middle school aged males also targeted issues surrounding the male gender role by O'Neil et al. (2013). This two-day intervention was designed to help boys obtain awareness and insight regarding their "masculinity issues, psychosocial development, and gender role transitions" (p. 195). The program was called "The Boy's Forum" and was formatted as a psychoeducational group where the first day grade 7 and 8 boys watched a documentary about the American male growing-up experience called, *Boys Will Be Men: Growing Up Male in America*, directed by Tom Weidlinger. An adult presenter spoke on the second day regarding his own journey growing up and sharing his struggles with anger and conflicts with authority. The purpose of the speaker was to empower the young adolescents by modeling healthy emotionality, vulnerability, and honesty. There was ample time for discussions during both days. Three weeks after the program was implemented O'Neil et al. surveyed the participants and found that over 80% of the participants reported thinking about the intervention over the last three weeks, over 70% thought more about their own issues, 59% thought about how to deal with their anger, and 41% had spent time thinking about speaking to someone about their problems. Encouragingly, what O'Neil et al. (2013) were pleased to conclude was that middle school-aged boys could positively receive an inexpensive, simple, and short intervention about issues concerning the male gender role. They were also pleased that three weeks later many were still thinking about it. They hoped that this would propel participants towards a more positive and healthier masculinity.

Lastly, a study that explored the practices of male adolescents who have, to various extents, gone against the hegemonic masculinity in schools, reveals the importance of having healthy conversations with their peers. From the interviews, researchers Kehler, Davison, and Frank (2006) concluded that effective conversations would only occur between male adolescents if “(a) their vulnerabilities or weaknesses were respected and not ridiculed, (b) their male counterparts would listen in confidence, and not use the vulnerability as a lever for undermining or questioning his masculinity” (p. 67). Therefore these two guidelines are a critical component to any intervention that seeks to have honest conversations about masculinity in today’s culture.

Other bodies of research that involve increasing the social and emotional health of males in non-school settings can add to the insights gleaned from these examples. The effects of youth mentoring programs have been shown to increase adolescents’ social and emotional functioning in a number of studies (Herrera, Vang, & Gale et al., 2002; Karcher, 2005; Spencer, 2007). Spencer’s (2007) study on adult-adolescent mentoring relationships revealed that the majority of male teenage participants placed sincere value on the mentorship relationship. The adolescents saw it as a safe place for connection and a place where they could show their vulnerability. This study, along with others (Karcher, 2005; Liang, Spencer, Brogan, & Corral, 2008), all emphasize that the quality of the relationship between the mentor and mentee is what accounted for most of the positive changes in the adolescents’ lives. Neither the content of what was discussed, nor the specific program associated with the mentorship was quite as valuable. Therefore it is likely that in order for a longitudinal intervention with a small group to be effective, it needs to be rooted in trusting, positive relationships.

## **2.6 Invitational Schools**

The importance of teachers' relationships with their students has been so well documented it borders upon cliché. When a school intervention to increase the social and emotional awareness of adolescents is being implemented for students with behavioural needs, that axiom should be no different (Westwood, 2002). In fact, this should be even more of a priority for students with behavioural needs because of the negative biases teachers tend to have towards such students. If students feel their teachers genuinely care for them then their chances of being involved in the health risk behaviours of drugs, alcohol, suicide ideation, sexual intercourse and violence is significantly reduced (McNeely & Falci, 2004). Teachers' positions place them strategically in adolescents' lives as a role model and they can help to create an environment that adheres to Invitational Education Theory as developed by Purkey and Novak (1988, 1996). This respected theory focuses on developing a school culture where peoples' whole beings are being valued and encouraged to grow, not just their academics (Purkey & Strahan, 1995). One of the tenants of this theory is to create programs specifically designed to invite personal development as this results in positively transforming schools (Purkey & Novak, 1988; Purkey & Strahan, 1995). One could logically interpolate that this transformation of schools is only possible because education that invites students to grow socially and emotionally first transform students' lives, which is what this study aims to do.

## **2.7 Measuring Improvements**

To assess whether these "transformations" or rather social, emotional and behavioural changes have actually occurred in students, there are a variety of measures represented in the literature. For measuring social skills and behaviours, the Goodman

(1997) strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) has been used quite frequently such as in Lester and Cross' (2014) study. It has a child self-assessment version as well as a version for teachers and parents. Its validity and reliability was compared to the well-respected Rutter questionnaires (Elander & Rutter, 1996) and was found to be just as effective, with the added benefit of being shorter, having a component measuring child strengths, and a better assessment of peer relationships and prosocial skills (Goodman, 1997). Another well-established test for measuring behaviors and skills is the Conners 3-TS. Similar to the SDQ, it has teacher, parent and self-report versions, it is easy and quick to administer, but has the higher age range up to 18 years of age as opposed to the SDQ's age of 16 (Conners, 2010; Goodman, 1997). It is a level B test, requiring teachers with level B training to implement it and it is designed to assess for hyperactivity, inattention, learning problems, aggression/defiance, and peer relations (Conners, 2010). Although it has some diagnostic properties for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, it is not limited to that as it provides much information on the comorbidity of other externalizing problems (Conners, 2010). It is also a widely used and accepted measure by school psychologists in BC.

The majority of the literature assessing emotional health or intelligence tends to focus on self-reports, often in the format of Likert-type questions (Chu & Tolman, 2005; Moore & Mamiseishvili, 2012; Oransky & Fisher, 2009). Some studies have challenged the validity of self-report tests for accurately measuring emotional phenomenon because language comprehension can play an important role in representing emotional intelligence (Buck, 1971; Dunning, Johnson, Ehrlinger, & Kruger, 2003). Therefore some have opted to use more pictorial types of tests (Morand, 2001) while others have

used an interview approach (Watts & Borders, 2005). There is one prominent test that is designed for assessing males' emotionality in light of gender role strain and that is the Gender Role Conflict Scale (GRCS) as created by O'Neil in 1986. The GRCS is a widely used instrument (O'Beaglaioich, Conway & Morrison, 2015) that helps encapsulate the negative aspects that arise from gender role strain. O'Neil later adapted the scale in 2005 into the Gender Role Conflict Scale for Adolescents (GRCS-A). This adapted scale has been shown to be extremely relevant to adolescents' lives and experiences except for the subscale "conflict between work, school and family" (Watts & Borders, 2005). It has 29 questions and has four subtests for restricted affection between men; restricted emotionality; conflict between work, school and family; and need for success and achievement.

## **2.8 Literature Summary**

It is clear in the relevant literature that students with behavioural needs face a variety of challenges. From negative teacher attitudes, bullying, lowered academics, to delinquency, there is a deep need for the development of in-school programs to help these students gain social skills and emotional intelligence. Moreover, the BC Ministry of Education and the new BC curriculum compels schools to address these concerns, as students with behavioural needs are "most in need of intensive interventions" (BC Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 57). The lack of substantial change regarding attitudes towards students with behaviour problems in BC's recent history as shown by Naylor (2002, 2005), highlights the importance of such interventions.

In light of the research regarding male gender role strain and conflict, there are many factors that contribute to understanding these behavioural needs for male students.

Pleck's model of gender role strain highlights significant problems impeding males at all ages from healthily expressing their emotions and having positive social interactions.

The extent to which men are expected to be phlegmatic, in control and strong, was seen extensively throughout the literature (Mercurio, 2003; McCann et al., 2010; Way et al., 2014), as were the negative impacts of such expectations (Allwood et al., 2011; Garaigordobil et al., 2009). Therefore a large piece of understanding adolescent males' behaviour problems can sufficiently be linked to their restricted emotionality that is deeply connected to the gender role strain that society has placed on males.

While a few successful interventions were noted for helping increase adolescents' social and emotional functioning, few focused on exposing the restricted forces of masculinity as a pathway for change. The most notable exception being O'Neil et al. (2013). As far as I am aware, there have been no studies involving a secondary school intervention that deals with gender role strain for students with behavioural needs.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, to pioneer this area of research, I wanted to obtain as much data as possible by employing a number of qualitative and quantitative methods.

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<sup>8</sup> In personal correspondence Dr. James O'Neil indicated to his knowledge no such study has been done either. (J. O'Neil personal communication, July 30, 2015)

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter presents the methodology used for this study of nine adolescent males. They took part in an intervention program that was composed of nine sessions delivered by two teachers, myself as the principal investigator and a colleague. At the time this study took place, all nine participants were in grade 11 and all were 16 years old. In addition, these adolescents were either diagnosed with an official “Behavioural Need or Mental Illness” or had been identified by their teachers and principals as being in need of assistance regarding behavioral difficulties. This study is a search for a deeper understanding of how gender roles and expectations are a critical aspect to understanding and helping with social and emotional struggles.

#### **3.1 Research Paradigms: Quantitative and Qualitative**

How research is conducted depends greatly on the paradigm that is guiding it. Different research paradigms, or ways of viewing the world, each have their own assumptions regarding the attributes of reality and truth (Morgan, 2007). Traditionally, a researcher’s ascribed paradigm has tended to dichotomize their research methodology as either quantitative or qualitative; focusing more on instruments that strive to obtain objective numerical data, or on exploring the subjective human experiences of participants to better explain a phenomenon (Mertens, 2015). These often-polarized methods have their own strengths and weaknesses, yet what has been increasingly argued is the need for a more balanced approach that appreciates the value in both qualitative and quantitative methods (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Morgan, 2007). The only paradigm that explicitly accepts a balanced stance of both quantitative and qualitative

methods is known as “pragmatism”. Pragmatism is the paradigm guiding this current research.

**3.1.1 Pragmatism.** Pragmatists reject the notion of certainty in data and find no conflict in believing that knowledge is found in the natural world as well as in the socially constructed world (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Pragmatists are known for focusing on research that involves practical action rather than remaining in philosophical queries of objectivism and subjectivism (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Morgan (2007) contends that “it is not the abstract pursuit of knowledge through ‘inquiry’ that is central to a pragmatic approach, but rather the attempt to gain knowledge in the pursuit of desired ends” (p. 69). This attempt is due to pragmatism’s belief that actions provide the most effective and efficient way to ascertain meaningful knowledge about a phenomenon (Tebes, 2012). When deciding on a methodology to use for research, pragmatists look for what has the most utility to the research question or the situational context. This road leads to the research approach known as mixed methods.

### **3.2 Mixed Methods Methodology**

Mixed methods are best suited to pragmatist research as it allows the use of multiple measures of any type to approach a research question (Mertens, 2015). A pragmatic mixed method study uses the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative measures together to more fully understand a phenomenon. This current research evolved to employ one qualitative technique and two quantitative ones in order to understand and quantify participants’ social and emotional health via measuring their gender role conflict and in-class behaviours. Since mixed methods research borrows from both types of research, there is some difficulty in defining the type of

methodological design; this current study is no exception. Although this study shares elements of a case study as well as a program evaluation, the most fitting label for this study's specific research methodology is a mixed methods quasi-experimental ethnography. In this case, quasi-experimental refers to the two quantitative components of the study, which are both embedded within the overall qualitative ethnography.

**3.2.1 Ethnography.** This current study operates within a subset of qualitative research known as ethnographic research. Ethnography is a type of research that “aims to get an in-depth understanding of how individuals in different subcultures make sense of their lived reality” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 230). In order to do so, ethnography requires a researcher to interact intimately, and often over a prolonged period of time, with the people being studied in an attempt to research from *within* the social context of their everyday lives and *with* their perspectives in mind (Buch & Staller, 2014). This other-centric tenet of ethnographic research is based on the belief that the best way to analyze a phenomenon is by witnessing it while it naturally happens, rather than by manipulating variables to isolate it independently while the ethnographer retains control over what and how the phenomenon is studied (Mertens, 2015). Other common traits of ethnographic research are as follows: the data is collected “from a range of sources but observation and/or relatively informal conversations are often key tools”; the sample size is relatively small, and the analysis of data “mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most” (Lillis, 2008, p. 358). Ethnography is immersed in the “real world” and lends itself well to the pragmatic perspective used here.

**3.2.2 Rationale for ethnography.** I chose a qualitative method of research because it lends itself particularly well to “the process, implementation, or development of a program” (Mertens, 2015, p. 240). Yet, since I am deeply involved in the delivery of the intervention as the classroom teacher/leader of the nine specific sessions, ethnography was an obvious fit as it acknowledges and values the personal connection and interplay between the researcher and participants. Therefore, because ethnography allows for my personal voice to be present within my research, I utilize my first person perspective. At the core of my research, I am exploring what it means for a group of grade 11 students to grow up male. Throughout the data collection, I am present and serve as a “participant observer” describing their behaviours, recording their insights, as well as the insights and observations of other parties. This type of researcher-participant relationship epitomizes ethnography. Mertens (2015) offers other characteristics of ethnography, such as small sample size, the presence of observations and informal conversations, and the fact that quantitative analysis plays a supportive role to the “thick description”, also aptly describes this current study.

One area where my research differs from typical ethnographies is with the concept of transferability. Ethnography seeks to place findings within their larger social context and, although I would be pleased if this study’s results had transferability (also known as generalizability) to outside contexts, this research is not primarily intent on achieving this. In this way, this study operates like a case study as it is intrinsically valuable for any potential insights or outcomes that are specific to the context, its participants and, in this case, the participating school. That said, some insights and themes might well apply to other school settings and, thus, be of some value to

educational research on social and emotional interventions for students with behavioural needs as a whole.

**3.2.3 Rationale for quasi-experimental.** Quasi-experimental research is a quantitative method defined by the fact that there is no control group. This is a potential threat to the study's internal validity. However, the reason why no control group was selected is that it would be unethical to have students with behavioural needs in a control group and not offer them an intervention that could possibly help them socially and emotionally. This would directly violate ethical research design requirements as well as the mandate for schools in British Columbia to provide help to students who have behavioural needs (BC Ministry of Education, 2013; Mertens, 2015).

I chose two quantitative measures, the GRCS-A and the Conners 3-TS, as part of this study based primarily on two factors. Firstly, but not foremost, was the fact that certain stakeholders (namely the principals, BC government, and later the District School Board) were particularly interested in seeing social and emotional changes through the offering of this intervention program. As such, quantitative measures are valuable in quickly summarizing results. Additionally, there still is a perception in both the scientific and lay community that the use of a quantitative method is superior (Wacome, 2003). Therefore, rather pragmatically, I wanted the results of this study to be of value to its stakeholders and thus opted to use quantitative-type measures in addition to resting this research on only a qualitative ethnographic foundation.

Secondly, using quantitative measures added to the “thick description” of this study. Having clear quantitative measures before and after the intervention brings additional understanding and helps to answer the overall research question: *In what ways*

*does a teacher-led gender-conscious social and emotional intervention for a group of male secondary school students with behavioural needs impact their social and emotional health?* A self-report instrument (GRCS-A) was chosen for the participants regarding their own perception of gender role conflict for a few reasons: (a) the phenomenon itself is primarily intrapersonal, and (b) an essential aspect to the intervention is helping participants know themselves better. The very process of self-reflection that is required for filling out a self-report is important for participants as it may stimulate and enrich their own thinking about such emotional issues.

Since participants' teachers are knowledgeable about when and which behaviours are disrupting their classes, they were critical in understanding any changes in participants' in-class social behaviours. As such, the Conners 3-TS would be helpful in order to increase teachers' support and compliance with the study, a time-sensitive method of collecting data was necessary.

### **3.3 Context for this Study**

This study has its own unique circumstances that made it possible. The school's vice principal, myself, two of my teacher colleagues, and the school's youth care support worker applied for provincial government funding from BC's civil forfeiture program. This program is run by BC's Ministry of Justice, which takes moneys it seizes from violent crimes and puts it back into programs that seek to help victims of and prevent violent crimes from happening in the future. In 2016, the civil forfeiture grants were given with a particular emphasis on the provincial government's long-term strategy and commitment to ending violence against women, known as Violence Free BC (BC Government Caucus, 2015). Specifically, the purpose of the \$9800 grant that the school

received was to help at-risk students “develop stronger social, communication, and coping skills” (Langley Times, 2015, para. 2). For cohesiveness, the administrator, alongside my colleagues, and myself mutually decided to label and refer to our initiative as a “social and emotional program.” The vice principal first used the grant money to send me and the two other classroom teachers involved to a conference in Portland<sup>9</sup> on the topic of “social thinking.” The remaining balance of the funds went directly into the implementation of the program.

Early on, the decision was mutually decided that the youth care worker and the other female teacher would be in charge of an intervention for the grade 11 female students who struggle with social and emotional issues, whereas the male teacher, Mr. D,<sup>10</sup> who is doing graduate studies in counseling psychology, and I would be in charge of the male intervention. I took on the role of intervention leader and designer and had almost complete autonomy over designing the intervention, while Mr. D helped to facilitate discussions.

I recognized that the government funding, the administrative support, and my ability to personally help cast vision in an area that I was passionate about created a rare opportunity to explore further the role of gender in school at-risk behaviours. With the responsibility of implementing an effective set of social and emotional intervention sessions for male adolescents, I wanted it to be rooted in the literature and previous research regarding gender and behavioural issues.

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<sup>9</sup> “Social Thinking Conference” led by Michelle Garcia Winner, Portland, OR (May 11-13, 2015)

<sup>10</sup> Name has been hidden and changed for confidentiality.

**3.3.1 The stakeholders.** There were many stakeholders interested in this research, although the majority of them were primarily concerned with seeing how/if the participants' in-class behaviours changed. Firstly, the BC Ministry of Justice needed to assess the impact of their grant money and my vice principal was required to report back to them about what was accomplished throughout the year. In April 2016 I offered up the results of my research to the vice principal to be used as part of the report back to the government. To clarify, the government does not own or necessarily support my research; it is the program itself which concerns them. The school's administrators, as well as the participants' teachers, were deeply interested in the potential outcomes of this research. Although no participants nor their parents expressed personal interest in the specifics of my research, they are invested in the potential outcomes of the interventions. Without exception, when participants' parents were told what the intervention aimed to address, namely social and emotional health, they immediately saw the value and hoped that their child would gain a lot from the experience. The local school board became another stakeholder as my principal asked Mr. D and me in October 2015 to present to them the intervention project. The school board expressed enthusiasm in our program and was particularly keen on the fact that my research was collecting some quantitative evidence to assess the effectiveness of the program. We were asked by the school board to return at the end of the school year in 2016 to report on the results, which has yet to happen.

Given my personal involvement in the intervention, I was also a stakeholder. I wanted the intervention to be successful in that it helped with participants' social and emotional health, but I was also invested because I wanted the intervention to be received and viewed positively all involved: the principals, participants, their parents, my

colleagues, and the school board. The quantitative component was designed to better validate the research to the previously mentioned stakeholders; however, my emphasis, and the heart of my research, was to explore the ideas and the difficulties surrounding the participants growing up male.

**3.3.2 The researcher.** I have worked, and continue to work, in the special education department at the secondary involved in this study. At the time of the study, I was in my third full year teaching at the school. Interestingly, I graduated from this secondary school myself, which gave me a deep understanding of the school's demographics and culture. I work primarily with students with learning disabilities but also with students diagnosed with behavioural needs or mental illness and autism spectrum disorders. As part of my graduate program, I received my level B training for administering level B psychological assessments,<sup>11</sup> which is necessary for me to administer the Conners 3-TS. Prior to this study, I built rapport with a number of the student participants, primarily through playing intramural sports with them, as well as by helping the majority of the participants with their homework during their resource blocks over the span of two years. Building these relationships proved beneficial since the rapport created was positive, thus increasing the likelihood of honest reflections and buy-in from them as participants in the intervention.

**3.3.3 The school.** The school in this study is situated within BC's lower mainland and has approximately 800 students and 50 staff; this size is similar to other secondary schools in this school district. However, in comparison to these other secondary schools, it is one of the most rural. It is surrounded by farmland and, because of this, a large

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<sup>11</sup> Certain qualifications are needed, typically at the master's level, in order to purchase, administer or score a level B assessment

proportion of the student body arrives each day by school buses; the school is not located near any one neighbourhood within walking distance, nor is it near any public transit. The school has the reputation in the school district as being the “hick”<sup>12</sup> school. For example, although not common, it is still not unusual to see students wearing cowboy boots or hear students talking about their horses or farms. Because families in this area also tend to be politically and socially conservative, there was some trepidation expressed by the school district when I sought approval for my study and its focus on gender-related issues concerning perceptions of masculinity. Although supportive, the administrative authorities cautioned me that some of the GRCS-A questions could be perceived as exploring homosexuality and thus there was potential for participants’ parents to respond negatively if they thought questionnaires were exploring the possibilities that their son was gay. The socioeconomic status of the school’s population is middle class but it is quite diverse and may be lowering. Comparing the demographics of the school’s catchment area from 2007-2013, there have been critical increases in student vulnerabilities regarding physical health and well-being (+15%), social competence (+25%) and emotional maturity (+6%). These increases can be indicative of a low socioeconomic status (Human Early Learning Partnership, 2013). The majority of the school is Caucasian (70%), but it also has a strong presence from the local Aboriginal community (13%) and the international student program (13%). The school has the highest ratio of students with special needs in the school district at around 24%—not including the many students who are not officially coded but still receive special educational support.

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<sup>12</sup> Local slang for a person who lives in the country, typically regarded as being less sophisticated.

**3.3.4 Sampling procedures and participant characteristics.** It was mutually decided by the two teachers, one youth-care worker, the vice principal, and myself, that the participants would be chosen from the in-school program since such students were somewhat known, specifically the males, as having social and emotional issues and being behaviourally disruptive in class—some since grade 8. Our hope was that these students would have the most to gain from the intervention and that, by grade 11, they would have the maturity and capacity for receiving and participating in an intervention. A list of twenty male names were compiled based on the following criteria: their special needs designation, many were behavioural needs/mental illness, within that category a few were IBI (students requiring intensive behaviour intervention) and B/MI (students requiring behavioural support or students with mental illness)<sup>13</sup> and some had no designation; the frequency of disciplinary incidents involving said student; the nature of these issues (aggressive, relational and emotional behaviours were targeted); classroom teachers' reports, counselor recommendations and/or personal experiences with the students; also a minor aspect of the decisions was based on whether parents/guardians would be supportive of a program to help their child.

Once again it was mutually agreed upon that for group dynamics only eight to twelve male students who fit the criteria most closely would be asked to be a part of the program. There were ten students who fit the inclusion criteria most closely, and when I first asked these students individually about their interest in the program they all responded positively. Since this number was also in the middle of the target range for participant numbers, no further grade 11's were invited to participate. After these ten

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<sup>13</sup> IBI and B/MI are both classifications used by BC Ministry of Education. IBI is the most severe label given to students with social and emotional problems.

male adolescents agreed and parents gave permission to be a part of the group, I separately discussed with the students and their parents about whether they would also consent to being a part of this research study. All ten students gave their assent to be apart of this research and, likewise, all parents readily gave their verbal consent over the phone. After securing the parents' verbal consent, informed consent letters were sent home (refer to Appendix C) and all were returned signed by parents allowing their child to participate. There was one exception: although verbal consent was given by every parent, one consent form was never officially received because, by that point, that student was no longer living at home and not on speaking terms with his parents. Shortly thereafter he was expelled from school on drug-related matters and only attended the first session of the intervention. Since his participation in the group was minimal and his official parental consent was never received, his data was wholly excluded from this study. Of the remaining nine participants, three lived with both parents, while four lived with their mothers and two with their fathers. More detailed descriptions of the nine participants are provided in Chapter 4, Table 2.

### **3.4 Measures and Covariates**

**3.4.1 Gender role conflict scale for adolescents (GRCS-A).** As previously discussed, this study used two quantitative measures for assessing longitudinal changes in students' gender role conflict and in-class behaviours. The instrument used for measuring gender role conflict was the GRCS-A, which is an adapted form from the well-established adult Gender Role Conflict Scale (Blazina et al., 2005). The GRCS-A contains 29 questions on a 6-point Likert-type scale and it is a self-reported measure. The questions are categorized into four different subgroups or factors: *restricted*

*emotionality; restricted affection between men; conflict between work, school, and family; and need for success and achievement.* For the first three factors, the higher the score for each subtest, the more indicative that there are negative mental health issues associated in that area. Interestingly, for adolescents, a high score on the *need for success and achievement* factor does not associate with any negative mental health issues, leaving Blazina et al. (2005) to speculate that the *need for success and achievement* is “more reflective of the positive aspects of masculine ideology rather than measuring gender-role conflict” (p. 43). Therefore, since this study is interested in observing changes from a negative to positive direction, only the three factors of *restricted emotionality (RE)*, *restricted affection between men (RAM)*, and *conflict between work, school and family (CWSF)* were used. Out of these three, Blazina et al.’s (2005) study found that RE is “the most consistent factor [on the GRCS-A that is] correlated with the measures of psychological distress” (p. 43). This factor has significant correlation to the well-established Conners-Wells’ Adolescent Self-Report Scale, which is used to identify a variety of emotional problems in adolescents (Blazina et al., 2005). The questions on the GRCS-A associated with RE, ask adolescents to reflect on their own emotions and their ability to use them, which are two important aspects of emotional intelligence (Morand, 2001; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Therefore, this subscale was of particular importance. The internal consistency coefficients for GRCS-A subtests ranged from .70 to .82, and the 2-week test-retest reliabilities for the factors were as follows: RE, .87; RAM, .83; CWSF, .60. This relatively low test-retest reliability for CWSF may be due to how conflicts in one’s life are impacted by external events.

**3.4.2 Conners 3-TS test.** The *Conners 3rd Edition<sup>TM</sup> Teacher Short (Conners 3-TS)* form was used to measure participants' change of in-class behaviours of aggression/defiance (AG) and peer relations (PR). This is a level B test and was chosen as it is widely used in many school districts in BC, often by school psychologists. Unfortunately, due to the copyright law of a level B test, it cannot be included in the appendices. The test includes a teacher form, parent form, student form, global index form, and ADHD index form, which can be used independently or cohesively for a more thorough or specific assessment. Most of these have long and short versions. For the purposes of this study, only the teacher short form was used as it pertained directly to participants' social behaviours in class and would only take approximately ten minutes for teachers to complete. The Conners 3-TS offers no composite scores and instead independently evaluates a student's inattention, hyperactivity/impulsivity, learning problems, executive functioning, aggression/defiance, and peer relations (Conners, 2010; Multi-health Systems Inc., 2015). Therefore the scope of this test provides sufficient data about the participants that can be analyzed. There are 39 questions with a 4-point Likert-type scale, and higher numeric values correlate to a greater amount of concern for that area. Interestingly, 10 of the questions are specifically designed to assess the teacher's response style to see if they are overly positive or negative towards the student. Therefore if a teacher records a score of 4 out of 5 for either positive or negative impression then there is reason to suspect that their assessment of that student is biased.

The Conners 3-TS has American standardized norms for age and gender groups (Conners, 2010) and, even though there is not a Canadian standardized version, it is still widely used in BC schools. The Conners 3-TS has a high internal consistency and

validity scale with Cronbach alpha values of .91 and .90, respectively (Gallant et al., 2007 as cited in Conners, 2010). Furthermore, Gallant et al. (2007 as cited in Conners, 2010), found the test-retest reliability for the Conners 3-TS between 2-4 weeks was .89 and that interrater reliability was .73. The relatively lower interrater reliability is understandable since students' behaviours can manifest quite differently depending on other students in their class, which subject is being taught, and the relationship between the teacher and a particular student. Teachers vary significantly in how they manage their classes and how well they tolerate certain behaviours. The discriminative validity of the five aspects of the test, i.e., inattention, hyperactivity, learning problems/executive functioning, aggression, and peer relations, when correlated to other established measures had an overall classification rate of 75.59% (Conners, 2010). Meaning that the Conners 3-TS was quite capable of accurately measuring the behaviours it claimed to measure. This study only analyzes the scores of AG and PR, as these are the only two that have to do with interpersonal skills and are a specific focus of the intervention. Participants' learning problems/executive functioning is not applicable to what this study aims to explore. Although in-class inattention and hyperactivity may be influenced by a gender-conscious social and emotional intervention, these traits are more deeply confounded with cognitive processes, such as the presence of a learning disability, the teacher's teaching style, or specific subject, whereas AG and PR are explicitly interpersonal processes. The items associated with AG ask about whether the student in question bullies, manipulates, or threatens their peers or disobeys the adults in the classroom. Meanwhile the items associated with PR ask teachers to assess how well the student is able to be accepted by a friend group and maintain those relationships.

Both the GRCS-A and Conners 3-TS are widely used instruments in Canada and internationally that have been highly correlated to similar theoretically established scales. Their good reliabilities and validity measures also ensured that this research confidently measured what it claimed to measure, namely gender role conflict and the in-class behaviours of aggression and peer relations. Additionally, both measures had sufficiently short test-retest intervals, thus lending well to a repeated measures study.

### **3.5 Qualitative Research Design and Data Analysis**

To assess how participants experienced the social emotional intervention and whether they felt that they had learned anything that helped them, exit interviews were conducted with the participants at the end of January and beginning of February. The guiding questions for the interview are found in Appendix A. I performed the interviews individually with each participant, which ranged in length from 7 minutes to 25 minutes. After using video recording to help transcribe the interviews, trends were observed by comparing participant responses.

### **3.6 Quantitative Research Design and Data Analysis**

The quantitative part of this mixed methods study employed a quasi-experimental (no control group) repeated measures design. The first two observations were taken in early October at time 1 ( $T_1$ ), the GRCS-A ( $O_1$ ) and the Conners 3-TS ( $O_2$ ), then the ongoing bi-weekly intervention ( $X_1$ ) was implemented until the end of January ( $T_2$ ), and at that time the second set of observations, using the same measures, were collected. This design is depicted as follows:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} O_1 & O_2 & X_1 & O_1 & O_2 & & \\ \underbrace{\hspace{1.5cm}} & & & \underbrace{\hspace{1.5cm}} & & & \\ T_1 & & & T_2 & & & \end{array}$$

The first two observations ( $O_1, O_2$ ) at  $T_1$  set the baseline for participants' emotional health as assessed by gender role conflict and social in-class behaviours. Altogether there were five variables: RE, RAM, CWSF, AG, and PR. These means were then compared to their respective means of the observations at  $T_2$  using the non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. A multivariate statistical analysis was not used to assess the change of all five variables together as they each measure a distinct phenomenon and no composite scores exist among them.

The GRCS-A was scored by adding up the Likert-type scale values pertaining to each individual factor and then dividing by the number of items on the test applicable to that factor. The Conners 3-TS was scored based on the scoring material that is included in the test, namely the T-scores that correlate to the raw data. The Likert-type values that teachers circle corresponds to specific hidden values, which are then added up for each category to give a total score for AG and PR, separately. The Conners 3-TS is designed so that if teachers miss or do not have the ability to answer a maximum of one of the questions for each subtest, then the average of the answered questions in that subtest becomes that missing value. Substituting averages in for a single missing value was necessary in quite a few instances as some teachers had difficulty knowing how to answer some questionnaire items about the participants.

### **3.7 Quasi-Experimental Intervention**

The entire program that I was in charge of was divided into two parts, one for each semester. What is referred to throughout this research as the “intervention” is the

first half, which took place during the first semester of the school year and focused on psychoeducating the participants in issues relating to emotional and social health. In the second semester participants were mentors for grade 7 at-risk students from a nearby elementary school. This was designed so that the first semester might better equip the participants with insights that they could in turn teach to their mentees. Yet, as mentioned, this current research concerns itself with the 9-session psychoeducational component of the intervention, as explicitly relating to gender.

The intervention for this study started the first week of October and finished at the end of January. Altogether there were nine sessions, approximately one every eight school days, and the last one was a daylong snowshoeing bonding experience. The school has a double block each day (the same class twice) so that all sessions occurred during one of the double blocks. This way participants would never completely miss any of their classes. Except for the snowshoeing daytrip and a guest speaker requiring 3 hours to present in full, each session was one hour in length.

The topics of each session were based from 27 thematic areas that O'Neil and Luján's (2009) identified as being crucial for having in a psychoeducational program for boys. Two of the guest speakers, from the organizations Safeteen and Children of the Street Society, were brought in without much control as to what they would specifically be speaking on, yet in both instances the speakers spoke on topics that perfectly aligned with these thematic areas. Although O'Neil and Luján's (2009) themes did guide the program, my colleague and myself leading the intervention believed it was important that sessions be altered and shifted depending on current issues for the participants or based on feedback from them or any other stakeholders. This really only occurred once during

the study when the administration had three separate disciplinary situations with three of the participants in the span of a week and they asked me to address this behaviour in one of the sessions. As such, the design of session #7 (see Table 3.2) reflects my decision to explicitly discuss what was going on for these participants.

Table 1 below briefly outlines the structure and content of each of the nine sessions, as well as the major theme or topics of each session. The bolded topics/themes are the ones taken directly from O'Neil and Luján's (2009, p. 262) suggestions for topics in a psychoeducational program for boys. In many cases, more than one topic was discussed in each session as they were closely related and often overlapped.

Table 1

*Overview of Intervention by Session*

| Session | Topic/Theme  | Overview   |
|---------|--|--|
| 1       | Introduction and Establishing Group Trust  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Played opening activity</li> <li>- Established group trust and expectations</li> </ul>  |
| 2       | <b>Masculinity Ideology</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discussed what it means to “be a man”</li> <li>- Discussed how masculinity looks like in our culture and the pros and cons of that for social and emotional health</li> <li>- Watched beginning of the documentary <i>The Mask You Live In</i> (The Representation Project, 2015)</li> </ul>                          |
| 3       | <b>Conflict Management Skills; Relationships with Boys and Men</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Opened with a discussion about relational advice</li> <li>- Discussed the reasons why they are angry and why they feel the need to fight</li> <li>- Presented healthy management skills (e.g. self-control, removing oneself from situation, taking responsibility for actions when aggression does occur)</li> </ul> |
| 4       | <b>Patterns of Gender Role Conflict, Relationships with Girls and Women; Sexuality; Assertiveness Skills; Positive and Healthy Masculinity</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Safeteen presenter (3 hours in length)</li> <li>- Male code – how gender roles impact our lives and relationships</li> <li>- Role-Plays: How to not shrink or swell but stand strong during a conflict or confrontation</li> </ul>  |
| 5       | <b>Power in Relationships; Relationships with Girls and Women; Sexuality</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Children of the Street Society presenters</li> <li>- Information about sextrade/exploitation</li> <li>- rules and education around sexting and consent</li> <li>- discuss what unhealthy/healthy relationships look like (role-plays)</li> </ul>  |
| 6       | <b>Emotional Awareness and Expression</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Registered Clinical Counsellor from the community</li> <li>- discussed psycho-ed around emotional awareness and regulation</li> </ul>   |
| 7       | Open session: open discussion  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I wrote cards for each of the participants about positive things that I saw in them and distributed these</li> <li>- Did a check-in, talked about what was going on in their lives and how they felt about these things</li> </ul>  |
| 8       | <b>Emotional Awareness and Expression; Empathy Skills; Listening Skills</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Registered Clinical Counsellor from the community (same one)</li> <li>- discussed psychoeducational themes around emotional awareness and regulation</li> <li>- main focus on coping strategies and listening skills</li> </ul>   |
| 9       | Teambuilding wrap-up: Snowshoeing  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 3-hour snowshoeing hike</li> <li>- a chance to bond, have fun, make memories and debrief from the semester</li> </ul>   |

### **3.8 Exploratory Research and Feasibility**

Due to my paradigm of pragmatism, as well as the stakeholders' desires for tangible results, an important aspect of this study was its ability to provide as much information about a vulnerable student population as possible and to assess the intervention's feasibility. Foremost, the qualitative and quantitative components of this study together helped to determine how the intervention impacted participants' social and emotional health; however, interviews conducted with the teachers and administrators at the end of the intervention also provided information as to the impact and feasibility of the intervention.

Within the ethnographic design of this study, space was given to allow for participants' experiences, as communicated and witnessed by me, to be heard. Therefore, embedded throughout the discussions and conclusions of this research are themes or topics that emerged organically. To do this, I took extensive field notes and journaled throughout the semester whenever I had one-on-one conversations, heard conversations, or saw incidents involving the participants. For each session of the intervention I made notes as to what was planned, what actually happened, and my thoughts and feelings regarding it. Every time we had a guest speaker I would also jot down their reflections. Although this study acknowledges its limitations for transferability, its mixed methods data analysis and the rich detail regarding feasibility provides some potential direction or insights for future research. As this chapter explored the methodology used in the study, the next presents the qualitative and quantitative data, and, after analyzing them separately, seeks to understand all sources of data collected throughout this study in relation to each other.

## **Chapter 4: Data**

This chapter begins by giving a brief description of each participant, followed by the data collected from each participant's exit interviews regarding the two qualitative research questions. These are each presented and discussed separately. To follow is the quantitative data from the GRCS-A and Conners 3-TS, which will be presented and analyzed. For a richer and more descriptive analysis, there are also details given, as needed, from my personal field notes taken throughout the study. The information gleaned from my exit interviews with the two principals and the 11 participating teachers, ten of whom filled-in the Conners 3-TS and the eleventh being Mr. D, will be added to the discussion. The mixed methods section will begin by highlighting each participant in an attempt to understand their individual quantitative scores. This chapter closes with an overall summary of the findings of this study.

### **4.1 Qualitative Data Analysis**

To assess the two qualitative research questions, participants' responses to the 10 exit interview questions (Appendix A), which acted as a guide for open coding, were analyzed. Table 2 below aims to help differentiate between participants discussed in this chapter by highlighting key characteristics about each.

Table 2

*Summary of Participants*

| Research Name | Age  | Sessions Attended | Brief History and Description  |
|---------------|------|-------------------|--|
| Andrew        | 16.2 | 9                 | Andrew appeared to carry a certain confidence that naturally makes him an unspoken leader. For example, a few of the participants agreed to be a part of the group as soon as they found out he had agreed. He has a history of aggression at school, arguing with teachers and fighting. He can get quite defensive when talking to teachers, as if he assumes he is getting in trouble.  |
| Bob           | 16.2 | 9                 | Bob seemed to be a follower in the group. When asked, he would rarely do something if another participant was not already doing it. Bob also has been in trouble the least amount of times, and then usually guilty by association. That said, he exhibits aggression and at times is disrespectful towards teachers. He seemed extremely detached from his emotions. He claimed to always “be fine” or “to not know” how he feels. Bob was one of the least talkative during the nine sessions. |
| Chad          | 16.2 | 3                 | Chad missed the majority of the sessions because he was not at school due to serious personal issues. Chad was shy in the group and in his classes, but was very verbal and thoughtful when he was given the opportunity to speak. Chad did not really hang out in the same group as the majority of participants but the other participants told me they grew to care for Chad. Chad really seemed to look up to Andrew especially.   |
| Dorian        | 16.2 | 7                 | Dorian generally had the highest energy and was probably the most disruptive of all participants in the classroom based on the amount that he fidgeted, his outgoing personality, and his enjoyment/ability to debate. He is very talkative at school and has a witty sense of humour that often pushes the limits of appropriateness. He can get quite argumentative with teachers, which I have witnessed.   |
| Edward        | 16.6 | 7                 | Edward was very disruptive in the classroom and said things in the group that made him appear to lack empathy for other people. He had the most discipline issues with the office during the intervention. He could be aggressive towards peers (fighting) and extremely disrespectful towards adults, never thinking he is in the wrong. He stayed relatively quiet during most intervention sessions.  |

|       |       |   |   |
|-------|-------|---|---|
| Felix | 17.0  | 9 | Felix was the most talkative in the group and he always had things he wanted to share. He was very verbally expressive and compared to the other participants, always seemed to have an answer for everything. He was more of a leader as he is quite confident in himself based on the way he talks. His teachers have told me stories of his apathy in class and if he does not get along with a certain teacher he can be extremely disrespectful towards them.  |
| Hank  | 16.6  | 9 | Hank definitely seemed to be less popular in the group. He was often the comedic relief but often at his own expense for his friends, namely Bob, Dorian and Edward. He presented as being hypoaroused, tired and lazy, but he was known to eventually explode in anger. He had the most genuine academic struggles of any of the participants. He was quiet during intervention sessions.  |
| Jacob | 16.10 | 9 | Jacob presented as the most mature and empathetic participant based on his vulnerability and listening skills during sessions. He has a history of rage and aggression, as well as low self-esteem and anxiety, although this year he seemed much more confident according to his teachers. He was working hard on his academics this year for his future career path and told me that he viewed this group as a way to show his growth in these areas. He was in a different friend group than the majority of the participants. |
| Max   | 16.4  | 7 | Max probably has the most extreme history of aggression and fighting. He appeared rather intimidating but he was very emotionally soft and responsive as he was one of the most vulnerable in sharing with the group. Out of all participants he unanimously made the most improvement this year compared to last year according to principals and his teachers.  |

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*Note.* Age of participants is at the end of the intervention (in the format: year.month)

**4.1.1 RQ #1 How did participants experience the social emotional intervention?** All nine participants spoke extremely positively about their experience in the intervention, with Chad and Felix asking to help with next year's program if it were to continue.<sup>14</sup> When asked what they would have changed about the intervention, four of them said they would not change anything while the remaining five all expressed a desire

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<sup>14</sup> I plan on arranging this for the future.

to have met more often, and/or for longer. Andrew, the unspoken leader, was the only participant, who said, with a laugh, that “skipping class” was a positive about this group, followed up quickly by getting a chance to hang out with his friends. Ironically, he was also the only participant who said he “fell behind a little bit” because of missing some classes. This was the only negative thing said about the intervention by any of the participants. The remainder reported that the amount of classes they missed was easily manageable as they were “able to catch up.” The best part of being in the group for participants was getting to be with their friends, make new friends, and getting “to know each other [more] and . . . develop a bond.” Every participant cited this except Hank, which could be a very significant omission as he was the one who was often the recipient of somewhat cruel “jokes” from his friends. Aside from Hank, all of participants’ responses suggested a positive social dynamic that was more than just having a surface level connection. Chad, although his attendance was sporadic, highlighted what was so powerful about being in this group:

Being able to be in the group, being with the other guys and being able to talk to them . . . knowing that you were able to speak when you wanted, and being able to say what you want at that time . . . , to actually be yourself, is actually huge for me.

Andrew echoed Chad’s sentiments of feeling safe enough to be vulnerable as his biggest take-away from being in the group was discovering “that not everyone judges you the way you would think and that sometimes you can just be open with people and talk to them without the fear of being made fun of, you can just be open.” Felix, the most

talkative adolescent in sessions, enjoyed getting the chance to share in the group as he explains that what made this group special was,

just all of us being together and talking about stuff. Guys don't do that anymore in this current time, nobody does that. Nobody just sits around with friends and talks about whatever they're feeling, but we did, and it was like weird [pause] good weird.

Similarly, when Max, who made the most improvement from last year in regards to his aggression, was asked what were positives of being a part of this program he admitted that "it's not bad talking about that kind of stuff, it's fun [because] everyone's connecting to it." This shared experience of talking together made a number of participants specifically remark on how they gained awareness for the unique experiences and "stories" of the other adolescents. Chad revealed an increase of empathy towards another participant after initially feeling apprehensive towards being with him in the group:

I've always thought that [he] was a strong guy who didn't care about anything . . . but hearing some of the stories about the parties he went [to] and some of the crazy stuff that happened that he didn't want to do, you realize the guy has feelings. He is able to feel as much as you and me and he's hurting from it and it's kind of sad. You want to do something about it.

Comparably, Jacob, the one who appeared to be the most mature, learned from this experience that "everyone has their own situations" which he said gave him more compassion for his peers. Jacob expressed his frustration about "getting all the guys together" for the times when other participants would be absent or show up late or miss

conversations; this seemed to indicate his desire for everyone to share in the experiences together. Since Chad only attended three sessions, two of them being the first and the last sessions, his biggest regret was not “[being] there more” and he observed that “how close the guys got by [the end] . . . was crazy.” Likely highlighting for him the missed opportunity for further connection and bonding. It was quite clear that the shared experience of being vulnerable talking and listening to one another was one that almost all participants found extremely valuable. Yet during the exit interview with Edward, who had the most discipline issues throughout the semester, there was an interesting exchange where he revealed that he finds it difficult to show his emotions around other people, and he “wish[es] [he] could do it around [his] friends and stuff and not be called a wussy.” This admission is significant because most of his friends were participants in the group. He quickly corrected part of that comment by adding, “maybe not my friends” would call me a “pussy, a wussy or . . . a fag” but nonetheless, Edward seemed unable to fully experience the same freedom in sharing and discussing vulnerable topics that most other participants expressed. Yet, clearly his desire for connection was just as strong.

In analyzing their responses to the first qualitative research question, many interesting and valuable insights emerge. The abundance of positive things expressed by all the participants and the absence of any major negatives, gives the strong impression that this intervention was something that the participants enjoyed, stating that they “always looked forward to [it].” Although it is possible that my dual role as teacher and as researcher may have encouraged participants to provide positive feedback, it would have been uncharacteristic of the participant group to do so as they usually had no problem giving their honest and blunt feedback to teachers. Furthermore, the extent to

which participants spoke positively about the intervention, wanting to help next year or wishing to have more sessions, goes beyond what one could expect had they felt pressured to be positive just for my sake. All things considered, it is clear that the intervention was experienced positively for all participants, which is a significant aspect for a successful psychoeducational boys' program as O'Neil et al. (2013) contended. Another example of this was seen in session 2 after showing participants a section of the movie, *The Mask You Live In* (The Representation Project, 2015). After we watched a particular segment discussing the male gender role, participants actually initiated clapping and applauded the movie. Considering this group of students had a long record of inattention and apathy in their classes, their high level of enthusiasm was, frankly, shocking. This event showed to me the level of engagement and acceptance they clearly felt for issues relating to male gender role conflict. This connection with gender was also seen when the guest speaker from Safeteen in session 4 described some scenarios of gender role conflict and asked participants to step into the circle if they had ever experienced them. In this activity, half of the participants revealed that they felt the pressure to be more muscular; three had felt made fun of for not having enough money; and all, except one, felt that they were not allowed to cry. Additionally, aside from two participants, all felt that they were expected to like women everyone felt strongly that they were supposed to be "smooth with the ladies." This suggests that all participants experienced socialization issues relating to gender role conflict. However, it was somewhat surprising that only about four of the participants agreed with feeling the pressure to be more muscular. Such pressure is typically well represented in other research.

A few weeks later, after the fourth session, Felix came to my classroom and thanked my teacher-partner and me for the direction we were taking the group. He said he had thought the first semester would be “very boring, thinking we would have to fill out worksheets, but we all enjoy it.” This was affirming since Felix had clearly been talking with other participants about the intervention and could speak for the group in such a way.

Deepening friendships was a major component of participants’ enjoyment, but the fact that a lot of them were already friends was seen as both a help and hindrance. Initially it was a positive factor for both Bob and Dorian, as they needed to know that some of their friends were also going to be in the group before they themselves committed to join. Likewise, Andrew commented in his exit interview that he thought the intervention worked better because all participants got along and some of them were already friends beforehand. However, based on my observations, these existing friendships may have also hindered participants’ openness in sharing. The trend seemed to be that participants who were either the confident leaders of the friend group that hung out together outside of the intervention, like Andrew and Felix, or participants who were less a part of this core friend group, such as Chad, Jacob and Max, were the ones who shared the most readily and deeply. Therefore, although friends may have motivated certain members with follower tendencies to be in the group, it might have also had the effect of keeping them quiet, as they may have been more concerned with how they would be perceived by their friends than in speaking honestly. Perhaps this is why Edward did not share much in the group sessions even though he expressed his desire for wanting to share openly about his emotions with his friends. Conversely, this also may

explain why Chad, Jacob and Max seemed to be the most transparent as they may have felt freer to share openly because their main friend groups were outside of the group's.

Overall trust and safety seemed to increase in the group over the semester. My colleague and I increasingly had to limit the amount of time individual participants could share because they often fought for their stories or experiences to be heard. Clearly participants enjoyed the intervention, and their connection to each other was a major part of their experience. This provides evidence of a deep social desire for connection, which came from their stories being told. These male students with behavioural needs have such needs for connection as experienced through shared revelations.

**4.1.2 RQ #2 Did participants feel that they themselves had learned anything socially or emotionally that has helped or will help them?** In participants' responses as to how they experienced the intervention, it appeared that the importance of talking and developing empathy for their peers was key. In addition to this, eight of the participants in the exit interviews explicitly mentioned how the intervention already had helped them and/or could potentially help them socially and/or emotionally in the future. Jacob, the best listener, said the emotional and social lessons were a "good reminder" of the need for friendship but he had trouble thinking of any totally new insights he gleaned. Bob also said that he learned nothing new other than new terminology, like the words "hypoarousal" and "hyperarousal"; however, earlier on in the interview he said he felt he learned how to control his anger better. Since Bob was regularly seen to have a difficult time reflecting, this contradiction is more likely a result of forgetfulness or a lack of self-perception. The major areas where participants believed that they had learned something valuable to their social and emotional learning was centred around teachings that

primarily came from two guest speakers' sessions. The first was from the male presenter in session 4 from *Safeteen* who shared his story of how he tried to live up to the ideals of masculinity and also discussed how to be assertive without needing to be aggressive or submissive. The other was a female registered clinical counsellor from the community that came in for session 6 and 8, and taught what emotions are, how to recognize when you might be getting triggered, and then how to get back within your emotional window of tolerance.<sup>15</sup> Other than Chad, who missed both of the sessions with the counsellor and came very late to the *Safeteen* presentation, everyone chose one of these two presenters as their most favourite, with three of them saying that both were. Although there was overlap between the content of these two presentations, as well as topics in other sessions, what participants primarily learned from the *Safeteen* presentation centered around conflict management, whereas the lessons learned from the counsellor were more associated with understanding and identifying their own emotional states.

Four participants cited the role-playing scenarios with *Safeteen* as being a powerful way to put into practice the three different types of stances you can have in any given conflict.<sup>16</sup> From this Andrew learnt how “to be assertive [and] how to deal with other people in a proper way.” If someone approaches looking for a fight, Andrew realized there is an option where you can still be viewed as strong but “you don’t have to fight.” Although Andrew had not yet had the opportunity to put into practice his assertive stance, he thought he would be more able not to fight someone and solve the

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<sup>15</sup> The “window of tolerance” was a model proposed by Siegel in 1999 that refers to “a ‘window’ or range of optimal arousal states in which emotions can be experienced as tolerable and experience can be integrated” (Corrigan, Fisher & Nutt, 2011, p. 17)

<sup>16</sup> The presenter called these your fighter stance (aggressive response), fear child (submissive response), and solid stance (assertive response)

situation with words instead. Max, who probably had the most history of aggression, also shared this epiphany about not always having to fight and be tough when someone challenges or provokes you.

Five participants said that learning about the “window of tolerance” from the clinical counsellor was something that had a lasting significance. For Dorian it helped him better identify “when [he is] high, middle, [or] low.” This refers to him knowing when he is in a hyperaroused emotional state, regulated state, or hypoaroused state, respectively. Without elaborating as to why, Max also claimed that the “window thing has helped a lot” while Hank explained more tangibly that he “learned to stay in the middle and not get so angry all the time.” Even more significant is Hank’s admission, “I’m angry a lot I guess, I learned that,” which was in direct reference to learning about the window of tolerance. It is likely that this insight into his own emotions came from when the counsellor had to correct and remind the participants a couple of times that being hyperaroused does not necessarily mean you are angry while being hypoaroused does not mean you are sad; all emotions can be experienced within or out of the window of tolerance. Since Hank was often in a low energy, hypoaroused state, he may not have been able to identify that he was actually feeling anger until it was more clearly laid out that anger could manifest in that way.

Participants also identified that they gained new knowledge regarding gender roles, particularly enacting masculinity. Gender roles were a major theme that I personally brought up throughout many of the sessions, as well as the two most memorable presenters previously mentioned also discussed this in their talks. It is important to note that both the Safeteen presenter and counsellor felt that talking about

emotions with males necessitated talking about male gender role constructs. Four participants identified that learning about society's expectations for how males are supposed to act and feel was new knowledge to them. In addition, six participants believed that their perspective of what a man should be changed noticeably over the course of the intervention. When asked what society thinks a man should be like, seven participants' answers indicated that society thinks a man "should put their feelings behind their toughness," especially crying. In other words, these seven participants identified society as a limiting force for emotional expression in males. Again, Andrew and Bob were the exception as they only mentioned society's expectation of males providing for their family or having "lots of money." Although these are good examples, the fact that Andrew and Bob did not connect society's gender scripting to any emotional stifling may explain why they also did not feel their perspective changed during the intervention. Perhaps that message did not stay or resonate with them.

When participants were asked what they think "a man should be", seven participants answered with "Whatever he wants to be." Regarding his change of attitude to the male gender role, Felix, the outspoken sharer, admitted, "I didn't agree with society's view on it, but I was definitely a whole bunch closer to that than I was to share-your-feelings kind of guy." For Edward, the one who wished he could talk about his emotions with his friends, this change seemed greatest. He said that "before [this group] I didn't think you should show your emotions, but now [I] do."

Max's response of what he thought "being a man" meant before the group compared to how he thought about it after, was important. He said, "I still think a man should be tough and live by some of those rules [societal gender norms], but you should

be able to show your emotions and feel how you want to feel.” Even though he missed multiple sessions, Chad too felt that a man should not lose everything about society’s gender scripting. He explains,

“A man should be afraid but not afraid at the same time . . . there’s always fear in someone’s life . . . but I feel they shouldn’t be afraid at the same time if you have these emotions and you do express these emotions right.”

These comments from Max and Chad seem to show that although their perspectives widened to embrace male emotional expression, they did not believe everything that society promotes about masculinity is wrong or incorrect. Perhaps what Max and Chad were trying to communicate was that emotional vulnerability does not require oneself to be seen as weak; one can be strong and express emotions.

A number of participants were also able to highlight specific examples of how this new knowledge has already led to tangible changes. Even though Edward had the most negative incidents during the semester, he claimed to notice that he’s “not really rude to the adults anymore like [he] was before.” He did not identify when he felt this shift took place, but, for him, it was significant that he acknowledged he *had* been rude. Felix explained how the group had helped him in practical ways, like stopping himself from blowing up in anger at his mom:

[I have learned] to control [my] anger better. I started doing that when my mom gets mad at me, she thinks I’m crazy because I just stare at a wall and I just completely go blank because I know that if I continue to think about it I’m going to flip out which I learned from the group . . . it’s

helping me control being less angry and wanting to hit stuff . . . . [I] haven't punched a hole in the wall or nothing since I joined the group, so that's good.

For Chad, the tangible difference this group has had on him, in light of his poor attendance, seemed quite drastic:

It changed how I thought with my impressionment [sic], anxiety and stuff, because I always thought that I was nothing and I couldn't be anywhere in my life and when I grow up. But joining the boys group and talking to all these guys when we went snowshoeing and they're saying, "you're a great guy" – my thoughts are not facts. I'm not a bad guy. I'm not here to go be nothing. All these guys think I am something and having that is bigger than anything I have ever had. It has changed my life in a way I can say.

Dorian said he also learned some ways to help self-regulate when he feels like he is going beyond his "window of tolerance", such as listening to music and playing video games. Although these resources may be numbing him from his emotions, they keep him from entering an uncontrollable rage.

Whether it was learning about conflict management from Safeteen, emotional learning from the counsellor, or insights about gender role conflict, most of participants in this study felt that something valuable was gleaned from this intervention. Besides Jacob who thought it was a good reminder, everyone believed that they felt like they understood themselves and their emotions more or that they could control their emotions, specifically anger, more effectively. To clarify, having an assertive stance was the main social teaching participants reported learning from the intervention, as knowing how to

both speak and act confidently relates to healthy interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, the main emotional teachings participants reported learning about was how to identify their own emotions and, for some, how to regulate those emotions before losing control. Such understandings help them better understand themselves and build intrapersonal health and have great interpersonal relational benefits. It is difficult to entirely separate emotional insights from the social ones as both undoubtedly play a role influencing one another.

A greater emotional intelligence was seen in the revelations about gender role conflict. From the outset it was critical that in teaching and discussing about society's male gender role construct, that the message not focus on negativity concerning masculinity. In fact, quite the opposite: the intervention tried to redefine and increase the scope for what masculine strength and power can actually look like apart from physical toughness, aggressiveness and control. O'Neil & Luján (2009) advise in their guide for psychoeducational programs for boys that programs exemplify positive masculinity and build on the positive notions of masculinity. Such a focus better empowers males to improve rather than be overcome by overly criticized images of masculinity. As such, it was important to see that participants were able to identify praiseworthy qualities in society's idea of masculinity, such as being willingly responsible for others in their lives. Max's response that a man should still be tough but be allowed to be emotionally free made manifest the primary message regarding masculine gender roles that the intervention wished to communicate. Namely, that masculinity can mean strength but this strength can be a positive one that cares deeply for others and can express emotions without inflicting pain on others.

I was most encouraged to hear that a number of the participants had already applied this new understanding to their own lives. Felix controlling his rage towards his mom and not resorting to a harmful physical release of energy, like punching a wall or a locker; Chad's acceptance from the other participants tangibly building up his confidence and reducing his anxiety; Edward feeling like he was not as rude to adults anymore, and Dorian also knowing how to regulate his frustrations were all significant testimonies. They indicate that a certain level of internalization of the intervention's content was occurring in their minds and was affecting their actions. Another example was in Hank's exit interview when he mentioned that he had just recently been talking with his mom about the different types of assertive stances one can have. This conversation occurred at least two months after this concept was taught in session 4; this teaching had stayed with Hank for a relatively long time and had been significant enough to bring up in a discussion with his mother at home. These examples all provided evidence that the intervention had "staying power" with at least some participants.

Although participants gained substantial insights from lessons through the intervention program, it was evident in the occasional comment from some participants in their exit interviews that they had not grasped some key concepts about healthy emotional masculinity. For instance, although Felix realized the benefit of being a "share your feelings kind of guy," he saw this as being limited to adolescence based on his comment: "When you're a grown man you're obviously probably not going to be sobbing to your best friend all upset." Felix's comment seemed to suggest that he still believed that, when a man is grown up, he should be in control and have his emotions all sorted out. Part of Jacob's response as to what a man should be also reflected this notion. He said

that a man should “take care of themselves and not rely on anybody.” This was surprising, especially coming from Jacob, as he was quite expressive about how much he enjoyed sharing with the group and saying how important it is for people to have someone to share with. Another example of not quite fully understanding healthy emotionality was Hank. Even though he became connected with his own feelings of anger, his advice to a younger child would be “to stay in the middle [of the “window of tolerance”] and don’t get angry,” which had an element of wisdom but actually recommended not feeling one’s emotions. Therefore perhaps Hank did not fully comprehend that numbing emotions is harmful and that it is okay and, in fact, necessary to feel and express anger in appropriate ways. Out of all the participants, Bob seemed to have the most disconnect with the key teachings, as he claimed he did not go up and down with his emotions, “I’m just kinda middle” (referring to the window of tolerance metaphor). He also felt personally unaffected by society’s expectations for males because he thought “[society] affects [people] more in the city” and not in the countryside where he lives. Interestingly, he took the longest to fill out the GRCS-A the first time; he had one question left and he finally asked what the question meant when it asked how comfortable he was expressing “love” towards another male. He was confused and seemed quite concerned that it meant gay love. All of these student comments show that there are still some messages of the intervention that would need to be reviewed and probably re-taught for some of these participants. This was not unexpected, especially since, for many, it was their first time hearing social and emotional health being discussed in such a way. It takes time for a shift in thinking to occur, especially in regards to gender role conflict as it upsets the status quo of masculine concepts in society.

## 4.2 Quantitative Data and Analysis

Each factor, or subtest score from the GRCS-A and Conners 3-TS, was analyzed separately using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. This compared variable scores for significant change from time 1 (T1) in early October 2015 to time 2 (T2) in early February 2016.<sup>17</sup> Composite scores do not exist for either of these measures because each subtests measures a distinct phenomenon. Also it was reasoned that no factors analyzed from the GRCS-A were measuring the same phenomenon as the Conners 3-TS as aggression/defiance (AG) and peer relations (PR) were assessing external social behaviours and GRCS-A variables were assessing internal beliefs associated with emotional health. For each variable assessed, the higher the score, the more it indicates a more severe problem in that area. For RE, RAM, and CWSF the maximum score for each category was six<sup>18</sup> and based on how the Likert-type scale worked, scores that were higher than 3 meant that participants responded with more answers that agreed with experiencing conflict in these factors, whereas scores less than 3 meant participants tended to disagree more with there being a conflict in that factor. The maximum raw scores for AG and PR subtests were technically fifteen, however, for this age group a score of 7 or higher for AG<sup>19</sup> and 8 or higher for PR was essentially the maximum as it corresponded to a T-score greater than 90, which is equivalent to being at or above the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile for males of that age category. All lower and upper limits reported have 95% confidence intervals.

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<sup>17</sup> Dorian completed his second GRCS-A questionnaire in the last week of January.

<sup>18</sup> Calculated by averaging all test item scores within each category.

<sup>19</sup> For Felix, because he was 17, the maximum for AG is 6+.

**4.2.1 Group GRCS-A and Conners 3-TS results.** Results from the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test did not find any statistical significance for any variable scores ( $p < .05$ ) over the course of the intervention except for RE. RE scores were half a point higher at the beginning of the year,  $M = 3.44$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ,  $LL = 2.54$ ,  $UL = 4.35$ ,  $Mdn = 3.67$ , than at the end,  $M = 2.94$ ,  $SD = .92$ ,  $LL = 2.23$ ,  $UL = 3.64$ ,  $Mdn = 3.22$ , and this differences was statistically significant,  $T = 1.5$ ,  $z = -2.32$ ,  $p = .021$ ,  $r = -.55$ .

Participants' RAM scores did not significantly differ as they stayed almost exactly the same from October,  $M = 2.97$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ,  $LL = 2.54$ ,  $UL = 3.80$ ,  $Mdn = 2.71$ , to February,  $M = 2.98$ ,  $SD = .84$ ,  $LL = 2.34$ ,  $UL = 3.63$ ,  $Mdn = 3.29$ ,  $T = 22$ ,  $z = -.06$ ,  $p = .953$ .

Participants' CWSF scores had increased by the end of the semester from October,  $M = 2.94$ ,  $SD = .84$ ,  $LL = 2.29$ ,  $UL = 3.58$ ,  $Mdn = 3.00$ , to February,  $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ,  $LL = 2.57$ ,  $UL = 4.60$ ,  $Mdn = 4.00$ . Therefore, even though this increase in CWSF mean and median scores were the largest differences of any GRCS-A variable, it was not significantly different  $T = 7$ ,  $z = -.1.84$ ,  $p = .066$ .

Based on the Conners 3-TS results, aggression/defiance actually increased, but not significantly, from October  $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 2.23$ ,  $LL = 1.75$ ,  $UL = 5.18$ ,  $Mdn = 3.33$ , to February,  $M = 4.81$ ,  $SD = 3.24$ ,  $LL = 2.32$ ,  $UL = 7.31$ ,  $Mdn = 4.00$ ,  $T = 25$ ,  $z = 1.87$ ,  $p = .062$ . Using the standard T-scores for that age group, the October AG mean score had a t-score of approximately 68-69, which is + 1 SD above average, and that rose to a t-score of 78 which is +2 SD higher than the average aggression in male sixteen year olds.

PR scores were fairly constant from beginning,  $M = 2.99$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ,  $LL = 1.80$ ,  $UL = 4.18$ ,  $Mdn = 3.00$ , to end of intervention,  $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ,  $LL = 1.97$ ,  $UL =$

4.14,  $Mdn = 3.00$ ,  $T = 11$ ,  $z = 4.76$ ,  $p = .916$ . This corresponded to a standard T-score of 63, which placed these participants problematic peer relations +1 SD higher than the average for males of their age.

**4.2.2 Quantitative results analysis.** Participants' levels of RE was the only variable significantly lower at the end of the intervention. The effect size for this improvement was moderate, which seems to indicate that participants felt that were more aware of their emotions and able to share them. Although none of the other variables on either quantitative test were found to be significantly higher or lower at the end of the year, the data still yields useful information for analysis. For the GRCS-A variables, RE, RAM, and CWSF, the closer the value was to six, the more participants agreed with having a conflict in that area. Based on how the Likert-type scale was divided, a score between 1-3 meant that participants more so disagreed with the questionnaire item while a score from 4-6 meant that they identified that there was a conflict. The upper and lower limits of the GRCS-A variables' mean scores all pass the threshold between 3 and 4, indicating diverse responses among the nine participants. Therefore, the median scores provide a better sense as to whether the majority of participants' responses indicated a conflict in each area or not. Even though the median scores of restricted emotionality decreased, at both times it was between 3 and 4, indicating that approximately half of the participants felt somewhat uncomfortable showing emotions while the other half did not. Relatively unexpectedly, RAM median scores were 2.71 in October and 3.29 in February, which means that slightly more participants were okay at both times with expressing affection towards males than not. The CWSF medians increased from 3-4, meaning that

the majority of participants shifted from October to negatively experiencing stress or some other conflict with work, school and family in February.

From the Conners 3-TS results it was extremely clear that teachers identified participants with high levels of AG before and after the intervention. At the start their group average T-score would place their AG scores at approximately the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile, and afterwards greater than the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile. This indicates that participants were exceptionally high in displaying aggressive or defiant behaviour in the class, which, at the very least, validates the selection of these students for study. Peer relations mean scores stayed consistent and placed participants around the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile, which, although high, is still just slightly higher than the above average range for their age group and gender.

Although it was disappointing that only one of the GRCS-A and Conners 3-TS variables showed significant change by the end of the intervention and four did not, the results were not entirely unexpected or unexplainable. To begin with, due to the small sample size of participants in this study, it was difficult for the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test to have enough power to detect significant change in any of the variables. Why significant changes for restricted affection between males were not detected by the GRCS-A may be due to the intervention connecting participants more with their emotions. This emotional attunement was evidenced by multiple participants' responses as well as the significant improvement in participants' levels of emotional restrictiveness. For example, Andrew believed that by the end the participants all "underst[oo]d better the way we feel," Edward realized he could and should show emotions, Felix explained how he became more in touch with his emotional side, and Hank realized that he had anger issues. All of their comments suggest that there was an increase in participants'

emotional awareness. When participants first completed the questionnaire in October, it is quite plausible that participants interpreted and responded to the RAM questions with a surface level understanding. For instance, the RAM statement, “Expressing my emotions to other men is risky” may not have appeared to be as problematic in October due to a lack of participants ever having experienced or known what is actually involved with expressing vulnerable emotions to other men. Participants easily could have believed that they *could* or even that they *do* express their feelings, but that may have been limited to a few emotions, likely anger. Hopefully after experiencing more emotional expression during the intervention, participants in February may have realized what other sort of “feelings” they actually had going on inside of them and realized how challenging sharing their feelings with others, particularly males, can be. In essence, an increased level of emotional intelligence at the end of the intervention may have resulted in more thoughtful, thorough answers on the GRCS-A the second time, perhaps minimizing or negating the level of statistical improvement that could be observed.

Improvement in the CWSF factor was less likely to observe due to the context of what was happening at the school in October as compared with February. A lot of the questions that comprised the CWSF factor asked about school-related stressors and the quality of their leisure time, which, in early October, as the school year has barely started, stress levels are typically lower than at the end of the semester. Therefore when participants wrote the GRCS-A in February, it was during the time period right after the highest stress season of their final exams and when they were still waiting to find out about their marks. So out of all the times when participants’ leisure time, or resting time

was negatively impacted by external conflicts, it was probable that it was when the second GRCS-A was written.

The nature of the Conners 3-TS questionnaire likely played a role in confounding any potential significant results for the variable of AG and PR. It is important to know that the Conners 3-TS is designed for teachers to only assess the most recent month of in-class behaviour, hence the first scores reflect participants' behaviour for the month of September, and the scores given by teachers in February were assessing the month of January. Therefore, as with CWSF, assessing September's behaviour, particularly their in-class aggression/defiance, when the year has barely started and none of these participants were in any particular academic trouble, could be quite different than in January when exams needed to be passed and stress levels were higher. As such, there is a chance that participants displayed a higher level of AG as the semester went on due to stress.

Another possibility for the lack of significance for both AG and PR is that most teachers had not taught the participants before and so as teachers grew to know participants better over the semester they were better able to assess these variables. Therefore, scores may have been inflated at the first assessment time in October as teachers were getting to know participants and there had not been as much opportunity to perhaps witness participants' aggression or relationships with peers.

Each participant had two to three different teachers assessing their aggression/defiance and peer relations. Because of this there was a lot of variability in how teachers perceived their students in these areas. It is not unrealistic to assume that teachers have their own biases or preferences towards certain students over others, and

that these biases may have introduced error, or less cohesive results. The Conners 3-TS was designed to account for this by having a certain amount of questions purely assessing if the assessor, in this case the teacher, has a potentially biased positive impression or negative impression towards said student. In this study, two teachers passed the threshold score of 5 for having a negative impression for two students each, meaning their assessment of AG and PR scores may possibly be negatively biased. However, due to the small sample size and since neither of these teachers maintained the negative impression scores of 5 for the same participant throughout the semester, their assessments of AG and PR were kept in the data. Furthermore, as the intervention progressed, it became very clear that participants knowingly did not behave equally in all their classes. Many times during group discussions a couple participants, Felix, Dorian, Bob, and Edward in particular, wanted to vent about certain teachers, which was one of the only things they were not allowed to discuss, yet regardless it was quite clear that these participants clashed quite strongly in the classroom with certain teachers. Overall this means that the scores for AG were highly dependent on the relationship with the teacher. There were a few cases where some teachers would score a participant quite highly for AG while the other teacher for the same participant did not observe much, if any, AG.

The variable of PR was also quite dependent on which peers the teacher observed participants interacting with, which varied from class to class. In exit interviews with the teachers who participated at the end of the study, three teachers found it extremely hard to assess some of the items on the questionnaire for this variable such as: “has trouble keeping friends” or “is one of the last to be picked for teams or games.” On the other hand, teachers that had seen these participants in contexts outside of their classroom, or in

a class with more group work/peer interaction generally did not express having difficulty assessing questions pertaining to their peer relations.

Therefore, with the quantitative results, there were a lot of potential forces counteracting the possible impact the intervention was having, leading to insignificant results for all variables except restricted emotionality. In isolation, this qualitative data seems to suggest that participants gained an awareness about emotions in general, but that the intervention was ineffective at improving participants' abilities to be more comfortable being vulnerable with males, being able to reduce their levels of perceived conflict with their work, school, and family environments, and was unable to improve their aggression levels and peer relations at school as perceived by their teachers.

### Chapter 5: Mixed Methods Discussion

In analyzing the results of the qualitative exit interviews and quantitative data sets, it appeared as if two different interpretations/stories emerged. In the first, participants' experiences appeared engaging and extremely positive in the intervention—to such an extent that almost all of the participants felt that they had learned something of value to their social and emotional health. A number of the participants also identified positive changes in their intra and interpersonal interactions. However, the lack of any statistically significant change for all the GRCS-A and Conners 3-TS variables except RE seemed to suggest that the intervention did not drastically benefit participants perceived restricted emotionality, restricted affection towards males, conflict between work, school and family, as well as teacher perceived classroom aggression/defiance and peer relations. In addition, based on the T-scores of the final scores for AG and PR, the participant group was +2 SD and +1 SD above average, respectively. This seems to indicate that perceived aggression/defiance, in particular, was still a very major concern in the classroom for participants. The discrepancy between the positive qualitative data and the largely unchanged quantitative data begs the questions as to what impact the intervention actually had on participants.

To more thoroughly explore this question and to consider various aspects of this study, this second half of this chapter goes through each participant systematically, looking at their individual quantitative results and interpreting it in light their exit interviews, my field notes, and data gleaned from the exit interviews with the principals and participants' teachers (refer to sample questions for those interviews in Appendix A), and concluding with a discussion of this study's results as a whole.

### 5.1 Individual Results and Analysis

The breakdown of all of participants' mean variables before and after the intervention, some of which are discussed, here can be found in full in Appendix B. Table 3 below highlights participants' changes in raw scores from October to February. For the variables AG and PR the difference of T-scores is also reported, as the T-scores are more easily conceptualized.<sup>20</sup> None of these stats were analyzed in terms of statistical significance but functioned descriptively to better understand what was happening at the individual level.

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<sup>20</sup> In cases where AG and PR score values had a decimal value corresponding T-scores were rounded down to the nearest whole number.

Table 3

*Participants' Change in GRCS-A and Conners 3-TS Scores Before and After Intervention*

| Research Name | RE           | RAM          | CWSF         | AG           |            | PR    |            |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|-------|------------|
|               |              |              |              | Raw          | T-Score    | Raw   | T-Score    |
| Andrew        | 0.00         | -.14         | +.29         | +2.5         | <b>+16</b> | +.5   | +3         |
| Bob           | -.11         | -.14         | -.57         | +2.5         | <b>+16</b> | +.75  | +5         |
| Chad          | <b>-1.89</b> | -.29         | <b>+1.00</b> | +.5          | +3         | -2.00 | <b>-12</b> |
| Dorian        | -.44         | <b>-1.00</b> | +.57         | <b>+3.12</b> | 0          | 0     | 0          |
| Edward        | <b>-.89</b>  | -.57         | <b>-1.14</b> | +4.5         | <b>+18</b> | -1.0  | -6         |
| Felix         | -.33         | <b>+1.14</b> | <b>+3.57</b> | 0            | 0          | +1.58 | <b>+10</b> |
| Hank          | -.56         | <b>+1.14</b> | <b>+1.71</b> | -1.5         | <b>-10</b> | +.75  | +4         |
| Jacob         | +.11         | +.57         | -.29         | 0            | 0          | 0     | 0          |
| Max           | -.44         | -.57         | +.43         | +.5          | +3         | -2.0  | <b>-12</b> |

*Note:* Values that are bolded are those had a change that appeared descriptively sizeable. For RE, RAM, and CWSF, values approaching or higher than +/- 1 were selected as a change this size would have meant a participant's answers for each test item comprising each variable would have averaged to a different choice on the Likert-type scale. For AG and PR T-scores with a change of +/- 10 or greater were bolded as those changes were noticeable enough to impact the approximate percentile that the T-score corresponded to. Dorian's raw AG was highlighted instead because his T-score max was already reached so no further change could be observed there.

Andrew's final scores for RE, RAM, and CWSF were 3.67, 3.71, and 4.00, respectively. These scores were slightly closer to the higher end of the GRCS-A, and his AG ended with a t-score of 78, which is +2 SD above average and very high, in the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile, whereas Andrew's final PR T-score was within the higher side of average for his age (T-score = 66). Yet, both of Andrew's teachers indicated that they noticed improvement in his behaviours over the semester. One of his teachers noticed that at the beginning of the year Andrew would get very aggressive and defensive when approached but that behaviour decreased as the semester went on; his other teacher also noticed that

he was more able to control himself emotionally. That teacher also noticed that, at the beginning of the semester, he had a few instances of being rude to his peers, but noted Andrew was actually quite inclusive by the end of the semester. In addition, the vice principal too noticed Andrew being more polite during the semester.

Bob had the lowest scores by far of all participants for RE and RAM, ending at 1.00 and 1.29 respectively, and he also finished the semester with the second lowest CWSF at 2.43. These low scores were likely due to his disconnect with his emotions than actually not finding conflict in either of those areas. As mentioned, he was the only participant that seemed quite discomforted by the RAM question asking if he found it difficult to express love towards other males. Agreeing with my observations, one of his teachers described Bob as being “just zoned out someplace else,” which sounds like hypoaroused behaviour that could potentially be from restricting his emotions. After scoring his first GRCS-A, I approached him the next day because I thought he had purposely skewed the results because most of the 29-questions he just answered with 1’s (for *strongly disagree*). He looked again at his responses and told me that, yes, those were his serious answers. Although Bob claimed to not really have anger in the exit interview, his T-score was the same as Andrew’s at 78, which puts him high above average in aggression-related issues for his gender and age group. His PR T-score was 56, which was right in the range of average. Although Bob’s AG was very high, principals and teachers had no major discipline problems with him during the semester and one teacher noticed a clear improvement in less aggressive interactions. Another teacher, while noticing an initial improvement in his behaviour after the intervention began, claimed that around Christmas his behaviour declined. It was also around this

time that Bob was dealing with a personal issue (which I cannot reveal here). I attempted to speak with him about this personal issue in January, although he was not responsive to my enquiries.

Chad had the largest reduction in RE from October to February; he also started with the highest level of RE at 5.11. This decline indicates a significantly unhealthy amount/lack of emotional expression. This turned out to be quite true as it was around this time that his attendance dropped off completely due to personal issues. Although his reduced February RE score of 3.22 is hard to attribute completely to the intervention as he missed most sessions, from his own testimony he reported that the connectedness and belonging to his peers that the intervention provided were significant components to helping him heal. Other than Bob, his RAM ended up being the lowest at 2.00, which was not surprising based on my own observations of Chad; he was arguably was the most accepting and non-judgmental of all participants. His CWSF scores increased to 3.57, which was also understandable because, at the time, he was making efforts to return to school after not attending for approximately a month, and he knew he would have to redo most of his courses. In fact, one of the first things that motivated Chad to return to school was the intervention course's final session's snowshoeing trip. Both of Chad's final AG and PR T-scores placed him +1 SD above average for his age group but, fortunately, his PR T-score dropped substantially which may have been, in part, a result of the positive peer interactions he experienced in the intervention. Even so, his teachers expressed severe difficulty accurately assessing his AG and PR scores as he missed so much school, but qualitatively they described him as being "withdrawn."

Dorian's RE and RAM both reduced from October to February, to 3.33 and 3.29 respectively. Both values were quite close between 3-4, indicating that Dorian felt comfortable with approximately half of what the RE and RAM test items were asking about. Even though Dorian started with the highest levels of RAM, 4.29, he also decreased the most which is encouraging as, based on my personal anecdotal evidence, he and Edward were the participants who used the most homophobic language used as a joke/insult. During a discussion in session 7, Dorian and Edward were also the only participants who revealed they never fully trusted anyone anymore. Undoubtedly, this greatly impacts both Dorian's and Edward's ability for healthy intra and interpersonal relationships. Dorian also was the most anxious about schoolwork and his CWSF increased to 4.00, likely indicative of the end of semester stress he was experiencing when completed the GRCS-A. Dorian's AG scores of 7.88 and 11.00 were the highest of all participants, making his T-score correspond at or above the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile of all males in his age group. Qualitative evidence seemed to agree with this high value, as Dorian's aggression tended to manifest in verbal arguments, and he was arguably the participant who most embodied the stereotype of a distracting and hard-to-contain student in the classroom. One of his teachers did not notice any change with his behaviours over the semester but the other reported that Dorian seemed better able to control his anger by the end of the first semester. That said, his teachers said that he still had the tendency to avoid accountability and would argue, "I was just joking!" if teachers approached him about his behaviour or inappropriate comments. The principal and vice principal reported no issues in the office with Dorian during the semester, and my teacher-partner in the intervention, who also taught Dorian in the classroom, noticed that Dorian did take

responsibility for his actions throughout the semester which was something he “hadn’t seen in him before.” Dorian’s PR stayed consistent with a T-score of 63, which places him just higher than average (+1 SD); this was typically of most participants, although Dorian’s teachers noted that he seemed to fit in quite well in the class and was well-liked by his peers, regardless of sex.

Edward was the participant whose scores decreased for the most variables, everything except AG. This was interesting considering he was the only participant who had nothing positive said about him by his teachers or principals. He had the highest level of RE to start with, 4.56, which seemed to match up with his comments about not knowing how he could express emotions and then his desire to speak more about them with his friends. His RAM ended up at 3.43 while his CWSF at 1.00 (the lowest of all participants). The reason for his low CWSF may have been because he appeared to have given up about caring about his schoolwork as the semester progressed. Edward’s AG score increased from 4 to 8.5, which put him in the highest T-score and highest percentile possible, which was corroborated with one teacher’s testimony that Edward became “progressively more disrespectful towards the educational assistant that was in [the classroom] . . . [and towards me].” As one principal said regarding Edward’s semester, “Edward has still struggled with his behaviour, he is still struggling taking ownership.” Edward’s PR score put him alongside most other participants in the above average range, although one teacher noted that he tended to be manipulative in relying on his peers work as he later copies their work and submits it as his own.

Felix, besides Bob, ended with the lowest RE score of 2.22. This means Felix felt he could accurately and somewhat comfortably express his emotions; he was the most

talkative in discussions during the intervention and seemed the most able to eloquently express his emotions. In October, it appeared that Felix felt his RAM was a non-issue at 1.86, yet he was much closer to a conflict with RAM in February at 3.00. Felix's CWSF had the largest increase over the semester, ending at 5.43, likely due to a significant home, school or work related stressor at the time. One principal and one teacher noticed Felix seemed more polite and able to handle his anger in class by the end of the semester; however, that same teacher said he observed a lot of arguments between Felix and another teacher who was not a part of this study. His AG remained constant with a T-score of 69 and his PR increased to the second highest at 4.25 which the corresponding T-score places him at almost +2 SD from average. This high PR is somewhat surprising as most of his teachers indicated they thought he was well liked, although one did comment that he and his friends primarily related by frequently making fun of each other.

Hank's final RE scores of 3.22 indicates he felt marginally more comfortable in that area, whereas his RAM score, 3.86, and CWSF score, 4.57, both indicate his self-acknowledgment of having conflict in those areas. Hank's CWSF increased considerably, which was possibly influenced by his landing a part-time job. Out of all the participants, Hank had the most evident learning disabilities, making school work challenging. I also discovered later, that there was something significant outside of school that was greatly impacting him. Hank's aggression decreased substantially from a score of 5.50 to 4.00, although that still put Hank's AG quite high around the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile. His teachers did not observe any improvements in his aggression, with one teacher even describing his movements as unintentionally violent, such as knocking over things off desks and opening and shutting his binders. The vice principal said that Hank

was learning to handle his behaviour more during the semester but still “shut down” at times. Hank finished with the highest PR score of 4.75, which seemed to correspond with my own observations as well as the observations by one of his teachers, saying that “[Hank] tends to be a loner.”

Jacob was the only participant who had his RE score increase during the intervention, although only slightly, from 3.67 to 3.78. His RAM also increased but his final score was 2.86, which indicated he still felt less overall conflict with restricted affection between males than more. His CWSF was the highest of all participants before (4.29) and second highest after (4.43) the intervention, likely influenced by the pressure he described feeling about achieving high letter grades for his future career. Incredibly, Jacob scored zeroes on AG and PR, both before and after the intervention, meaning that his teachers saw no areas of concern for either of those variables. Both his teachers reported that Jacob’s behaviour and maturity steadily improved as the semester went on. His English teacher, who had taught him the year before, also said the biggest change he had noted was Jacob’s confidence, which he attributed to Jacob’s involvement in the intervention.

Lastly, Max’s final RE score of 2.33 was quite low, which corresponded well to the emotional self-awareness Max showed in sharing with the group during the entire intervention. His starting RAM score was fairly high (4.00) and although it decreased (3.43) it still indicated there was some conflict in this area. During the intervention Max was the most open about feeling the pressure to be athletic and tough and having to keep up a “typical masculine image”; therefore, his higher RAM score was perhaps indicative of that tension. CWSF was not as major concern for him (his final score being 2.86),

although his AG score increased putting him approximate +1 SD above average. Out of all the participants, the principals, his teachers, and I were most astounded by the positive changes he had made this semester, the vice principal even calling him “a stellar student.” He had arrangements with multiple teachers to regulate his emotions by going for walks, which he often utilized responsibly, and he was accountable for his actions immediately if anything did happen. Both of Max’s teachers who were interviewed spoke very positively about Max this year and mentioned that “other people don’t get to see what there is beyond the surface of Max.” His teachers also commented that at the beginning of the year that his peers seemed intimidated by him so it was especially encouraging to see that his T-score for PR dropped from 75 to 63; it decreased by approximate 1 SD, leaving his PR scores just above average. All of his teachers and principals who were interviewed reported that it was very evident he was working hard to improve himself at school.

## **5.2 Summary Synthesis**

Out of the two principals and eleven teachers interviewed, all but one saw positive changes in one or more of the participants. The change that stood out significantly to the two principals was that the number of incidents involving these participants in the office had definitely decreased from the previous year.<sup>21</sup> As the vice principal stated, “sometimes no news is good news . . . we just haven’t had those [negative] reports this year.” Such positive feedback did not mean participants were completely changed, or that all positive changes were associated with the intervention, but what participants’ stories tell about the study is that, although there were differing levels of success, each

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<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately there was no official record of numerical data regarding this.

participant did indeed experience some success. Even Edward, who was the only participant whose behaviour was unanimously seen to decline, learned that it was okay to have emotions, and he wanted to be more vulnerable and less rude to adults. These revelations are not made less significant simply because his misbehaviours and aggression seemed to increase according to educators exit interviews, but rather they show the complexity involved between learning to feel and show emotions, and actually learning to manage them. This lack of internalization was likely true for many participants. When the guest counsellor came in for session 6 and discussed what emotions were, she only presented some of her material because, she said, the students had a difficult time in grasping the very basic content. A large portion of her second visit (in session 8) was spent discussing and going over things from the previous session. This example highlights the relatively slow process of assimilating these potentially new social and emotional ideas for at-risk male adolescents. If these boys have been basing their behaviour on a different social and emotional script that required them to be tough and stoic, it will take time to reconstruct their ideas about these things in order to improve their behaviour strategies.

Determining how effective the intervention was in this study is complex. Success, insofar as meaning that participants enjoyed, connected, and felt that they had grown socially and/or emotionally from a semester-long intervention, and were less emotionally restricted, then it is clear that it was. However, “success” in regards to participants’ recorded levels of RAM, CWSF, AG, and PR was not. However, additional evidence from teachers exit interviews suggests that participants did make improvements, therefore it is likely the lack of major quantitative change had more to do with the

measures' abilities to detect the positive changes that were occurring. Each participant chosen for the intervention had social and/or emotional issues in school; experienced gender role conflict to varying levels; and they were in need of social and emotional teachings. In considering the individual participants' stories, it is clearer that many of the participants had significant personal issues throughout the intervention that must be included in understanding any of the results.

One participant was suspended twice, one was suspended once, and yet another was expelled at the end of the semester, but the principals did notice improvement. One wonders, then, how the school year would have been like for participants if they had not been supported or involved in this social and emotional intervention. Participants were still in danger of high-risk behaviours, but, perhaps, this study was a modest contribution to helping these participants, as well as pointing to the unique changes possible for a deeply vulnerable and at-risk student population who need significant social and emotional teaching and support in today's high schools.

## **Chapter 6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I consider the overall narrative of the study by discussing personal observations. I was immersed in all aspects of this research as the leader of the intervention and the researcher I was, understandably so, deeply affected by it. There are issues to discuss relating to the specifics of the intervention itself, the experiences of how participants feel they are perceived in the school, and some practical insights that other educators might consider as well, especially if they are looking to adapt or create their own social or emotional intervention. This study's implications, strengths, and limitations, open up areas for further research as well.

### **6.1 The Experience of the Researcher**

I did not teach any participants in the classroom during the academic year in which this study took place. As such I found myself relating to them more in a mentor-mentee relationship. When they had discipline issues or run-ins with their teachers, I became an advocate for these participants, since I often felt I had a better glimpse in understanding their behaviours. At times, I admit, I had frustrating thoughts towards my colleagues who were unable to understand their own actions as, sometimes, causing or aggravating many of the disruptions. Certainly participants were responsible for their behaviours, but that said, these participants were clearly in need of adult advocates. I used my unique connection with participants to speak to them regarding their behaviours and problems that were happening elsewhere in the school. Without intending to do so, I became the go-to person for teachers and, at times, the administrators, for issues concerning these participants. The intervention could not “fix” their discipline issues but the primary goal was to educate participants themselves about issues relating to their

social and emotional health. Such awareness, I hope, could be helpful for these boys in decreasing problematic behaviours.

Hearing each participant reflect in the exit interviews was a profoundly moving experience for me. I did not fully realize the extent to which the most basic of ideas were big revelations for them until hearing them reflect on what they had learned from the intervention. For instance, Chad realized that another participant had feelings, Hank discovered that he had anger, and Edward did not know one could show emotions. Many times I found myself smiling or crying at the transcripts because some of their statements sounded surprisingly simplistic; yet, at the same time, I was deeply saddened at the reality that these adolescents were only just now – at the age of sixteen – discovering these fundamental things about themselves and others.

## **6.2 The Program**

Part of my focus throughout the intervention was assessing and trying to reduce any potential concerns that classroom teachers, the administrators, and the participants themselves might have. My intention was that the intervention would run as smoothly as possible. In exit interviews with the teachers and administrators, when asked for their feedback, all the teachers indicated that they believed this program was valuable and should be run again. However, there were two teachers who felt they did not have enough information or experience with the intervention to comment more fully. Excusing students from classes was not ideal, yet not a single teacher had a problem with the amount of classes participants missed due to the intervention. Importantly, 8 of the 11 teachers interviewed openly expressed the belief “that emotional learning is valuable just like academic learning.” Their view may also be due to the fact that many

participants had such obvious disruptive behavioural needs than the average student. It seemed to me that the teachers were willing to put additional work in to helping students catch up on missed classes, meaning their own investments had been central in the intervention process.

Another important factor for assessing the intervention is to consider the feasibility needed for the two teachers of the intervention, Mr. D and myself, to manage and lead the course. Fortunately, we had full administrative support which was also necessary in allowing students to miss classes for the sessions. From my perspective, it was quite seamless to implement this intervention once every two weeks. The only time things became slightly difficult was when, for various reasons, we needed to have sessions on a day that did not line up with our prep blocks and we had to rearrange things with other teachers. Being a teacher in the special education department allowed for our flexibility, but Mr. D felt differently. In his exit interview he described his unique role in also teaching most of these participants in other classes at the same time:

It was really hard for me to switch from being a very relaxed open-ended . . . talking type of person in one block and literally the next block I had to look after a class of thirty, teaching a class they need to graduate and with some of the behaviours I couldn't have them disrupt the learning environment.

However, Mr. D he did identify a huge practical benefit for having this dual role; he says, "I could deal with their behaviour [in class] easier because I had that connection and we had that contact and I could talk about things that we talked about in guys group which was very helpful for me." What was particularly valuable to him, what he says "[he] was

honoured to be a part of,” was being able to see “a different side” to the participants. This gave him hope because some of the participants were “not very well thought of amongst the staff.” He concluded by saying he would definitely do this intervention again.

Very few of the teachers and principals interviewed had suggestions for improvement, although some teachers expressed the desire to have known more about the content of lessons being taught. This is valid and something I hope to address in any future interventions. Other suggestions were to include more staff members as guest speakers in sessions and to target younger grade levels so that many of these lessons could serve as more preventative in nature. There was also some speculation if the intervention would be more effective if the majority of participants were not from the same circle of friends. Three teachers suggested that “even though it’s more time out of teachers’ lives,” they would prefer more informal one-on-one conversations with me throughout the semester to discuss the students, rather than filling out the Conners 3-TS. In light of the teachers’ feedback, improvements to this intervention could easily be made.

From the financial perspective, even with government funding to use, costs were quite low and could easily be kept lower. The Safeteen presentation was the most expensive at \$325 CAD but most of the other presenters were found based on personal connections, such as the community counsellor, who did not charge anything. Salaries for myself and Mr. D were in place as full-time teachers anyway. Things like snowshoeing and having pizza and snacks at some of the sessions were unnecessary minor costs, although initially having food was a definite draw for some of the

participants. I highly recommend an outdoor experience for group bonding and would not recommend cutting costs here. Overall the intervention was received and viewed extremely positively by all educators involved, so much so that my principals believe this is “exactly what these kids need” and are expecting me to present the results of the intervention to the school’s staff and to run a similar intervention next year, even without the grant money. I plan on doing this.

### **6.3 Implications of Research**

Foremost, this research builds upon and validates O’Neil and Luján’s (2009) research that an intervention with a grounding in understanding gender role conflict and gender role strain is a good approach to take when designing and structuring a social/emotional intervention for at-risk male youths. In this study, issues of gender role conflict were extremely relatable and connected to the target demographic. Arguably, the most immediate implications of this research were for the participants themselves. I believe that the lessons and insights from the intervention will continue to be more deeply internalized by participants in the future and have positive impact on their intra and interpersonal relationships. Since the small sample size of the study does not make results generalizable to larger populations, the main ramifications of this current study rest on the secondary school itself. There remain insights that are likely to at least be somewhat useful to other contexts and could serve as a guide for other secondary schools implementing a social and emotional program.

Evidence from my ethnographic research, being with participants in their everyday lives, revealed that the school community could improve its acceptance of at-risk male students and learn ways of better handling students with disruptive behavioural

needs. As discussed, male students with behavioural needs are some of the most at-risk people in our society and some of the most pre-judged individuals by teachers themselves. These nine participants felt no different. Many times during the semester, participants would express their frustrations and outrage with feeling like their teachers were unfairly picking on them or being harsher on them than with other peers. The participants themselves thought this was due to their reputations. The fact that their reputations in the school were well known in the school was confirmed in the exit interviews with teachers. Five teachers interviewed indicated that they had heard of the negative reputations surrounding certain participants before ever teaching them, even though all these five teachers had a very different experience than what these reputations had set them up to expect. One teacher said that one participant “was [the] opposite of what I’ve heard.” Regardless, in discussions with the nine boys, it was clear that participants were aware of their reputations, which they did not like, and how they felt some adults in the school were not expecting them to succeed. This attitude of the teachers, according to the participants, seemed to be at the root of all their arguments and blow-ups with teachers. These sentiments came out of conversations in session 3 and 7, where the participants discussed the perceived disrespect that had been shown to them by teachers and principals. They felt completely entitled and justified to behaving as poorly as they wanted. A one-on-one conversation with Bob summed up this sentiment best when he said that he gives respect “the same it’s been given.” For many participants, trust of teachers was very fragile. If they felt a teacher assumed they were responsible or involved in some sort of misbehaviour (when they actually were not) participants wrote off any respect for those teachers. Conversely, when participants were in trouble for

things that they agreed was their fault, they behaved much more maturely. The principals' reports support this possibility. Undoubtedly, the participants have reputations for some legitimate reasons, but how individual teachers responded to the students as respected individuals or not dramatically altered the classroom experience.

Based on my own observations and on the exit interviews, teachers who seemed to have the best relationships with the participants were ones that allowed and had arranged a way for the student to manage and regulate their own behaviour. This could mean allowing them to go on a "cooling off" walk around the school, or by confronting them on their behaviours privately. Participants responded much better to attuned discipline that listened to their side of events rather than discipline that immediately engaged in the power dynamic of teacher versus student and an assumption of guilt. Felix in his exit interview, complimented Mr. D and I saying,

You guys are good influences and stuff because you guys are cool and interesting enough to not be quite seen as, I guess, a scary figure but still a respectable figure . . . to the point that I respect you as a human being and as a teacher, but you're not a dick.

When I asked him if it was "weird" for us to be teachers as well as leading the group he replied, "Not at all, it was actually better. I wish all my teachers were like that, most of them are all like, 'I'm a teacher, fear me.'" According to the literature, positive relationships of teachers with students with behavioural needs are the cornerstone of a successful intervention. What the ethnographic aspect of this study revealed is that these particular participants with behavioral needs can feel unknown or blacklisted too quickly by their teachers or principals. Therefore, the philosophy surrounding Purkey and

Novak's Invitational Education Theory (1988, 1996) is of deep importance and relevance to this school and how they relate to students with behavioural needs.

Encouraging, there seems to be a desire by teachers for a greater connection. Although many teachers expressed their honest frustrations with particular participants, almost all the teachers interviewed were more concerned with the participants' overall wellbeing than whether they were difficult to teach or not. A professional development seminar or workshop for the school's staff could summarize the content and ramifications of this study and be helpful so that teachers, even at the school, could have the information as well as some tools for handling their own attitudes towards at-risk male students. Likewise, I think it would be necessary to discuss and compare with the at-risk female intervention leaders to glean their insights as how to best care for, teach, and handle the complexities and nuances unique to females with behavioural needs. At the school level in general, the need to reflect on the role that gender plays in education for all students is a conversation that needs to be initiated and explored further.

#### **6.4 Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

Besides lacking generalizability due to the small sample size, there were other issues that may have limited ability of this study to detect change, most of which were already discussed in chapter 4. While participants, teachers, and principals alike, acknowledge social, emotional and behavioural improvements due to the intervention, the possibility exists that the maturation of participants could also have played a positive role in these areas.

The main aspects of this study relied on the success and quality of the intervention itself. Although it was based on O'Neil and Luján's (2009) framework for creating a

boys' psychoeducational program, we did not follow a previously established program that we merely implemented. The program used here was my own creation. This meant that the intervention was being adapted constantly and frequently throughout the semester. While many elements of the intervention could be used to build a similar intervention in the future, or adapted to another context, how the intervention existed for this study is unique. However, this flexibility also had the benefit of allowing me to better adapt and customize sessions or introduce sessions that were more timely or better met the specific needs of the participant group.

Another limiting factor was that the intervention was highly dependent on my own ability, and to a lesser extent Mr. D's ability, as his role was more limited, to be an effective leader and facilitator of the intervention. Although we each had some official social and emotional training, it was rather limited when compared to the counsellor I brought in for two of the sessions. Therefore, a significant part of our intervention relied on our personal passion and investment in which promoted a search for professional psychologists to serve as guest lecturers a few times. We worked hard on building and maintaining positive relationships with participants, and it seemed our ability to do so was essential for the intervention being received positively. Our intervention was well accepted and logistically worked at this school, but this may not be the case for other secondary schools, as it is highly contingent on who is implementing it and the kind of administrative support available.

Another possible limitation with this study involves my dual role as the leader of the intervention and being the researcher. Since I was so connected and invested in all aspects of this research, particularly the intervention itself, it is legitimate to question my

ability to interpret its conclusions with some neutrality. However, in regards as to whether the intervention was successful or not, I let participant, teacher, and principal assessments of the intervention speak for themselves. My discussion makes it clear that success in certain areas was achieved while not so in other areas. My personal evaluation of the intervention's success is more reserved now than I had expected initially. The fact that a participant was expelled, two were suspended, and I heard of multiple times when participants were extremely rude to their teachers during the intervention, was extremely discouraging. I had to be reminded at times that a 9-session intervention is a limitation in itself as it can only do so much in that timeframe to change behaviours. Yet my embeddedness with the intervention and my connection with the participants enriches the data because it allowed for genuine caring relationships to form with the participants and this was such an important and valuable aspect of the intervention. Although this study's quantitative data was particularly humble in its findings, the use of mixed-methods provided a variety of information to emerge on a vulnerable student population: the at-risk adolescent male in regards to gender role conflict.

### **6.5 Considerations for Future Research**

Particularly for males, gender role strain/conflict is often the cause of many interpersonal and intrapersonal challenges related to emotional distress (O'Neil & Renzulli, 2013). Future research should consider looking at the impact and prevalence of gender role conflict on male adolescents with and without behavioural needs to explore differences in the two populations. Also, a similar study should be done that is more longitudinal and includes a mentorship component. Such a study could look at what the participants were able to internalize over a longer period of time. A follow-up study with

these nine young men in 5-10 years with the adult GRCS would be fascinating to either note trends or any more mature reflections on their emotional and overall health over time.

It was interesting that, when the school in this study received the grant money for a social and emotional program, it was assumed that there would be separate male and female programs. Perhaps that is necessary for some specific sessions; however, I am curious as to the assumptions about gender that were present when this decision was made. I wonder too if a future gender-conscious study included a mixed gender intervention then the benefits or results of hearing and discussing with females and the feminine stereotypes that limit their emotional health would make for even richer experiences.

Throughout discussions with participants, half mentioned having a strained relationships with their fathers; this is deeply connected to gender role trauma as Dadson's (2012) research pointed out. Therefore a qualitative study that explores adolescents with behavioural needs and their relationships with their fathers in reference to gender role strain would be a fascinating and important area for male adolescent gender research.

## **6.6 Concluding Thoughts**

In closing I would like to share my final reflections regarding the nature of this study. What started for me as a study about finding an observable change for the entire group was quickly hi-jacked by the stories of each participant. Change became less important than simply hearing their stories. Not all these stories were expressed fully by them in their own words, but some pieces were made clear during discussions, and some

information was picked up during the times I would have one-on-one conversations with them at other times, like in the hallway when I would notice they seemed more sullen than usual or after they had or were about to “blow up” at a teacher. Getting to witness these incomplete, honest, and, at most times, unfiltered stories, was a privilege I did not take for granted. I realized that most such confidences, if not all, had likely not ever been heard or expressed to many people before. This added both a sense of urgency and necessity that what was being told needed to be held or borne witness to. My most powerful lesson throughout the leading of this intervention occurred around when school closed for winter break. For undefined reasons, the Christmas holiday tends to be a difficult time for some students and this year was no exception. In the weeks leading up to the winter break, teachers and administrators had informed me of a few negative incidents involving some participants, and I had been told to address these overall misbehaviours after the break at the next intervention session. Hearing all these negative things made me aware of how many more times, explicitly or implicitly, participants must have heard or known of negative things being said or thought about them in school contexts. I decided over the break to write participants each a postcard, in which I identified their positive traits I genuinely saw and encouraged them to continue journeying forward. It is hard to record a reaction but when Jacob finished reading his postcard and told me, “That is the nicest thing I’ve ever read or ever gotten,” the others seemed to genuinely agree with him. When I had the chance to give Chad’s card to him a few days later, his eyes welled up with tears. What I hope my postcards managed to address was the sense that, to some extent, each participant had been seen and could feel the sense of belonging and connection that had become such a powerful part of the

participant group. I also purposely tried to use emotive language, as it is not likely a lot of these participants have received much emotive language, especially from an older male. Mr. D and I were very open during discussions about how we still find ourselves at times caught in the negative aspects of society's masculinity requirements but we were actively working on challenging those beliefs in our own personal lives. Trying to lead by example became a significant aspect of what I viewed my role to be; it was a way to counteract society's masculine scripting.

To finish I end with Chad's reflections regarding the male gender role and why it is so important to learn to express one's emotions. This also sums up my own purpose for this study and the main message of the intervention itself:

For a man to show [his] feelings I feel it's kind of like for people it's like seeing an extinct animal come back to life or something, it's kind of weird to see when a man cries...when a full grown man cries it's hard to watch, [and] it's sad because you hardly see it. I feel like if people opened up more I feel like this problem with hiding your emotions and people feeling trapped and suicidal and having depression and having all these things come from hiding their emotions. If they let out their emotions and explained how they felt to people and showed people how they felt more than just hiding it under a hat or putting your hood on or something, it can change your day, it can change your week, it can change how you feel for the rest of your life if you don't express these feelings.

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## Appendix A

## Sample Exit Interview Questions

## For Students:

1. What would you say the purpose of this group was?
2. What were the positive parts of this group?
3. What were the negative parts of this group?
4. Which topic/session did you enjoy or remember the most? And why? (ex. safe teen, kids on the street, counselors, movie/our talks together)
5. What have you taken away from this boys group?/What have you learned?
6. If you had to teach one thing that you learned in this group (one piece of advice for your future mentee) what would it be?
7. What does society think “a man” should be?
8. What do you think “a man” should be? Do you think differently about this after this group?
9. If you could change anything about this group what would it be?
10. Any other comments?

## For teachers:

1. What were the positives (if any) of being a teacher that had students participate in this group?
2. What were the negatives (if any) of being a teacher that had students participate in this group?
3. Did you observe any changes in the boys over the semester? Good or bad? If so in what areas (specific examples)
4. Since the beginning of the semester any noticeable shifts in the way the students displays aggression towards staff, peers or self?
5. Generally how do you observe or interpret their interactions with their peers?
6. Generally, how do you find these students in your classroom (easy? Challenging?) What, if any, would you say their main issues in the class are?
7. Any feedback for this program?

## For Principals

1. Did you observe any changes in the boys over the semester? Good or bad? If so in what areas (specific examples)
2. Since the beginning of the semester any noticeable shifts in the way the students displays aggression towards staff, peers or self?
3. Generally how do you observe or interpret their interactions with their peers?
4. Would you say disciplinary issues increased or decreased, with which specific students.
5. Any feedback for this program?
6. What would you say their main issues in the class are?

Appendix B

Table B1

Table B1

*Individual's Means and T-scores for All Variables Before and After Intervention*

| Research Name | RE   |      | RAM  |      | CWSF |      | AG   |      |      |      | PR   |    |      |    |
|---------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|----|------|----|
|               | T1   | T2   | T1   | T2   | T1   | T2   | T1   | T2   |      |      | T1   | T2 |      |    |
|               | M    | M    | M    | M    | M    | M    | M    | T    | M    | T    | M    | T  | M    | T  |
| Andrew        | 3.67 | 3.67 | 3.86 | 3.71 | 3.71 | 4.00 | 2.50 | 62   | 5.00 | 78   | 3.00 | 63 | 3.50 | 66 |
| Bob           | 1.11 | 1.00 | 1.43 | 1.29 | 1.57 | 2.43 | 2.50 | 62   | 5.00 | 78   | 1.25 | 51 | 2.00 | 56 |
| Chad          | 5.11 | 3.22 | 2.29 | 2.00 | 3.00 | 3.57 | 2.00 | 59   | 2.50 | 62   | 5.00 | 75 | 3.00 | 63 |
| Dorian        | 3.78 | 3.33 | 4.29 | 3.29 | 3.43 | 4.00 | 7.88 | ≥ 90 | 11.0 | ≥ 90 | 3.00 | 63 | 3.00 | 63 |
| Edward        | 4.56 | 3.67 | 4.00 | 3.43 | 2.14 | 1.00 | 4.00 | 72   | 8.50 | ≥ 90 | 4.00 | 69 | 3.00 | 63 |
| Felix         | 2.56 | 2.22 | 1.86 | 3.00 | 2.43 | 5.43 | 3.33 | 69   | 3.33 | 69   | 2.67 | 60 | 4.25 | 70 |
| Hank          | 3.78 | 3.22 | 2.71 | 3.86 | 3.29 | 4.57 | 5.50 | 82   | 4.00 | 72   | 4.00 | 69 | 4.75 | 73 |
| Jacob         | 3.67 | 3.78 | 2.29 | 2.86 | 4.29 | 4.43 | 0.00 | 47   | 0.00 | 47   | 0.00 | 44 | 0.00 | 44 |
| Max           | 2.78 | 2.33 | 4.00 | 3.43 | 2.57 | 2.86 | 2.00 | 59   | 2.50 | 62   | 5.00 | 75 | 3.00 | 63 |

Note: Felix was 17 when the intervention ended and so different T-score values were used with his data.

## Appendix C

## Sample Parental Consent Form

**GROWING UP MALE: REFLECTIONS ON A YEAR-LONG SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL PROGRAM FOR A GROUP OF GRADE 11 BOYS IN A BC RESOURCE CLASSROOM**

**Principal Investigator:** Brendan Kwiatkowski, M.A. Student in Educational Studies – Special Education, Trinity Western University.

**Supervisor:** Allyson Jule, PhD., Faculty of Educational Studies, Trinity Western University.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to observe the impact of a yearlong social and emotional program for a group of grade 11 males. The researcher is designing the study to monitor whether students' in class behaviours improve and whether their emotional intelligence also improves over the course of the year.

Additionally, there is quite a lot of research regarding adolescent males that says that males face unique challenges growing up in the culture that we live in. One of these unique male experiences is that teenage males are often told by society and social media not to show any weaknesses or emotions, which may sometimes be potentially harmful to their overall health. Therefore this study also wants to determine whether your child is impacted by society's message about what males should be like. **This study was designed to inform the academic community, teachers, and administrators whether the social and emotional program was successful. However, most importantly, this study was designed with the purpose of developing the most effective program as possible that would best meet the needs of grade 11 boys.** The reason why your child/guardian is asked to participate is because the teachers teaching the program and principals collectively feel that they would benefit from learning the variety of topics dealt with these groups and believe that the program would hopefully have a positive impact in their high school experience and personal lives. Also, they feel that your child has a strong social presence and many intrinsic leadership qualities that will allow them to be influence their own peer groups with the knowledge they may learn in this group.

**Procedures:** The method chosen to assess your child's in-class behaviours contains 39 questions that will be filled out by your child's teachers 2-3 times over the duration of the year. These questions have only four possible answers: not true at all, just a little true, pretty much true, and very much true. There is nothing your child needs to do for this questionnaire as it will just be their teachers answering questions about what types of behaviours they have observed your child having in-class. The method chosen to assess your child's emotional intelligence and to see whether the society's notion of masculinity is impacting their lives will be a survey containing 29 questions that your child will complete three times: at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. The answers to these questions just need to be circled on a scale of 1-6 and it takes a maximum of 10 minutes to fill out. Your child will complete this questionnaire as directed during the time of the program so that they do not have to be inconvenienced at another time. The program itself consists of approximately eighteen 55-minute sessions throughout the year, which is approximately every other week. Near the end of the year, your child, if they are willing, will also be asked for any positive or negative feedback they have in regards to the program and to discuss if they learned anything. This exit interview will be recorded for the sake of collecting the data for analysis. If results from this study are of interest to you or to your child then please contact the researcher and the results will be made available and sent to you by email.

**Potential Risks and Discomforts:** Although this study is about something positive for your child, participating may be potentially triggering for your child as they may find it uncomfortable being asked to explore their emotions. At all times during the intervention and study there will be a teacher present who is training in counseling psychology and there will be counseling support at the school if necessary. The researcher will also provide you with a referral to a clinical counselor should any emotional distress arise in your child. The other potential risk to your child is that the study occurs

during class time. Therefore to minimize the impact on their academics the researcher and fellow teachers will be constantly communicating with their teachers and will be supporting your child so this does not negatively affect their academics.

**Potential Benefits to Participants and/or to Society:** Due to the fact that a study like this has never been performed before, the results could be quite valuable for both the academic and school community. Participating in this study will assist the researcher and the school in seeing if the intervention was successful or not and it will be valuable to guide how to make the program even better in the future. Having a safe environment for your child to discuss social and emotional issues where they will have rare opportunities to learn from experts in the field can greatly increase their overall health and equip them for the future.

**Confidentiality:** *Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.* For example, only the researcher, Brendan Kwiatkowski, will collect data and he will not share any of the results with anyone else. Any information and all documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and as soon as the last questionnaires are filled out then all of their names will be completely erased from all the data so that it becomes anonymous. Fake names will always be used for the research. Also any online documents or recordings will be kept in a password-protected folder on the researcher’s computer. Data may also be stored anonymously for future use.

**Remuneration/Compensation:** **To thank your child/guardian for participating in this study, they will be given a pizza party/or \$5 iTunes gift card at the end of the year (They can vote on the prize). Your child will be invited/receive the gift card regardless of if they dropped out of the study before the end of the year.**

**Contact for information about the study:** If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Brendan Kwiatkowski or his research supervisor at Dr. Allyson Jule

**Contact for concerns about the rights of research participants:** If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact

**Consent:** The participation of your child in this study is entirely voluntary and you or your child may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without losing your reward or without leaving the program. You child’s withdrawal from this study is not possible after the researcher has removed all the information that may identify you, as it will then be impossible to identify who your child is. If you would like to withdraw then a meeting, email or phone call to the researcher will suffice–no explanation is needed.

**Signatures**

Your signature below indicates that you have had your and your child’s questions about the study answered to your satisfaction and have received a copy of this parental consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to have your child participate in this study and that your child’s responses may be put in anonymous form and kept for further use after the completion of this study.

*I consent/I do not consent (circle one) to my child’s participation in this study*

\_\_\_\_\_ Parent or Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

\_\_\_\_\_Printed Name of the Parent or Guardian signing above

\_\_\_\_\_Printed Name of Child Participating in Research