Gender and achievement. Exploring boys' narratives of male identity and education during Key Stage 1

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Abstract

This research sought to explore the perceived gender achievement gap between girls and boys in the UK. In order to draw focus, the research focused on male identity, and its relation to education, for a group of boys in Key Stage 1. A literature review of research in this area was undertaken with analysis highlighting the relationship between maleness and education; a focus on tensions, process and the need for nuance; a critique of narratives around maleness and education; and a focus on older children. Underpinned by a social constructionist research perspective, a qualitative methodology was employed involving a semi-structured group interview with six boys aged 6-7 in a single rural primary school. A "small stories" narrative analysis focused on positioning within the boys' narratives, positioning within the interview interaction, and the relationship between the interview narratives and wider narratives. The data was presented in the form of ten stories, re-storied from the interview transcripts.

This data suggested the boys presented a strong sense of maleness, particularly in relation to their bodies, interests and some physical elements of school. However, how the boys related this maleness to education in general was less straightforward. The interview interaction suggested boys' views were open to change, challenge and disagreement. The boys were able to negotiate their views at times, and their responses, often based on their anecdotal experiences, contained a level of nuance. Moving forwards this research suggests ways of including young children in the research on this topic, methodologies to make this possible and reinforces a move away from simplistic binary notions of how all boys or all girls might feel about school. The research argues for a close focus on context, differences between and within pupils, and attention to the specific social processes that link male identity and attitudes towards education.

Student Declaration

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Declaration

I declare that while registered as a research degree student at UEL, I have not been a registered or enrolled student for another award of this university or of any other academic or professional institution.

I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.

I declare that my research required ethical approval from the University Ethics Committee (UREC) and confirmation of approval is embedded within the thesis.

Barney Wade

Signature: Date: 27.04.2018

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Table of Abbreviations

DCSF	Department for Children, Schools & Families
DfE	Department for Education
GCSE	The General Certificate of Secondary Education
KS1	Key Stage 1
KS2	Key Stage 2
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENDCo	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
UK	United Kingdom

1. Introduction

1.1 Chapter overview

This chapter begins by setting out the background to the research including the current national context. Following this, debates around the concept of a 'gender achievement gap' are set out. The current research is introduced in relation to this context, including the purpose of the research, rationale for the research and the key research questions addressed in the thesis. A social-constructionist research perspective is discussed in relation to key concepts of gender, identity and achievement. The structure of the thesis is set out including summaries of the literature review, methodology and discussion sections.

1.2 Research context

There has been on-going debate around the concept of an 'achievement-gap' between boys' and girls' academic progress in school (Lloyd, 2011). Media, political and public interest in this area increased from the 1990s onwards, both internationally and within the United Kingdom (Voyer & Voyer, 2014; Skelton, 2001). Government figures provide the basis for a seemingly clear picture. As a general statistical trend, boys start out achieving at a lower level in tests of early development than girls, and lag behind throughout primary school and through to GCSE exams. Boys are three times more likely to receive a permanent exclusion from school than girls (DfE, 2015a). 14.7% of boys are on special educational needs (SEN) support in comparison with 8.2% of girls (DfE, 2016a). Girls outperform boys in early learning development goals such as writing, using media and materials, reading, 'being imaginative' and 'managing feelings and behaviour' (DfE, 2015b). The general statistical pattern of girls outperforming boys on measures of achievement repeats during Key Stage 1 (DfE, 2016b), Key Stage 2 (DfE, 2016c) and at GCSE level (DfE, 2016d). Different perspectives have been offered as to why this gap might exist including the effect of male identity, genetic differences, changes in society, changes in

families, the curriculum, school management and classroom management (Noble & Bradford, 2000; Frosh et al, 2001).

Across research literature in this area, 'stereotypical' masculinity is frequently presented as potentially being in tension with boys' education and their educational performance (Renold, 2004; Smith, 2004; Skelton & Francis, 2011). However, the differences between boys and girls are not presented as completely binary, with many studies explicitly mentioning that not all boys or girls behave or feel the same way. The vast majority of the studies looking at male attitudes to education, focus on older children. The studies predominantly focus on children at the end of primary school and moving into secondary school. There are very few studies which include children under the age of eight.

1.3. The gender achievement debate

The narrative of an 'achievement gap' between girls and boys is debated and contentious (Warrington & Younger, 2006; Skelton et al, 2007). Some have disputed the narrative of an achievement gap, describing such a focus as a misplaced form of "moral panic" (Warrington & Younger, 2006: 49), and pointing to the fact both boys' and girls' achievement is rising generally (Connolly, 2004). Others have expressed concerns that a focus on what is best for boys might disadvantage girls (Skelton et al, 2007), and that a 'simplified' focus on gender overlooks other factors adversely affecting achievement, primarily ethnicity and social class (Lloyd, 2011; Connolly, 2004). The gender achievement gap is hotly contested, with some researchers bemoaning the 'blaming' of the curriculum or female teachers and fearing a neglect of girls' achievement at the expense of focusing on boys. Furthermore, Lloyd (2011) highlights that dividing children by gender in terms of how they learn can be over simplistic, arguing that "reducing boys to only kinesthetic learners …risks narrowing boys' underachievement to a 'quick-fix' of teaching and learning styles" (p. 39). It is important to be critical of narratives that seem overly simplistic in relation to the 'gender gap' in achievement.

The UK Government publication 'Gender and Education: Mythbusters' (DCSF, 2009) tackles what the authors consider some of the most prevalent 'myths' in relation to gender and education. It refutes notions including: the idea all boys underachieve and all girls do well at school; boys underachieve across the curriculum; boys' educational performance suffers because the curriculum doesn't meet their interests; boys and girls have different learning styles; boys are 'naturally' different to girls and learn in different ways; boys benefit from a competitive learning environment; boys prefer male teachers; girls are naturally better at reading and writing. The authors argue that teachers need to give guidance to 'stop' boys and girls going down stereotypical education routes, and that learning preferences and attitudes to learning may well be affected by 'social norms'. They argue social constructions of gender encourage boys to be competitive, 'boy friendly' curriculums could lead to gender stereotyping and that high expectations of both genders benefits boys, rather than a specific tailoring of teaching methods to 'suit boys'.

The concept that being 'the right kind of male' within the social system of a school (Lloyd, 2011) is one several authors have highlighted for discussion. Connolly (2004) argues "we cannot simply talk of a universal form of masculinity in relation to boys, but only of a diverse range of masculinities, reflecting the very different backgrounds and experiences that exist among boys and men" (p.20). He argues that focusing on 'feminising schools', biological factors or changes in society neglects "a focus on masculinity itself as appropriated and expressed by boys in school" (p.31). Connolly critiques the proponents of 'boy friendly' teaching methods including greater use of tests, competitive learning or using phrases like "word attack skills" to motivate boys in literacy lessons (Noble & Bradford, 2000). He argues there is nothing 'natural or inevitable' about boys' masculine identity and its impact on achievement, pointing to differences within boys' achievement. There is a need, he argues, to move beyond viewing children as passively learning 'gender roles', and to understand that boys have agency over the way they interact with education. Connolly argues young boys' masculine identity is not 'passively' given to boys, but rather they are actively engaged in understanding and creating this identity in relation to specific social contexts.

1.4 The current research

1.4.1 Research purpose

The purpose of this research is exploratory. The general context and literature around a 'gender achievement gap' is broad and covers far too many factors for a single study. To draw focus, the purpose of this research is to explore the specific area of how young boys' male identity may interact with their views on education. In relation to themes and gaps highlighted in the literature review around this topic, the research focuses on boys at the start of primary school, utilising a group interview model with male participants aged 5-7. The main purpose of this study was to explore male identity for a group of young boys aged five to seven, and how this identity is constructed within the group and related to education. The research aimed to explore the views of participants who are under-represented in the research literature on this topic. This research moves away from a focus on the 'content' of participants' responses as a standalone construct, or as something individually generated. The purpose of the research is to draw focus on social processes in a specific context, and how these factors relate to discussions of maleness and education for a group of boys in KS1. The overarching focus is on gender and education and how these themes are negotiated in a group interaction. There is a focus on what this process looks like for young boys, and whether their participation in research on this topic is valid and valuable. This focus aimed to provide information about ways in which masculinity was enacted and constructed by a group of boys of a particular age, and the implications of this for their educational performance. These implications were understood in terms of how this group of young boys constructed masculinity through their narratives, how this discussion was affected by a social group interaction, and what having a 'voice' around gender and identity looked like for boys this age.

1.4.2 Research rationale

This current research is based on the premise that even if the focus on a gender achievement gap is complex and contentious, it is certainly interesting and worth further exploration. Few studies have:

> "…focused specifically on exploring the diverse range of masculine identities that are appropriated and reproduced by boys in the early years…the active role that young boys play in appropriating and constructing their gender identities and how these, in turn, tend to reflect the wider contexts within which they are situated" (Connolly, 2004. p.142).

To draw focus within the broad literature around gender and achievement, this research centres on how male identity might interact with boys' attitudes towards education and achievement. Lloyd (2011) argues the current picture "suffers to a very large extent by the absence of boys' and young men's voices" (p. 41). This study included a group of boys in Key Stage 1 (KS1) directly, in order to better understand how they construct concepts of maleness and achievement within a group interaction. This research involved a social constructionist research perspective, a qualitative methodology and a narrative analysis. Through this approach the research explores psychological concepts of gender, identity, social group processes and how they might relate to the participants' constructions of education. There has been much written about gender and achievement, this exploratory qualitative research seeks to drill down both in terms of the specific area of masculinity and education, and how these topics are negotiated in interaction for a group of young participants often missed out of the research in this area. Young boys are not often included in research into this topic, which tends to focus on children at the end of primary school and moving through secondary provision (Lloyd, 2011). This research sought to address gaps in the literature around masculinity and education, specifically in terms of boys at the start of education in KS1. This focus is associated with my interest in methods and process that might enable younger boys to contribute to narratives around their constructs of gender and

education. The research involves an attempt to understand the results in the context of the wider debate on gender and achievement.

Qualitative research does not provide results that can be 'counted' or generalised easily. The guiding rationale for this research is that is explores the key area of male identity and education within the wider context of the debate around the 'gender achievement gap'; explores and employs methods that might help under-represented young boys take part in research; challenges assumptions around who can form 'coherent' narratives and what constitutes an 'acceptable' narrative. This research did not seek out boys who were 'failing' or getting lower than expected scores, this data was not asked for or included in the research rationale. Boys' experience of school is broader than a test score. For example, issues of engagement, enjoyment, mastery and self-esteem may be related to how boys perceive their own gender and education. Some of these issues arise in the literature review, but it would be wrong to see exploring these issues through this research as working towards the sole 'end' of increasing test scores, rather than gaining a greater understanding of how the boys' construct gender and education. In this sense, the research rationale is not about accepting fixed concepts of attainment and seeking to increase boys' attainment, it is about understanding young boys' narratives of gender and education in relation to the wider gender achievement debate.

1.4.3 The local context

The research took place in a small mainstream rural primary school for children aged four to eleven. The school has fewer than one hundred pupils on roll, which affected participant selection methods. The school is mixed gender and primarily attended by white British children. It is accepted that the results of this study are linked to a particular group of participants within a local context, and that this has implications for how widely the results can be generalised. However, within a qualitative framework and social constructionist perspective, the purpose of the research is framed more as a study of human interaction and meaning making linked closely to the research context. The purpose of this research is not to extend the findings far beyond the local context, but thoughts

around how this research might develop into a wider context are set out in the discussion section.

1.5 Research perspective

This study is based on a social constructionist research perspective which "denies that our knowledge is a direct perception of reality" (Burr, 1995: 6). The research accepts that humans create meaning through language and social-processes. Social constructionism rejects the notion that language is "transparent" (Burr, 1995: 34). As a researcher I am interested in how language is used as an active, social tool in order to make sense of the world around us. This 'sense-making' is not abstract and cannot be separated from the context of the research and those involved. This research does not claim to present a "realist view of qualitative research, where the researcher can simply give voice" (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 80.) Researchers analyse, shape, and seek to make sense of data rather than simply presenting the views of participants. As a researcher I am open to acknowledging that this is an active role (Hertz, 1997), which socially constructs meaning in interaction with the participants (Gergen & Davis, 2013). The social constructionist research perspective links with a qualitative research design and a narrative approach to data analysis.

1.5.1 Constructing gender

Social psychology theory suggests males are more likely to demonstrate violence; that there is a difference between direct aggression, with girls tending to 'manipulate' and boys tending to fight; that women's language is more social, with men being more assertive and prioritising group hierarchy; women tend to co-operate and men tend to value asserting their individual identity (Hogg & Vaughan, 2014). However, in line with a social-constructionist perspective, this current research is underpinned by an awareness that gender is socially situated and that this may affect the way boys frame their masculine identity, as well as how others view them. 'Social norms' can affect the way people behave, particularly in terms of peer pressure in a group situation (Burr, 2002). This research perspective echoes arguments in the literature review that there is

nothing 'inevitable' around the way boys perceive themselves and their education (Connolly, 2004), and that social-norms and gender stereotypes can affect the way boys approach school (National Literacy Trust, 2012).

One of the ways male identity is understood comes from the concept of 'masculinity', a contested and multi-faceted concept debated in terms of its usefulness, subjectivity and political power (Skelton, 2001). Masculinity and femininity have been related to agency on the part of individuals, as well as being socially situated concepts (Courtenay, 2000a). Some have argued that men construct a variety of masculinities (Courtenay, 2000a), and that rather than masculinity being one single idea, there are 'multiple masculinities' actively constructed in social contexts (Skelton, 2001). The term hegemonic masculinity has been used to understand the power relations between multiple masculinities. The notion of hegemony relates to a power struggle between multiple enactments of masculinity, with a dominant form of masculinity interacting with subordinate forms of masculinity, which can sometimes enable a dominant masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The way men identify with masculinity may be fluid and variable in relation to social context and time. Therefore hegemonic masculinity represents "…not a certain type of man but, rather, a way that men position themselves through discursive practices". (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005. p. 841). Whilst hegemonic masculinity may vary at particular points in particular cultures, it has been described as "the public face of male power" (Skelton, 2001. P. 51).

The concept of stereotypical masculinity relates to the expectations we have around what masculinity will, or should, look like. This has importance in terms of how we think about identity, gender and education. For example, teachers have been shown to interact more with boys than girls when the class were carrying out 'masculine' activities, and assumptions about gender differences have been shown to affect teachers' expectations of pupils (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998). The relationship between power struggles within the concept of masculinity and wider stereotypes is complex. Gilbert & Gilbert (1998) write that "…boys may not all share the same form of hegemonic masculinity, different masculinities are not necessarily more resistant to traditional gender divisions

and stereotypes" (p. 128). This suggests that whilst masculinity may be variable, multiple masculinities may nonetheless be enacted within the concept of stereotypical gender expectations. For example, Whitelaw et al (2000) discuss a concept of 'macho-masculinity' which ties into stereotypical concepts of men embracing risk, fighting or carrying out dangerous sports (Courtenay, 2000a). However, in contrast, a process of 'resistant masculinity' has been described whereby some men undermine hegemonic norms of male power, and at the same time pull away from stereotypical expectations (Courtenay, 2000b). Indeed, Skelton & Francis (2011) argue that some boys themselves are pulling away from stereotypical versions of what it means to 'be a boy' in school, enacting what the authors term a 'renaissance masculinity' whereby boys take part in stereotypically male sporting activities, but also perceive themselves as academically able which may not be seen as stereotypically masculine by some. In this sense some boys are understood to challenge dominant discourses around masculinity through challenging stereotypical expectations.

Some approaches to masculinity, such as 'hegemonic masculinity', have faced criticism that they link power too closely to gender, rather than giving due consideration to other variables such as race and socioeconomic status (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). It has been argued that gender, linked heavily to human culture (Skelton, 2001), intersects other factors such as race and class (Gilbert & Gilbert,1998), and that gender stereotypes can interact with other kinds of stereotypical thinking, such as racism (Man an Ghaill, 1994). This is important when considering issues of power through the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Considering factors such as race, class and ethnicity reminds us that gender is not the sole factor in cultural power dynamics. In certain cultures or points in time, gender may not be the most important factor in how power is negotiated and maintained, other factors such as race or class may interact with this process, or even become more important factors than gender. Within the literature reviewed for this current study several studies mention race and socioeconomic factors in the introduction, however they don't fully integrate them fully into the analysis. There is a risk in the literature that links between these factors are introduced, but not fully analysed or unpicked. For example, Whitelaw et al (2000) introduce race and

socioeconomic status into their research but in their results they leave these factors out, describing the study as 'preliminary'. At its worse, discussing these factors can seem tokenistic, for example linking the words "white middle class" (Skelton & Francis, 2011) to a participant but for no clear analytical reason. In general the literature reviewed focuses on gender as a standalone concept, with some references to race and class, but without a focus on how such factors interplay. Connolly (2006), provides an exception to this picture by situation an ethnographic study of 5-6 year old boys in a "multi-ethnic" context. Moreover, he discusses these factors in this analysis, including a focus on 'racialised' council estates and the way black boys might be treated differently to boys presenting a 'white middle class' masculinity.

1.5.2 Constructing identity

The terms 'self' and 'identity' are broadly recognised as hard to define with total consensus or clarity (Lyons & Fitzgerald, 2013; Hobson, 1990). Some have argued that the terminology of 'identity' is less essentialist than the language of the self, suggesting an active and on-going process of 'identifying' (Burr, 1995). A social constructionist view of identity is at odds with the idea of the 'self' or 'identity' as situated internally, and views identity as being shaped and maintained through social processes and interaction (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Smith & Sparkes, 2008a). As with relational views of gender, identity as a general concept can be understand as constructed in relation to how we view other people (Burr, 1995). The construction of identity has been theorised by some as closely linked to human narrative formation, a co-authored story used as a social tool to create structure, meaning and coherence in relation to our experiences, how we see ourselves and the world around us (Bruner, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988).

During my masters' research I focused on how constructions of narrative 'self' and 'identity' are seen to depend on concepts of narrative coherence, communication skills, cultural access and social identity. I was interested in how identity might look for people, in this case those with autism, who might be expected to struggle in these areas (Lee & Hobson, 1998; Crane & Goddard,

2008; Losh & Capps, 2003). A potentially rigid criteria for narrative identity might isolate some people from an act argued as fundamental to human 'culture' (Vinden, & Astington, 2000), and at the heart of a concept of 'personhood' itself (Kitwood, 1997). I argued that concepts of 're-telling' and 'co-telling' may need to be reconceptualised to allow for more personalised approaches to understanding identity formation. Narratives have been viewed as the "coin and currency" of cultures (Smith & Sparkes, 2008a: 15) and I am interested in the way young boys, so often left out of research on gender and achievement, might access research relating to narratives around identity, gender and education. This view of identity and narrative processes links with the narrative analysis methods discussed later in this chapter.

1.5.3 Constructing achievement

In researching in this area it is important to think about the nature of achievement. Warrington & Younger (2006) argue that formal assessment in British primary schools is a fairly recent concept ushered in by the 1988 Educational Reform Act, which introduced a 'national curriculum', seeking to improve literacy and numeracy achievement and perceived challenging behaviour in classrooms. Political election pledges related to ever increasing achievement, regulatory literacy and numeracy hours (Warrington & Younger, 2006) and a general emphasis on exam-based grades as a measure of achievement, have contributed to pupil attainment becoming part of the national dialogue. Recently a stated government aim to increase "rigour" in the education system has been understood by some as narrowing "achievement" further towards being a synonym for what is essentially a national testing system (BBC, 2013).

The language of achievement in this current research runs the risk of accepting the premise that end of key stage assessments are the gold standard for deciding whether boys are 'achieving' at school. However, my focus is on boys' perceptions of male identity and education, which may be informed by such wider societal narratives around testing and achievement, rather than accepting such narratives of achievement as part of the research. Therefore whilst it is

acknowledged the national context of a 'gender achievement gap' is related to test scores, this research is more interested in how participants' narratives of gender, identity and education might exist in relation to wider narratives around gender and achievement, rather than accepting constructs of 'achievement' on face value.

1.6 Structure of the research

The research begins with a review of relevant UK based research from the last ten years. This review contains an analysis of quantitative literature, and then a section on the qualitative literature. Each section is sub-divided by articles focusing on primary education, secondary education and those which sample pupils from both primary and secondary education. Themes and implications for the current research are drawn from the literature. Following this literature review, the methodology section sets out details of participant selection, the use of semi-structured interviews including visual and physical prompts and details the narrative methods used to analyse the data. The research findings are presented as ten analytical narrative stories, focused on positioning within the narratives, positioning within the group interaction and how these exchanges relate to wider narratives. The findings are discussed in relation to existing literature, and the research questions set out. Limitations and implications of the research are discussed.

1.7 Chapter summary

This introduction chapter set the research within the wider context of a gender achievement gap. In spite of statistical trends suggesting girls consistently outperform boys through various measures, the construct of an achievement gap was recognised to be contested and complex. The research purpose and rationale were explained in terms of a focus on male identity and how it relates to education for a group of young boys in KS1. A social constructionist research perspective was set out, including how this approach relates to key concepts in the research of gender, identity and achievement. The structure of the following

chapters was explained through laying out the literature review, methodology, findings and discussion framework.

2. Literature review

2.1 Chapter overview

The focus of this research is how male identity interacts with boys' attitudes to education. This chapter involves a review of relevant research literature from the last twenty years in the United Kingdom. The literature reviewed focuses on issues of gender and how it relates to children's attitudes towards education. The chapter begins with an explanation of the methodology of the literature search, including inclusion and exclusion criteria and search terms. This is followed by a section on the quantitative literature, and then a section on the qualitative literature. The literature was divided by methodological approach in this way in order to unpick different research methods employed to explore this topic, and to highlight how methods chosen might affect research outcomes. This current study used a qualitative methodology and I was interested in how such a methodology has been approached previously, and how these approaches relate to quantitative methods. Each section is sub-divided by articles focusing on primary education, secondary education and those which sample pupils from both primary and secondary education. This is because the age of participants chosen is relevant to this study, both in terms of its focus on younger pupils, and the lack of focus on younger pupils in the wider literature. Themes and implications for the current research are drawn from the literature.

2.2 Rationale for the literature search

This literature review involves research related to primary and secondary school. The qualitative studies often involve interviews and discussions with children, where their views are explored at length. However, quantitative studies involving methods such as questionnaires and surveys have also been included. Lloyd (2011) writes that research around the gender achievement gap rarely works with children directly, and seems to primarily focus on older children moving through secondary school. Whilst the articles analysed in this literature review have methodological differences, the factor that links their selection is that children's views are included in one way or another. Articles

where children are simply observed or where they have been the 'object' of testing have been excluded.

Connolly (2004) argues that few studies have:

> "…focused specifically on exploring the diverse range of masculine identities that are appropriated and reproduced by boys in the early years…the active role that young boys play in appropriating and constructing their gender identities and how these, in turn, tend to reflect the wider contexts within which they are situated" (p.142).

The rationale behind this literature review is an exploration of how concepts including boys' perceptions of education, male identity and its link to educational achievement are represented in the existing research literature. Studies with both males and females are included as this is a common methodological approach within the research literature, and the ways boys might cast their identity in relation to girls is a pronounced theme. Studies which don't include boys have been excluded.

2.3 Methodology of the literature search

In his review of literature relating to boys underachievement in school, Lloyd (2011) argues against an exclusive focus on very recent material, pointing to the fact there was an apparent peak of academic interest in the gender achievement gap in Britain during the mid 1990s and early 2000s. This literature review has been limited to the past twenty-years. For example, studies dating back to the 1970s that have attempted to include male voices first-hand, such as Willis' (2000) often cited interviews with 'lads' coming to the end of secondary school in the 1970s, have not been included. Furthermore, research has been limited to British studies. The rationale for selecting British studies from the past twenty years is that this current research takes a social-constructionist approach to gender, and argues such concepts are strongly associated with time and place. It is not clear that gender in the United States is the same thing as gender in the United Kingdom, and certainly not clear than

gender in the 1970s is the same as a construction of gender in the 21st Century. 1997 – 2017 seemed a good range to draw clarity and fit with a social-constructionist research position, whilst on the other hand not missing out too many studies from the mid-1990s, a time when interest in this area was growing. The articles included in the literature review are set out in a table in the appendices of this thesis (Appendix A). The articles are ordered by date in order to bring clarity to the historic spread of interest in this area. The majority of relevant articles are from the first decade of the 21st century, and more recent articles included wherever possible.

2.3.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The area of gender and achievement is conceptualised from many different angles within the research literature. It was important to keep a tight focus and ensure articles were focused on links between male identity, boys' attitudes to education and boys' educational achievement.

For literature to be included in this review it had to be:
- Carried out within the past twenty years.
- Carried out in the United Kingdom.
- Involve males or males and females.
- Focus, at least in part, on links between male identity, boys' attitudes to education and boys' educational achievement.

Literature excluded from this research:
- Outside of the past twenty years.
- Undertaken outside of the United Kingdom.
- Involving girls alone, rather than boys or a gender mix.
- Theses, magazines, newspapers.
- Literature where children are 'objects' rather than 'subjects' of study e.g. studies involving observation or testing as sole measure, rather than directly eliciting children's own views in some form.

2.3.2 Database search details

A literature search was carried out on the 8th July 2017 using the EBSCO database including articles sourced from Academic Search Complete; British Education Index: Child Development and Adolescent Studies; Education Research Complete; ERIC; PsycARCTICLES; and PsycINFO. Searches were refined by the dates 1997 – 2017; the geographical option of Great Britain; selected from journals and academic journals. The following search terms were employed.

- Gender AND achievement AND school (201 results).
- Gender AND boys AND identity AND education (31 results).
- Gender AND boys AND identity AND school (30 results).
- Achievement AND boys AND identity AND primary (43 results).
- Achievement AND boys AND attitudes AND primary (2 results).
- Achievement AND boys AND attitudes AND school (16 results).
- Masculine AND identity AND primary AND school (81 results).
- Achievement AND gap AND boys AND school (11 results).
- Primary AND boys AND education AND attitudes (20 results).
- Gender AND stereotypes AND primary AND school (30 results).

Twenty articles were selected for the literature review, they are summarised in a in the appendices. In light of Lloyd's (2011) comment on peaks of interest in this topic, the articles in the appendix are ordered by date, rather than alphabetically, to draw attention to the historical spread of articles.

2.4 Quantitative literature

2.4.1 Quantitative research focusing on primary school

Gray & McLellan (2006) note that within the literature on gender and achievement, limited attention has been paid to children's attitudes to school, and that the attitudes of younger children are particularly rare in the research

literature. However, as with some other research looking into children's attitudes to school, their research paper focuses on children nearer the end of primary school, and seeks to compare male and female views. The authors analysed questionnaires completed by 1310 pupils in twenty-one primary schools, in an attempt to quantify some of the trends found in more qualitative literature. The authors categorised pupils within the five headings of "the enthusiastic and confident; the moderately interested but easily bored; the committed but lacking self-esteem; the socially engaged but disaffected; and the alienated" (p. 653). Girls dominated the enthusiastic and confident category, and boys the final two categories relating to 'disaffected' and 'alienated' descriptors.

In line with other authors (Connolly, 2006) the research calls for increased nuance in the comparison between boys' and girls' attitudes to school. Similarly to Connolly (2006) the article makes room for non-conventional types of gender expression, for example the disenchanted girl or the compliant male. However, it could be that directly comparing attitudes between the genders increases this lack of nuance through an implicit interest in difference leading to gender differences being sought and found. The authors celebrate the quantitative trends backing up qualitative patterns as being 'a good thing'. This could suggest that because the results can be counted, they somehow validate qualitative research trends. In fact the approaches ask questions in different ways and with different expected outcomes. The cluster analysis categories are essentially chosen by the authors, meaning human judgment and interpretation are at the heart of the research, but perhaps a little less transparently than with a piece of qualitative research.

Quantitative work can complement research of a more qualitative nature. For example, Myhill & Jones' (2006) qualitative study explored the link between teachers' lower expectations of boys, and pupils' perceptions that teachers treat boys differently to girls. This links well with Hartley & Sutton's (2013) three quantitative studies focused on the role of stereotypes and boys' underachievement, and how pupils' perceptions of teachers' expectations might influence test performance. Study one, involved children relating statements about education to a silhouette picture of a boy or a girl. Sampling 238 children

aged four to ten, results suggested "girls from age 4 and boys from age 7 believed, and thought adults believed, that boys are academically inferior to girls" (p. 1716). Study two, informed 162 children aged seven to eight that boys do worse on a test. When children then completed the test, results showed boys did worse on the test in line with the expectations communicated to them by the researcher. Study 3, involving 184 children aged six to nine, told children boys and girls would do the same on the test, this improved performance for the boys.

Hartley & Sutton (2013) describe a process of 'stereotype threat' where task performance is inhibited due to being a member of a group that is not expected to do well. The authors explain that children as young as four can conform to 'in-group' bias, that low expectations of boys can become a self-fulfilling prophecy and schools should attempt to actively "…counteract gender bias and negative academic stereotypes" (p. 1728). This study involved the youngest children found in the current literature search, as it included children aged four-years-old. However, two children were left out the study for choosing "both" rather than boys or girls in study one, suggesting the researchers had an attitude that children should prefer girls or boys to be treated unfairly by teachers. This further illustrates how research setting out to find differences between boys and girls might end up with biases in the procedures. As the research is quantitative, there is no chance to unpick in more detail how these interviews unfolded and why some children expressed the views they did.

Logan & Johnston (2009) sampled 232 10-year-old children, including 117 males, and used reading comprehension tests and questionnaires to investigate the link between attitude to reading and reading ability. The results suggested girls had a better reading comprehension, read more frequently and had a more positive attitude towards reading and school. However, effect sizes for these gender differences were small. Potentially more interesting for the current study was that, not only did boys have a more negative attitude to reading than girls, boys' attitudes to reading were much more closely related to their reading ability than for girls. Similarly to Hartley & Sutton's (2013) study, these results suggest boys' attitudes to reading may have an impact on the ability they show in the

classroom. This is another study that sampled children from the latter stages of primary school, which attempts to uses quantitative comparisons between the genders, and to generalise the conclusions to other children.

Logan & Johnston's (2009) study is interesting as it reflects a wider theme in the literature that boys' attitude towards school, and beliefs they hold around their gender may affect the ability they show. Related to this concept, McGeown et al (2012) used questionnaires and direct assessment work to explore 'sex differences' in reading skill and motivation for 182 primary children aged eight to eleven. The study included ninety-eight boys, with a key aim of separating concepts of 'identity' and 'sex' and how they might relate to reading performance. The study found that there were no sex differences in reading skill but that children identified very closely with traditional masculine or feminine traits associated with their gender, and that these traits were related to differences in intrinsic reading motivation. The authors conclude that a "…feminine identity was more closely associated with many different aspects of reading motivation than a masculine identity" (McGeown et al, 2012: 328). These results show interesting tensions between male gender identity and reading performance. However, this is a further example of studies that seek to compare boys and girls in the latter stages of primary school, and extrapolate from the statistical correlations.

2.4.2 Quantitative research focusing on secondary education

Whitelaw et al (2000) focused on pupils' perceptions using questionnaire data from a single eleven to nineteen co-educational school. The authors were interested in potential links between 'masculinities' and academic performance, particularly 'macho-masculinity' and related attitudes towards education. Questionnaire items were generated in relation to a qualitative interview involving six students. The authors show an awareness that race and socioeconomic status could be relevant variables in their study, but as the study is 'preliminary' the authors restrict their attention to age and gender. The study focused on attitudes related to age in terms of a 'pre-GCSE year sample' and a 'GCSE year group sample', and the difference between answers in terms of

gender. Results included both genders and age groups disagreeing that 'clever boys are popular with other boys'; girls disagreeing that 'clever girls are popular with other girls', but boys agreeing with that statement; both genders and age groups agreeing that 'well behaved pupils get good marks'; and girls and boys agreeing that 'girls are generally better behaved in lessons than boys.' Interestingly there was a difference in boys' attitudes between the pre-GCSE year group and the GCSE year group. For example, older boys answered more frequently that girls are better behaved than boys; that girls help each other more than boys; and felt more negatively about school being 'cool or fashionable' than younger pupils.

With a study of this nature the authors are comparing different cohorts so it is hard to say clearly that 'attitudes change' as pupils get older, but it is possible to say that attitudes seemed to differ for the boys in some key areas between age groups. As with other pieces of research, this article focuses on older secondary school pupils and aims to compare boys and girls. It is a shame the qualitative interview data, used to create the quantitative questions, is not included in the research. Some of the data leaves questions about the reasoning children had for certain answers, the detail within their answers and how different age groups might talk about the same issues. It is possible that the statistics tell the reader less about male identity and education than some of the more qualitative interview data might.

2.4.3 Quantitative research focusing on primary and secondary education

Clark & Douglas (2011) used an online survey to explore attitudes towards literacy for 17, 089 pupils aged eight to sixteen in 112 schools. The report, for National Literacy Trust, reported girls read outside of class more frequently than boys; girls held more positive attitudes towards reading than boys; nearly twice as many boys as girls agreed with statements that reading is 'boring' and 'hard'; girls report enjoying writing more than boys; girls rated themselves as better writers than boys; and that boys were more likely than girls to believe writing was 'boring'. The area of literacy is a key theme in the literature on the 'gender gap' as this seems to be one of the biggest areas of discrepancy in achievement from early years and onwards throughout school (Logan &

Johnston, 2009). The 'Boys' Reading Commission' (National Literacy Trust, 2012) was published by a cross-party parliamentary group in 2012. The report argues that boys are not always given the chance to develop an identity as a reader, that adults need to encourage positive gender identities that value reading and that male gender identities can fail to value learning and reading as a mark of success. The Commission points to the fact, that whilst an achievement gap is seen internationally it is not seen in all countries or within all boys.

The report argues this gap is "not biological and not inevitable…something we are doing as a society is making boys more likely to fail…" (p.5). The authors cite masculine identity as a crucial factor, with some boys understanding reading as 'being for girls'. This theme was picked up on a global scale by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in a wide ranging report in 2015. The report argued "…gender disparities in performance do not stem from innate differences in aptitude, but rather from students' attitudes towards learning and their behaviour in school" (OECD, 2015). The report argued that, on a global scale, gender-bias can work against both boys and girls depending on the expectations shown towards them by teachers, parents and through general 'social norms'.

2.4.4 Key findings of the quantitative literature

Within the quantitative literature there are calls for increased nuance in the comparison between boys' and girls' attitudes to school and attention is drawn towards non-conventional types of gender expression, for example the 'disenchanted girl' or the 'compliant male'. Attitudes of both children and adults are explored, including a construct that boys are academically inferior to girls and the relationship between this construct and boy's performance at school. For example, in one study boys did worse on a test when low expectations were communicated to them by researchers. The concepts of 'stereotype threat' and 'in-group' bias are highlighted as relevant factors, suggesting task performance can be inhibited due to being a member of a group that is not expected to do well. The literature suggests this can be true for children as young as four, can

act as a self-fulfilling prophecy, and that schools should attempt to challenge such preconceptions actively.

At the primary school level, some studies highlighted girls as having better reading comprehension, as reading more frequently and as displaying a more positive attitude towards reading and school than boys. Some studies suggest boys' attitudes can closely correlate to their ability, and there is the potential that boys' attitudes to reading may have an impact on the ability they show in the classroom. The literature pulls against the idea of 'sex differences' in reading ability but suggested children's associations with 'gender traits' may affect their intrinsic reading motivation. At the secondary school level, some of the literature suggests that 'clever boys' are not anticipated to be popular by pupils, and girls are viewed as generally better behaved in class. Masculine identity is understood as a crucial factor in boys' attitudes towards education, with reading highlighted as a particular area that may be affected by this identity. These attitudes are not seen as inevitable, but rather heavily linked with wider messages in society around gender and education.

2.4.5 Assessment of the quantitative literature

The search of British literature from the past twenty years, relating to children's perceptions, identity and achievement, yielded fewer relevant quantitative papers than qualitative ones. The quantitative literature uses a range of methods to elicit children's attitudes, and understand potential links between these attitudes and achievement. Methods include questionnaires, which are sometimes used comparatively with other tests; online surveys; and visual methods as prompts for pupil choices. The samples are large ranging from the hundreds to the thousands. More often than not the studies seek to compare boys and girls, occasionally risking bias through an apparent expectation and search for differences between the genders. The research helps us understand statistically general trends, and some authors (Gray & McLellan, 2006) state it is a 'good thing' the quantitative literature backs up qualitative trends. In this sense the quantitative literature helps us to extends trends that are found in smaller scale qualitative studies.

However, the research sometimes has a broad brush feel. Details around how children arrive at conclusions, the tensions or disagreements, and relationship between researcher and participant are not accessible. It would be useful to have a deeper understanding of younger boys' in their own right rather than through gender comparison, and an exploration of the depth and negotiation of boys' concepts around gender and school. The literature generally worked with children above the age of eight. However, as they included foundation stage pupils, the Hartley & Sutton (2013) study presented results from the youngest children found in the literature search. This is a positive in terms of application to the current study, which focuses on younger children.

2.5 Qualitative literature

2.5.1 Qualitative research focusing on primary education

Swain (2005) spent a year interacting, observing and carrying out interviews as part of field studies in three primary schools. His study focused on girls and boys during their final year of primary school. Swain analysed the association between masculinity and femininity, rather than seeing them as separate and straightforward identities. This perspective echoes Skelton's (2001) approach to gender and its attempt to move away from 'sex-role' theories, based on a designation of gender traits from others, and towards an understanding of multiple 'masculinities' actively constructed, variable and negotiated relative to feminine identity and the wider social context. Swain (2005) found that males in his study saw themselves as 'different' to females rather than needing to be critical of females. However, their masculinity needed to be 'policed' and reinforced in terms of sporty, dominant, heterosexual norms. Swain found variation in masculine constructs but argued that a dominant form of masculinity:

> "…exerts its influence by being able to define what is the norm and many boys find that they have to fit into, and conform to, its demands…masculinity is defined by what femininity is not…boys' constructs of girls as 'other' is a way of expelling femininity from within themselves" (p. 77).

Swain's qualitative method of situating himself in schools for long periods of time, and using 'loosely structured' interviews, are different from some of the more quantitative studies which focus on questionnaires, large samples, standardised tests and statistical analysis. Without prejudicing either methodology, which complement each other, it is important to reflect on the different purpose and related outcomes of such varying approaches. Swain writes that he wanted to experience as wide a variety of masculinities as possible, as if he might somehow understand masculinity fully the more children he spoke to. It could be seen as risky for qualitative studies to stray into the language of sample sizes leading to fuller understanding. Some of the large-scale quantitative studies provide a breadth of analysis, whereas the strength of a study such as Swain's is the depth of understanding related to specific children and contexts.

A similar ethnographic approach was undertaken by Renold (2001) in her exploration of children's gender and sexual identities during Year 6 of primary school. Renold cites the fact that many studies into gender, identity and education have focused on secondary education rather than primary. Her study focuses on primary school, albeit at the end of KS2, which is theoretically a very different world to KS1 in terms of children's development of language, abstract thinking, social interactions and gender identity. In this sense Renold's study addresses gaps in primary age focus, but not in what Connolly (2004) might see as moving further towards the 'roots' of issues related to gender, identity and achievement. Similarly to other authors (Swain, 2005; Skelton et al, 2009) the study is underpinned by an understanding of masculine identity as actively social constructed, negotiated by boys and linked closely as a construct to feminine identity. Renold pays attention to the social class of her participants and makes some attempt to feed these factors into her analysis of pupils' attitudes. For example, through noting the social background of those holding certain beliefs, in a similar way to some other studies (Skelton and Francis, 2011). Renold uses vignettes from her interviews and uses the quotes to draw themes including boys' use of humour to deflect from their school successes; the link between displaying the 'wrong' type of masculinity, such as hanging around with girls or not playing football, and being associated with younger

children or homosexuality; and issues of 'disguise', 'avoidance' and 'layering' whereby on the surface boys:

> "…appear to be displaying a seamless, coherent and consistent 'masculinity' when 'underneath' they are involved in an on-going struggle to negotiate classroom and playground hierarchies…negotiating high academic achievement with the seemingly increasing pressures of hegemonic masculinity." (P.381).

A rare study focusing on boys in Key Stage 1 comes from Hamilton & Jones (2016), through their qualitative study exploring the attitudes of boys and their teacher in a single primary school. The authors pose the question "what do we really know about the perceptions of young male learners and their experiences within the context of the primary classroom?" (p. 241), a question at the heart of the rationale for this current study. Hamilton & Jones accept that not all boys are underachieving, and not all girls are achieving at the expected level. However, they cite a difference in attainment related to gender regardless of ethnic group or social background, particularly in literacy. This research took a case study approach, with a researcher carrying out the role of a teaching-assistant in a Year 2 class. The methods involved observations, discussion groups and interviews with thirteen male pupils and two female teachers.

The authors claim that three types of learner "appear to have emerged" (p. 246) which they describe as "well-behaved achieving boy"; "misbehaving, struggling, disengaged boy"; and "boy who falls somewhere between these two descriptors" (p. 246). The language of 'appears to emerge' is interesting as it disowns the role of the researchers in generating these categories. There is also little information around how these somewhat catch-all categories were arrived at. The authors state that "differences *between* and *within* gender is an important part of understanding the classroom and an area in need of further research" (p. 251) yet there is little evidence of this thinking in their analysis. Indeed, the use of three categories seems a somewhat blunt instrument with this purported approach to 'within gender' differences in mind. An analysis of any tensions, disagreements and negotiation involved in group-based gender processes would potentially make for more interesting research than neat

categories. However, this study relates well to the current research for a few key reasons. Firstly, it focuses on boys rather than seeking to compare them to girls. Secondly, focusing on children who have just turned six, it spotlights children in KS1 making it fairly rare in the research literature. Thirdly, it is a lot more current than much of the literature in this area, and discusses boys' interest in technology and computers as part of their learner identity, alongside more longstanding trends such as their struggles with literacy and reading. The study found teachers had a strong feeling they should direct certain teaching methods towards boys, suggesting that the wider debate around boys and school is reaching some teachers, but potentially without some of the nuances found on closer inspection of the research literature.

Hamilton & Roberts (2017) used similar methods to explore the views of boys, girls and their teachers in a single primary school. Twenty children drawn from Year 5 and Year 6 were selected for observation, discussion groups and interviews. Four staff members were also included in the study. The results show children using stereotypical language to define their own gender in relation to opposing constructs of the opposite sex. Girls described boys using terms such as 'loud', 'noisy', 'silly' and 'easily distracted'. Boys described girls using terms such as 'confident', 'sensible', 'quiet' and 'better listeners'. In contrast with Swain's (2005) study, some boys framed gender differences in more negative terms, using descriptors such as 'controlling' and 'perfectionist' to define their female peers. Some of the male participants positioned their identity as 'opposite' to girls, but not all boys accepted this 'dominant discourse'. It is argued that rather than placing boys as 'victims', the dialogue should be around adults reflecting on their own gender biases and providing children with the opportunities to explore and discuss feminine and masculine identities, the limitations of binary stereotypes and question related power dynamics more openly. The authors claim that they used non-leading question styles and made checks to 'ensure' what they recorded accurately represented the views of the children. In spite of this claim, questions such as "if you were of the opposite sex, would you like these subjects?" and "is one gender better at certain subjects?" (p. 126) could be seen as leading questions. This demonstrates how hard it is to ask totally neutral questions, particularly in more

semi-structured or unstructured interactions with participants. In qualitative studies it may be more authentic to make the role of the researcher clear, both in terms of strengths and limitations this role might add to the study.

Hamilton & Roberts (2017) focused, as with many other studies, on children at the end of primary school. Similarly, Warren (2003) used observations, 'friendship maps' and interviews to elicit views around gender for thirty-one ten-year-old boys in two classes in one primary school. Warren analysed themes around boys' conceptualisations of gender. These themes included physicality, action and bodily presence, in sport for example; beliefs around superior intellectual and cognitive ability for males; importance of the correct male appearance including clothes and accessories; anticipation of life trajectories such as 'working hard' or 'women doing housework'; biological differences; and relationships to school authority, the idea boys 'get told off more' for example. Warren draws a distinction between narratives about personal experience and more general narratives boys might hold about masculinity. For example, boys who didn't possess a stereotypical physical male presence still produced narratives about this type of physicality being an important part of masculinity. The research doesn't make much mention around tensions and differences within participant responses. It would be interesting to know more about the variety of responses as well as the collective themes generated by the researcher.

Renold (2004) agrees that stereotypical tenets of masculine identity at school, such as toughness, heterosexuality, sporting prowess and distancing yourself from perceived feminine behaviours, can be oppressive for boys and girls. However, Renold also questions how easily boys can simply develop 'softer', less stereotypical masculinities, particularly when challenging gender norms in school may lead to children feeling threatened or isolated. Similarly to some other authors (Smith, 2004; Hamilton & Roberts 2017), Renold advocates including boys in discussions about gender dynamics in order to help them challenge and deconstruct the narratives and stereotypes influencing their lives. Renold isn't clear at what age this should start and, as with many other studies, her comments relate to work with children at the end of primary school. With

Connolly's (2004) idea of 'roots' of male identity early in school, it might be worth starting these dialogues long before children have reached KS2.

Connolly (2006) focused on the social processes surrounding masculinity for five and six-year-olds in an inner city school. In the article Connolly suggests that 'dominant' forms of masculinity within schools can be 'harmful' for girls and 'brutalising' for boys. He recognises masculine identity has often been explored with a focus on older boys and young men. An important theme of the article is that dialogues around masculinity can risk leading to generalisations. Rather than thinking of one masculinity, he argues for a focus on multiple masculinities heavily dependent on context and the active, rather than passive, role boys take in masculine identity as appropriated and reproduced in social contexts in relation to "largely taken for granted and instinctive aspects of their lives…taken for granted aspects of being male" (Connolly, 2006: 143). This article is interesting in terms of this current research. Connolly sees masculine identity formation as something constructed, social and variable. He interviews boys directly and seeks to uncover their view of school and their place in it as young boys. However, despite the stated focus of working with boys at the start of school, there seems to be little discussion around the potentially unique contribution of young boys in terms of the content of the interviews or the methods used to enable young boys to take part in the research. The focus of the article seems to be on socioeconomic background and race, valid factors in this arena, but nonetheless a different focus to age of the participants. The key gap in the literature relates to the way young boys at the start of school are left out the conversation. It would have been useful to hear more about how including young boys in research added to this conversation, and the methods used to enable this process.

Skelton et al (2009) focused on how Year 3 pupils and their teachers viewed issues of gender in the classroom. The study found children prioritised their teacher's competence over and above their gender; that gender affected the pupils' constructions of their own identity; but a variety of differing views amongst children make it hard to point to a 'one size fits all' approach in this area. The authors raise concerns around the idea of 'all boys' and 'all girls'

being alike and discuss a move away from sex role socialisation theories and favour understanding a 'plurality' of ways through which gender may be expressed. As with some other articles, the authors also highlight the risk of separating gender from other factors such as race and socioeconomic status. They talk about including participants from different ethnic and social backgrounds in their study, but this is not picked up in their conclusions. It could be the authors feel race and class are implicit in their results, as they are considered in explanations of sampling procedures. Nevertheless, there is a potential risk that without a detailed analysis of these factors, a cursory discussion of links between race, class and gender might add little to a study specifically focusing on teacher and pupil attitudes around gender. Interestingly, the authors give a specific rationale for sampling Year 3 pupils aged seven to eight. They wanted to sample young children, but felt children younger than seven to eight years old theoretically have a less established sense of gender identity, and are more eager to express the 'right' gender identity. Whilst this point might be related to psychological theory, it is less clear why it would matter that children have a developing or naïve sense of gender identity when the aim is to learn from their attitudes and experiences. In some ways it seems a tenuous rationale for excluding the voices of participants already often left out of research in this area.

Warrington et al (2003) considered boys' constructions of masculinity as part of their study into how English primary schools respond to gender differences in pupil assessment. The study sampled four 'pilot' schools where boys' achievement was a concern and girls' achievement was stable. Similarly to Millard (1997), the authors show interest in literacy as an element of primary school boys might find particularly hard to engage with. Warrington et al (2003) write that, in the school context, masculinity can be associated with power and assertiveness, attributes reinforced by the peer group, and at odds with perceiving learning diligently as an acceptable version of maleness. This may be particularly true in secondary school, though the authors note that some have found this to be the case in primary school too (Skelton, 2001). The authors state that in their previous one-to-one interviews boys often speak of having to 'pretend' they don't want to learn in order to fit an appropriate

stereotype of maleness in the classroom. This raises issues of the social construction of maleness at school and how boys might find their identity being molded as part of group processes. This current research uses a group interview model precisely with the aim of picking up on some of these group dynamics.

Warrington et al (2003) argue there is not one particular approach that helped boys in the primary schools they worked in, but that an attempt to raise achievement generally; challenge gender stereotypes; enable boys to associate more closely with school; highlight gender awareness in literacy explicitly; and giving older boys the chance to act as 'prefect' role models seemed to work well. However, the stated aim of some peer-led interventions making learning seem "wicked" or "cool" (p.150) may run the risk of patronising pupils and taking a superficial approach to deeper issues of identity formation, group processes, social norms and wider stereotypical trends.

2.5.2 Qualitative research focusing on secondary education

Millard (1997) selected 121 boys and 134 boys at the start of secondary school to complete questionnaires around their experience of reading, with some selected for interviews. In this sense, Millard used the questionnaire method employed often in the quantitative literature, but also used interviews to unpick some of the themes in more detail. The author explores the 'active' role of past experience in providing 'correct' models of male behaviour. Similarly to Connolly (2006), Millard understands male identity as relating to constructions of expected behaviour that boys encounter both at home and at school. With a focus on literacy, Millard raises issues of boys' choice of texts, such as comic strips or magazines, being potentially marginalized; boys' experiences of associating reading with female figures in their household; and the difference in attitudes towards reading between boys and girls. Millard argues the social practices of school and home work together to make gender identity 'dichotomous' with attitudes to reading. For example, girls read for pleasure, mothers were consistently regarded as key figures in early experiences of reading and boys used reading to symbolise negative attitudes to schoolwork in general. For boys reading was something they wanted to complete

competitively and quickly, or to avoid completely. The author argues the image of a reader is associated with a 'passive feminine identity.' The difficulty with this article is it asks children at the start of secondary school to 'look back' to their experience of learning to read when they were much younger. A social-constructionist perspective would suggest this gives us a constructed narrative of the pupils' experience of starting school rather than acting as a lens to view the 'facts' of the past. Indeed, many of the pupils simply couldn't remember what it felt like learning in the early days of primary school. Constructions of the past are interesting, and this current research accepts the data collected will be a narrative construction. It may be tempting for researchers to look back in hindsight to primary school with older pupils, with potentially greater skills in language, abstract thinking and self-reflection, rather than approaching very young children for research directly. This research also speaks about gender in a more binary way than some other articles, leaving less room for nuance of within-gender differences.

Frosh et al (2001) attempted to investigate the 'emerging masculinities' of boys aged eleven and fourteen. The idea of an emerging masculinity between the ages of eleven and fourteen is an interesting one as it seems to neglect the concept of a male identity for very young boys and how this might affect their attitudes to learning and school. The authors argue that boys' identity in school is influenced by their desire to be seen as different from girls, through showing a casual attitude to school work for example. During interviews, boys discussed the feeling they didn't always fit into a 'hegemonic' version of masculinity, accepting identity comes in many different forms. Interestingly, the researchers reported that children saw group interviews as being more fun and free, without the feeling of being 'singled out'.

Skelton & Francis (2011) argue that a 'real boy' construction of masculinity is being modified by some groups of boys to produce what they term a 'Renaissance Masculinity'. The authors are interested in the socially constructed 'production and performance' of masculinities, and argue that 'boy-centered' teaching methods, such as allowing boys to read about typically 'masculine subjects' or focusing on male teaching staff, can in fact reinforce

stereotypical ideas of what maleness can and should be. The criteria of achievement, widely associated with performance in exams, is not out of reach for all boys, and equally not all boys succeed. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with Year 8 boys identified as being both 'popular and high achieving'. Skelton & Francis argue that being 'successfully masculine' enabled the boys to engage both with the social and sporty elements of school, as well as having the confidence to engage with school subjects such as literacy. The authors reason that schools should be having a conversation with boys around different types of masculinity rather than pandering to stereotypes of what boys enjoy and what 'boys are like'. They discuss the racial and social makeup of the participants selected, but as with previous studies it is potentially quite a cursory endeavor. Including statements such as "white middle class" after participants' quotes may give the appearance of including these factors, but without a deeper analysis it could seem superficial. A better approach might be to make race and class a deeper element of the analysis and participant selection, or on the other hand to leave those factors out and accept a potential limitation to the study.

Within the literature on gender and achievement, there is an undercurrent of self-declared feminist resistance to the idea masculinity is a meaningful concept, arguing struggling boys should change rather than pedagogy. There is a risk of appearing to blame boys in some segments of the literature. Skelton & Francis (2011) argue that 'boy-friendly' approaches to literacy rely on 'essentialist' notions of gender stereotypes. However, the authors may run the risk of an equally reductionist argument when they state that, for boys to improve in literacy they should:

> "…read more, listen and attend more to teachers and other pupils, work harder (greater diligence), be more conscientious and take more pride in their work, work collaboratively and articulate themselves better in all aspects of communication" (p.473).

This type of language may run the risk of seeming over-simplistic, especially as the authors themselves state 'social status' seems to play a large part in whether boys feel confident enough to challenge a form of 'hegemonic

masculinity' and show overt interest in academic success. Smith (2004) worked with six boys over two years from the age of five to seven. She found they could consolidate reading as part of a masculine identity, but their subject choices were often stereotypical. The author advocates active conversations with boys from a young age in order to broaden their choice and, crucially, point out to them the social factors influencing their potentially narrow interests. Having an open dialogue with boys about the social choices they are making, and including boys in the conversation about gender and education, seems a better way of framing outcomes, rather than the language of boys needing to 'show more diligence' automatically (Skelton & Francis, 2011).

2.5.3 Qualitative research focusing on primary and secondary education

Myhill & Jones (2006) explored pupils' and teachers' perceptions around learning, behaviour and achievement in relation to gender. The study included fifteen primary schools, three middle schools and one high school. Forty teachers and 144 pupils, drawn from thirty-six classes, were interviewed during the study. The authors placed pupils in mixed sex pairs for the interviews as they felt "same sex pairings…seemed to create more pressure to conform to gender stereotyped viewpoints" (p. 105). It could be argued the social processes by which such a 'pressure to conform' was constructed by same sex pairs or groups, would have been an interesting element of the study. For example, some authors have viewed peers as key role models in the forming of 'appropriate masculinities', potentially more so than male teaching staff (Ashley, 2003). The results of Myhill & Jones' (2011) study found that 62% of pupils interviewed felt boys were treated more unfavourably by teachers than girls, 8% felt the opposite was true and 30% felt they were treated the same. The feeling that teachers treat boys unfairly appeared to increase with age. However, even in KS1 there was a feeling that teachers treat boys differently to girls, with boys feeling this was unfair and girls putting it down to boys' naughty behaviour. Interestingly some of the pupils felt male teachers could treat boys more unfairly than female teachers, who they viewed as treating pupils equally. Some of the claims that children shift attitudes as they get older could be seen as problematic as the study compares different cohorts rather than taking a

longitudinal approach.

2.5.4 Key findings of the qualitative literature

In some of the qualitative literature boys saw themselves as 'different' to
females rather than needing to be critical of females. However, in other studies
boys framed gender differences in more negative terms, using descriptors such
as 'controlling' and 'perfectionist' to define their female peers. Some of the male
participants positioned their identity as 'opposite' to girls, but not all boys
accepted this 'dominant discourse'. Some evidence is presented of masculinity
being 'policed' and reinforced in terms of sporty, dominant, heterosexual norms.
Masculinity varies for boys but some studies suggest a hegemonic form of
masculinity exists in the primary schools studied. The 'wrong form' of
masculinity is presented as a construct possibly existing for some boys.

Within the literature the way masculinity is constructed is explored through
themes such as humour, deflection of success and issues of 'disguise',
'avoidance' and 'layering' whereby on the surface boys present certain forms of
masculinity but might hold more complex identities. Differences between and
within gender are concluded by some studies to be important in terms of
developing a complex approach to identity and gender in the classroom.
Similarly to conclusions drawn within the quantitative literature, adults are
encouraged to consider their own gender biases and to provide children with
the opportunities to explore and discuss feminine and masculine identities, the
limitations of binary stereotypes and to question power dynamics more openly.

Themes such physicality, action and bodily presence are presented as
stereotypical masculine traits which may shape some boys' identities. However
some authors draw a distinction between narratives about personal experience
and more general narratives boys might hold about masculinity. For example,
boys might uphold stereotypical narratives within their constructs of masculinity,
but experience their own masculinity in quite a different way. This masculinity is
understood by some to be heavily dependent on context and the active role
boys take in constructing their identities. Boys are understood in some studies
to construct an identity that is intentionally different to that of girls, yet during

some interviews, boys discussed the feeling they didn't always fit into an expected version of masculinity, accepting identity comes in many different forms. Qualitative research suggests masculinity is being modified by some groups of boys who engage with sporty elements of school, but also school academic subjects such as literacy.

2.5.5 Assessment of the qualitative literature

As with the quantitative literature, there is a focus on children in the latter stages of primary school and during secondary school within the qualitative literature. The primary method of choice is direct interviews, but other methods appear such as longer term ethnographic research, case studies, observations, physical and visual methods. The qualitative literature gives us a rich insight into specific settings, researchers often embed themselves in schools and work there for a period of time. The qualitative approach allows for a focus on context and social construction. However, during analysis the focus is often on segments of dialogue, through the use of vignettes for example. It isn't always clear how these vignettes were selected, and at times categories are drawn without proper acknowledgement of the role of the researcher in this active process. It might be interesting to hear more about the group dynamics, non-verbal aspects of interaction and social processes involved in forming dialogue. It is possible researchers desire to work with large chunks of dialogue contributes to younger children, with developing verbal and conversational skills, being overlooked in the qualitative literature.

2.6 Themes & implications

2.6.1 Male identity and boys' education

Across the quantitative and qualitative literature, stereotypical masculinity is frequently presented as being in tension with boys' attitudes towards education and their educational performance (Renold, 2004; Smith, 2004; Skelton & Francis, 2011). Differences are presented between males and females in terms of how they feel they are viewed by teachers (Myhill & Jones, 2006); how they express their physicality (Warren, 2003); their academic subject choices; their

behaviour (Hamilton & Roberts, 2017); their self-identity as a learner; and expectations of their own ability (Hartley & Sutton, 2013). Often these differences are explored through a critical lens viewing gender differences as socially constructed. Children are generally viewed as taking an active role in forming their identity rather than being passively 'given' gender roles. Gender is understood as 'relational', masculinity is cast in relation to femininity rather than in isolation (Skelton, 2001). Dominant 'hegemonic' masculinity is challenged through the concept of 'multiple masculinities', negotiated by boys and related to social-context and other factors such as race and class. Several studies cite schools as potential sites for counteracting gender stereotypes and their potential 'negative' effects on boys' attitudes to education.

2.6.2 Tensions, process and the need for nuance

The differences between boys and girls are not presented as completely binary, with many studies explicitly mentioning that not all boys or girls behave or feel the same way. Some girls have negative views of school, some boys have positive views of school. Children might give opinions that differ from stereotypical views of gender, and children may disagree with each other and negotiate meaning in group interviews and discussions. These tensions, negotiations and disagreements are not always explored fully by researchers, furthermore the tendency for studies to compare boys and girls might exacerbate the notion of binary differences between the genders. Data is often presented in tidy themes or vignettes, with less attention paid to children who give unexpected answers or buck trends. In the literature, many authors view gender as 'inter-sectional', insomuch as it intersects other factors, in particular social-class and race. Several studies mention these factors in the introduction but don't integrate them fully into the analysis. Gender, race and social background are varying constructs and there is a risk in the literature that links between these factors are introduced, but not fully analysed or unpicked.

2.6.3 Reframing masculinity

Many of the authors writing on the topic of male identity and education are female. Feminist perspectives are a pronounced theme in the literature, offered as a critique of the notion of a 'simplistic' masculine identity (Skelton, 2001; Skelton, 2003; Skelton & Francis, 2011). The notion that boys are somehow essentially different from girls is rejected by some authors, at times it is argued boys should behave more "diligently", and that schools should be actively challenging stereotypes, around subjects such as literacy for example, rather than presenting 'boy-friendly' materials such as comics or magazines (Millard, 1997). The concept of male-identity is viewed as problematic by some of the authors carrying out studies in this area. However, Warren (2003) argues masculinity 'exists as a reality' in the lives of the children in his research. Whether sociologists or feminists agree it is a useful term, the current research seeks the experiences of young boys in primary school and accepts they may experience a sense of 'maleness' as part of their identity. Whether this maleness is cast as stereotypical 'masculinity' and how it is negotiated and constructed is an area of interest in the research.

2.6.4 A focus on older children

The vast majority of the studies looking at male attitudes to education, focus on older children. The studies predominantly focus on children at the end of primary school and moving into secondary school. There are very few studies, quantitative or qualitative, which include children under the age of eight. In spite of calls for research with younger children (Connolly, 2004), this is the principal gap in the literature on this topic. Some authors cite the fact that very young children will have a more naïve sense of gender (Skelton, 2009), or give examples of young children being excluded from studies for 'not understanding' or giving the 'wrong' answers (Hartley & Sutton, 2013). This suggests a need to create a research methodology that anticipates and accepts the nature of working with very young children around this topic. For example, younger children's potential to be less vocal; have a more limited vocabulary; their

physical movement and attention span; and their understanding of the research process and informed consent.

2.7 Chapter summary

This literature review involved an analysis of research focused on children's perceptions of school, their identities and the interaction of these factors with their education. The chapter began with an explanation of the methodology of the literature search, including inclusion and exclusion criteria and search terms. This was followed by a section on the quantitative literature, and then a section on the qualitative literature. Each section was sub-divided by articles focusing on primary education, secondary education and those which sample pupils from both primary and secondary education. Themes and implications were discussed including the relationship between maleness and education; a focus on tensions, process and the need for nuance; a critique of narratives around maleness and education and a focus on older children.

3. Methodology

3.1 Chapter overview

This chapter sets out the three research questions and the rationale behind them. A qualitative research methodology is discussed and the research process is set out including data collection, participant selection, data analysis and ethical considerations. Lastly, the narrative analysis process is discussed in terms of how it relates to the research perspective and methodology. In contrast with the literature review, parts of this methodology section are written in the first person, in particular when discussing my own role in the research. This is a conscious decision made as part of an acknowledgment that as researcher I am heavily present in the research, and the choices I made influenced questions, research methods and analysis.

3.2 Research questions

The research aimed to explore the views of participants who are under-represented in the research literature on this topic. Consequently, the research is focused around three main research questions:

1. How do a group of boys in KS1 understand gender and education?
2. How does the group interaction process affect the boys' responses?
3. Can a group of boys in KS1 have a 'voice' in the research around gender and education?

Research question one relates to an interest in how the boys in the study think about gender and education. The question does not assume they will make links between their gender and experience of school, but seeks to understand this area in more detail. Research question two relates to the social interaction the boys participated in during the group interview, and the particular effect this may have on the answers given. This social process includes my role as researcher in the group interview process. Research question three relates to an interest in how boys of this age, often left out of the research, might engage

with these complex issues and have input in an arena which tends to focus on older children.

3.3 Qualitative research methodology

As set out in the introduction section, this research is underpinned by a social-constructionist approach. Linked to this approach, the research involved a qualitative methodology which focused on process, meaning and context rather than attempting to quantify data (Hughes, 2001). This qualitative research is explorative in nature, and seeks to understand the nuance behind apparent broader trends. The research perspective for this study focuses on elements of social interaction, communication and language, and their role in constructing meaning (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). A qualitative methodology was chosen in order to focus on meaning, perceptions and process during a semi-structured group interview using visual and physical prompts. Following on from these approaches, a narrative analysis was selected as the most appropriate way to make sense of qualitative data focused on human 'meaning making' through social interaction.

In the existing literature quantitative methods, including questionnaires and online surveys, have been used in research around gender achievement, often with large samples ranging from the hundreds to the thousands. More often than not the studies seek to compare boys and girls, and the research helps us understand statistically general trends. However, details around how children arrive at conclusions, the tensions or disagreements, and the relationship between researcher and participant are not always accessible. The literature generally works with children above the age of eight and it is rare for research to approach a deeper understanding of younger boys' in their own right rather than through gender comparison. This current research moves away from general statistical patterns and takes a qualitative explorative approach. There is a focus on children in the latter stages of primary school and during secondary school within the existing qualitative literature.

The current research focused on spoken 'content' as a function of interaction, the way meaning is constructed as part of the group, and the role of the researcher in this group process. As a researcher I believe in the value of studies that explore the direct experience and perceptions of children and young people (Lloyd-Smith & Tarr, 2000). This is particularly relevant to research in the area of male identity and education, where young children are almost entirely absent in the literature. However, as stated above, this research does not claim to present a "realist view of qualitative research, where the researcher can simply give voice" (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 80). In terms of a qualitative research process, I am interested in the voice and perceptions of young children, but accept that as a researcher I am not benevolently "giving voice" to children, but rather engaging with and interpreting the data to form my own critical narrative.

Both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies are shaped by the researcher, and both involve limitations. Whilst quantitative research into male identity and education might be able to claim statistically significant results, as discussed in the literature review, some of these studies fail to provide the detail and depth to fully understand these statistical trends. Qualitative research results might face the "so what?" question at the end of a study. Seemingly subjective, personal and highly related to time and place, this research is not about proving universal truths, but sets out to explore and ask questions around a political and widely discussed topic, meeting with children who are often talked about during such reports but rarely included.

3.4 Data collection

3.4.1 Approaching the school

My first point of contact at the school was the special educational needs and disability coordinator (SENDCo). I communicated with the school SENDCo via phone and email to explain the nature and purpose of my research. When it was confirmed she would be happy for me to conduct research in the school, I sent her an information letter and consent form to distribute to parents

(Appendix B). After parental consent was gained from parents I visited the children directly to give them information about the research and child-friendly consent forms were completed one-to-one (Appendix C). This process is explained in more detail in the later 'ethical considerations' section of this chapter.

3.4.2 Sampling participants

We agreed due to the limited number of children on roll, the SENDCo would contact parents she felt would be receptive to their children taking part. In this sense the sampling of participants was carried out on a 'convenience' basis. However, there were some key guidelines for the selection of participants. The participants were all male, aged between five and seven, drawn from years one and two in KS1, and with a basic ability to communicate in a group interview situation. Boys were not 'screened' for social class or ethnicity. The focus of this research is gender, identity and education. The constructs of class and ethnicity are pertinent in this arena, yet far from straightforward. There is a potential trap in the research literature of extending research focus to a superficial inclusion of many constructs, but not fully engaging with them in either the data collection or analysis. Out of the available participants selected on a convenience basis none of the boys were on free school meals, all of the boys selected were white British with English as their first language, none of the boys were on the SEN register. Whilst participants were not sampled in relation to race or class, this sample could be understood as middle-class, white and British. The results are discussed in relation to this particular sample.

As the school was small, the boys were already known to one another. The purpose of this research was not to select boys who were struggling at school, data on their achievement was not taken. The main criteria for selecting participants was that they were male, in KS1 and had at least some language skills that would enable them to take part in the research. Six boys were selected for the study. The number chosen related to the need for a contained group interview where children could interact and have their voice heard. Four boys were from Year 1 and two boys were from Year 2. The participants who

took part in the research were Toby (Year 2), Felix (Year 1), Jack (Year 2), Bradley (Year 1), Gregory (Year 1), and Jamie (Year 1). Pseudonyms have been used.

3.4.3 The semi-structured interview

Similarly to methodologies used in much of the qualitative research around this topic, the current research employed an interview method in order to elicit the views of children directly. However, this current research utilises a group interview method, which is less common in the existing research. This approach aimed to develop an understanding of group dynamics, non-vocal aspects of interaction and social processes involved in forming interview answers. It is possible researchers' desire to work with large chunks of dialogue in one-to-one interviews contributes to younger children, with developing verbal and conversational skills, being overlooked in the qualitative literature. Working with a group interview allowed for participants to share the process of dialogue and spread verbal output between them.

This research made use of a semi-structured group interview in order to explore the boys' views, and in particular, how these views were constructed and negotiated in a group context. Rather than asking pre-set questions in the same order, semi-structured interviews present an opportunity for a more targeted and informal interaction (Coolican, 2009). The use of a semi-structured interview is linked to the 'depth' of response this research sought from participants, and the flexibility I wanted to work with (Robson, 2002). Questions could be re-ordered based on how the interview was going, and to pursue issues raised. Using a semi-structured interview meant questions could be varied, extra questions added or questions, that didn't seem appropriate, left out (Robson, 2002; Cohen et al, 2011). The use of interviews ties in with a social-constructionist research perspective, welcoming the concept of research as a social encounter involving an interaction between participants and researcher (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). Some researchers have suggested that children report group interviews as being more 'fun and free', without the feeling of being 'singled out' (Frosh et al, 2001). As the interview

was semi-structured, there were chances for the boys to interact with each other, tell stories, laugh and move around the room at times. The interview lasted about forty-five minutes in total. I had this kind of time limit in mind due to the young age of the boys, and in practice they were becoming fairly restless by the time we finished.

3.4.4 Physical & visual methods

Related to the developmental age of the boys, physical and visual methods were used in order to help them engage with the interview. Based on methods used by Bian et al (2017), in their work exploring young children's gender stereotypical thinking, prompts for discussion were presented as statements from children in "a different school". Statements such as "I am good at spelling", "I work really hard in school" and "I am good at maths" were typed in large font on speech bubbles and laminated. The quotes were put in speech bubbles to reinforce the idea that they had been 'said', and laminated so they could be physically manipulated by the boys. I read a statement and asked the boys if they thought it was said by girls, boys or both. This acted as a prompt for discussion. The rationale behind reading the children statements 'other children' had said was to move beyond a sole focus on the boys' own experiences, and towards their understanding of more general themes around gender. In practice, the attempt to get boys to move beyond their own experiences and consider more abstract rules wasn't entirely successful. This is discussed in greater detail later in the thesis.

I placed three large 'sorting hoops' on the table, one hoop contained a picture of a boy, one a picture of a girl and the third hoop contained a picture of both boys and girls (Appendix D). The SENDCo informed me the boys were used to sorting in this way during their maths lessons and we used the familiar hoops from their class. The rationale behind this choice was to reinforce visually and physically both the idea of 'sorting', and that the statements might have been said by boys, girls or both boys and girls. The choice of boys and girls was important as it represented a chance for the boys to make a choice that wasn't related to a binary split between the genders, a trap some research in this area

falls into. After a discussion about each statement we placed the statement in an appropriate hoop. The placing of statements in sorting hoops were not counted, and qualitative inferences were not made in any way. I often placed the statement in a hoop at the end of a discussion and therefore it would be wrong to look at the presentation in this way. The placing of statements was in order to generate concrete understanding, engagement and discussion. The research analysis is at the level of the group discussion rather than where items were eventually placed.

The pictures of boys and girls chosen to go in the hoops were selected carefully. I thought about dark silhouettes to remove immediate gender hints from the research, but in the end I selected coloured images of boys and girls of a much more storybook nature (Appendix E). The boy was in a blue jumper, and the girl in a red and pink dress. The rationale behind choosing these pictures was that they were characterful enough to suit the developmental age of the boys; they were colourful and engaging but simple enough to not present overly distracting details; the gendered clothes reinforced the fact we were thinking about gender together. I made a choice this was a positive factor, balanced against the risk the gendered presentation could potentially lead the boys to answer in certain ways.

3.5 Ethical considerations

When working with vulnerable young people, the process of ethical informed consent becomes more complicated (Silverman, 2013). The British Psychological Society makes it clear that when working with groups at "heightened risk", such as young children, during research, ethical practice is essential (BPS, 2010). Participants must be clear on what they are agreeing to and who will have access to the information. Consenting also involves being made aware that you can decide to change your mind at any point, without being prejudiced in any way. Consent is an on-going process rather than quickly ticking a form at the start of the research. In the worst case scenario authors have described a process of participants "acquiescing" without a full understanding of a potentially "abstract" agreement (Loyd, 2013: 134).

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I met with the boys as a group and explained research to them as a process of "finding out about things" (Snelgrove, 2005: 316). I presented details of the research to the boys in a storybook style information sheet, complete with large font size and colour pictures (Appendix C). We talked and the boys were given time to ask questions, digest the information and understand what they were agreeing to (Cameron & Murphy, 2007). After this process I sat one-to-one with each boy looking over a consent form which included statements "I am happy to be involved with the research project"; "I understand people reading the project won't see my name"; I understand I can say no to anything I don't want to do in the project"; and "I understand I can change my mind about helping with the project". After each statement boys were asked to tick a box for either 'yes', 'no' or 'I need more information'. The boys then signed their consent at the bottom of the form. During the interview I kept aware of potential stress signals during the research process that may have acted as non-verbal indicators that participants were struggling or uncomfortable (Preece, 2002). The published research does not contain names or details that could identity participants. Parental permission was given to audio record the interview, all audio and physical documentation containing the children's names will be destroyed by July 2018. I applied for, and received, full ethical clearance for the research from both the university (Appendix F) and local authority ethics boards.

3.6 Narrative analysis

The field of narrative research is defined by the variable nature of approaches and methods used. For this piece of research, which focuses on how meaning is shaped and the personal roles of those involved in the research, it is appropriate that narrative analysis can be personalised in relation to the research questions and research perspective. There is no one way to 'do a narrative analysis' and questions around what constitutes a narrative, how to elicit a narrative and how to analyse narrative remain open and on-going (Squire et al, 2011). Authors in the field attempt to distinguish ways of working with narrative through descriptions of narrative process, its varying approaches and through offering typologies classifying these approaches to narrative and

narrative analysis. Squire et al (2011) make a distinction between narratives which focus on 'events' and narratives which focus on 'experience'. The authors explain the distinction:

> "Event-centred work assumes that these internal and individual representations are more or less constant. Experience-centred research stresses that such representations vary drastically over time and across the circumstances within which one lives, so that a single phenomenon may produce very different stories, even from the same person." (Squire et al, 2008. p. 5).

In their narrative analysis typology, Smith & Sparkes (2008b) make a distinction between researcher as 'story analyst' and as 'storyteller'. Story analysts might focus on content, through structural or content analysis for example, or on how the narrative comes about, through performative or interactive analysis. On the other hand, for researchers as story-tellers "analysis is the story" (Smith & Sparkes, 2008b: 24). Researchers working in this way might move back and forth between form and content during analysis and employ 'creative analytics processes' such as re-storying the accounts, or producing their own narratives. Conceptually different from the idea a researcher can reveal the 'reality' of a story through close analysis, the constructive role of the researcher is highlighted, "thus, narrative analysis becomes explicitly a representation project and writing is considered a method of analysis" (Smith & Sparkes, 2008b: 21). However, a crucial element of a narrative typology is that it acts as a guide rather than a prescriptive document. It would be wrong to seek out a strict narrative 'framework' and there are other qualitative methods that are more in line with this way of approaching research. As the authors explain:

> "…the typology is not meant to be hierarchical or evaluative. In practice, different approaches may be combined; they are not mutually exclusive and, as with all typologies, boundaries are fuzzy. (Smith & Sparkes, 2008b: 20).

This is a theme picked up by Mishler (1995) in his typology of narrative analysis, which he describes as a 'flawed' guide and warns against viewing descriptions of various narrative approaches as providing mutually exclusive ways of working or set formulas. Mishler writes that narrative analysis will "always

include a multiplicity and diversity of approaches" (p. 88). As a researcher, this diversity has lead me to think clearly about the narrative approach I used; how this differs to other approaches; the rationale for working in a certain way; and how I communicate this approach. Mishler's typology includes approaches to narrative analysis which focus on the temporal ordering of stories, 'coherence' or the 'point' of a story. Similary to Squire et al's (2008) description of event-centred narrative analysis, such approaches might face the problem of seeing narrative as a direct representation or as "mirroring" events, rather than presenting a selective, socially grounded, context-based and partial account. At the more prescriptive end of narrative analysis style, content might be analysed at the level of its language, with stories requiring a recognised format of an abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, result of resolution then coda (Mishler, 1995). Some approaches to narrative assume there is a "match between language and reality" (Mishler, 1995) with researchers going as far as to tell participants to respond in a certain narrative form, thus taking a very prominent role in eliciting certain styles of response. This research moves away from that kind of approach.

3.6.1 Reframing narrative

Mishler (1995) discusses narrative competence in terms of 'high, mid and low', but as with my previous work with children with autism, there may be a risk of perpetuating a set criteria of what constitutes 'acceptable' narrative ability. In the case of this current research, young children may have a lesser grasp of semantics, syntax, vocabulary and the pragmatic elements of language. Making narrative synonymous with communication skills, particularly long tracts of spoken language, may risk alienating developing communicators from the research process, particularly in terms of narrative approaches. For this research, narrative is much more about the formation, selection and process around the development of 'meaning', rather than interlinked with language or communication skills inextricably. Squire (2011) argues that narratives which focus exclusively on a representation or mirroring of 'events', might miss important factors such as:

"(a). Talk that is not about events but that is nevertheless significant for the narrator's story of 'who they are'.⸝SEP⸝

(b). Representation itself. The uncertain, changeable nature of written, spoken and visual symbol systems means that stories are distanced from the happenings they described, have many meanings, and are never the same when told twice.⸝SEP⸝

(c). Interactions between storyteller and listener, researcher and research participant, in the co-construction of stories." (Squire, 2011. p. 2).

These three points connect with the approach to narrative analysis taken during this research. During the interview process I didn't exclusively seek 'stories' as some narrative researchers might. I am interested in all talk during the interview, how the talk is constructed as part of a group process, and the interaction between researcher and participants. Whilst the boys do tell some 'stories', the approach taken does not seek to elicit biography as a transparent representation of demarcated and finalised experience. My approach to narrative is nearer to Squire's (2011) description of the researcher who views "…narrative as the whole interview, or as a wider representational formation of which the interview is a part, [the researcher] may not be concerned with gathering obvious 'stories'." Moving away from the idea of researcher eliciting long biographical narratives, that are viewed a simply "descriptive", enables a focus on a narrative process, which constructs meaning, and how this process relates to context (Phoenix, 2011). A move away from long biographical event-based narratives also helps step away from "the tyranny of the transcript" (Squire et al, 2011. p. 4). A focus on "small stories" (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Squire et al, 2011; Phoenix, 2011) spotlighting the construction of 'meaning' and 'function' above singular, transparent representations moves away from a potential:

"…hegemony, in the narrative field, of interview-obtained transcripts of people talking, usually one at a time, often reflexively, about their life experiences; and the large, content-based, biographical and social interpretations that narrative researchers derive from such materials… The 'small story' argument… emphasises the sociality of narrative and its separateness from agency." (Squire et al, 2011. P. 4).

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This is a further move away from Mishler's (1995) description of 'narrative ability'. In contrast, this approach focuses on meaning created in context amongst participants, rather than arbitrating whether their narratives are long enough, in the correct format, singular or represent 'real stories'. The approach to narrative taken is more interested in construction, social interaction, group processes and meaning making.

3.6.2 Small stories

The idea that definitions of narrative can vary from autobiographical 'big stories' (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Bamberg, 2004a; Bamberg, 2004b; Georgakopoulou, 2006) is crucial to the narrative approach taken in this research. 'Big stories' are seen as representing or 'reflecting' events, whereas 'small stories' might not involve long tracts of language, but rather focus on construction of meaning, process and social interaction. Whilst some have pointed out the trend for focusing on these factors is not exclusive to 'small story' research (Phoenix, 2011), nonetheless the concept of moving away from a focus on language, long stories and autobiographical 'event representation' suits the nature of this research which works with young children and seeks to focus on their ability to form narratives, in relation to group processes, social context and interaction. As part of their work on 'small stories', Bamberg & Georgakopoulou (2008) offer a three-step approach for reading narratives. When reading a narrative transcript authors can read closely for:

1. The nature of the content and how it is communicated, particularly through how characters are 'positioned' by the speaker.
2. How the speaker positions himself, and is positioned by others, within the interactive situation. This step includes considerations of how the 'research' context affects the interaction and how the group members interact with each other.
3. How the narrative is formed in relation to 'dominant discourses' or 'master narratives'. In terms of this current research, relevant 'master narratives' would include those around gender, identity and achievement.

In their rationale for this approach to narrative analysis, the authors argue that:

> "Behind this way of approaching and working with stories is an action
> orientation that is crucially different from work with big stories. This urges us to
> look at constructions of self and identity as necessarily dialogical and relational,
> fashioned and refashioned in local interactive practices." (Bamberg &
> Georgakopoulou, 2008. p. 15).

3.6.3 The current narrative analysis

As discussed above, there is no simple framework for completing a narrative
analysis, which by its very nature can be shaped to fit the approach taken by
the researcher. Even authors who set out guiding narrative typologies state
different approaches might overlap (Smith & Sparkes, 2008b; Mishler, 1995).
However, in formulating and communicating a clear approach to narrative
analysis, there are some choices to be made as researcher. This narrative
analysis is designed with the following principles in mind. Analysis is interested
in the "experience-centred" (Squire et al, 2011) process of talk and meaning
creation rather than prioritising biographical narrative, or asking for 'stories' in
certain formats. The analysis is geared towards understanding how this
meaning is shaped through "small stories", moving away from a focus on one-
to-one, autobiographical, long transcripts. Story content is viewed as a 'function'
of interactional engagement. In other words, the content of the interaction is
part of the analysis, but content is viewed in terms of its role within the wider
group process and social creation of meaning.

This narrative analysis consciously moves away from 'coding' data in order to
generate themes. Themes are of interest, but fracturing the data through a
process of 'systematic coding' (Braun & Clarke, 2006) differs from a more
descriptive approach to themes, which can still move between interpretation
and 'text' in order to generate explanations (Squire, 2011). This principle
distinguishes a narrative approach from some other qualitative analysis
techniques, which may seek to mirror quantitative language of coding and

counting, rather than foregrounding the researcher as linked to participants in a contextually based social creation of meaning. As Squire writes, thinking in terms of themes:

> "…may not seem at first to differ greatly from many other qualitative procedures, for instance a thematic content analysis. However, experience-centred narrative analysis is distinguished by its attention to the sequencing and progression of themes within interviews, their transformation and resolution. Thus, it foregrounds the specifically narrative aspects of texts' meanings." (Squire, 2011. p. 5).

The narrative analysis is based on Bamberg & Georgakopoulou's (2008) three-stage model for analysing narrative. The rationale for this approach is an approach which highlights social and interactive group processes; moves away from fractured coding in favour of the progression of themes; accepts the role of researcher and the research context as central to the reading of narrative; understands content as a 'function' of interaction rather than isolating content as an accurate 'mirror' of factual events; highlights the role of the 'small story', as a focus on unconventional narrative form which may look different to pages of autobiography, and yet favour developing communicators or meaning generated through interaction.

3.6.4 Narrative analysis procedure

1. *Full transcription of the audio recording of the interview*. Transcription included my voice as researcher, and any interactions not directly 'related' to my questions. In this sense, the transcript focuses on something closer to the 'whole' interview, rather than simply the spoken word. An example of the transcription is included in the appendices (Appendix G).
2. *Familiarisation with the text* (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Re-reading the text and thinking about how it might be organised or interpreted. The whole transcript was read as typed in order to familiarise myself with the text and begin the analytical process.
2. *Splitting the text into 'chapters'* in relation to Mishler's (1995) theory of

text 'openings' and 'closings' "…that give a stretch of text of talk a unity of coherence." (Mishler, 1995. p. 91). These chapters followed a change of topic, often when I produced a new statement for the children to discuss. Using a chapter approach to openings and closing meant passages of text were organised without losing the progression, sequencing, resolution or transformation of themes (Squire, 2011). Each chapter was given a title utilising a participant quote from the chapter. The use of titles is to add impact to the idea of the chunks of texts as being stories, as well as allowing for organisation of the text.

3. *Analysing the chapters* in terms of Bamberg & Georgakopoulou's (2008) three-step model for approaching 'small stories'. This involved marking the text in relation to how the boys positioned themselves within their own comments; how they positioned themselves and others within the group interaction; and how their comments related to wider narratives around gender and education.

4. *Summaries of chapters presented* in line with Mishler's (1995) description of 'case summaries' in narrative research. In terms of Smith & Sparkes' (2008a) typology framing researcher as "story analyst" or "story teller", the approach taken is more similar to a story-teller. However, the story-telling I construct in the data of ten stories is an analysis, rather than simply a description of the transcript.

Bamberg & Georgakopoulou's small stories model uses the terminology of 'master narratives'. In order to constrain this concept into something meaningful for this research, wider 'master' narratives I considered were drawn from themes generated through my review of the existing research literature. These themes were:

- Stereotypical masculinity in tension with boys' holding positive attitudes towards education.
- Differences in how boys and girls relate to teachers.
- Differences in how boys and girls express their physicality.
- Differences in academic subject preferences for boys and girls.

- Differences in behaviour of boys and girls.

- Differences in self-identity as a learner for boys and girls.

- Differences in expectations of own academic ability for boys and girls.

These themes are not taken on face value as differences that exist between boys and girls, rather the participants' comments are thought about in relation to these wider narratives around gender and school. These themes were marked on a separate transcript of the completed ten stories (Appendix H). It was noted whether the boys' comments contradicted or supported wider narratives. The difference between the boys' 'stories' and wider discussion around the stories, including social processes was also marked on this transcript of the ten stories. In this sense the analysis involved an analysis at the stage of the transcript, and an analysis at the level of the completed ten stories.

I used Bales' (1950) 'categories for the analysis for small group interaction', as a social-psychological framework, to better constrain an understanding of the group processes during this three-stage analysis. This was of particular use when thinking how the boys interacted and positioned themselves and others within the group interaction. It also enabled to me to focus on my own role within the interview. Bale's model sets out positive reactions such as showing solidarity, tension release and agreement as well as negative reactions such as disagreement, showing tension and showing antagonism. The framework includes attempted answers including giving suggestions, giving opinion and giving orientation as well as questions asking for orientation, asking for opinion and asking for suggestion. These areas are split into sub-categories by Bale. More details can be found in the appendices. Bale's model was designed for a particular style of analysis. It has been used in this research as a useful tool within the overriding three-stage model of analysis in order to underpin analysis of the group interactions with a psychological framework.

3.7 Chapter summary

This chapter set out the aims and key questions underpinning the research. Links were made between a social-constructionist research perspective and the employment of a qualitative research methodology. The research process was discussed including methods, participants, data analysis and ethical considerations. This included a discussion of the group semi-structured interview process, utilising visual and physical methods. The narrative analysis process was set out in terms of a focus on experienced-centred narrative, reframing notions of 'acceptable' narrative to include 'small stories', and a focus on social processes and 'content' as a function of interaction. The steps of narrative analysis were set out including transcription, familiarisation, focusing on 'openings' and 'closings' through chapters, analysing the chapters using a three-step 'small story' model, presenting 're-storied' chapter summaries and drawing themes from these chapters.

4. Findings

4.1 Chapter overview

This section presents the ten stories drawn from the interview transcripts. The stories represent the chronological flow of the interview. However, they are analytical stories rather than simply descriptive accounts. Bamberg's 'small stories' narrative model is used to think about how the boys position themselves and others within their narratives, how they position themselves within the interview interaction and how their ideas might relate to wider narratives around gender and education. Each story has a title drawn from a quote in the text. The chapter ends with a summary of the ten stories.

4.2 Ten stories

4.2.1 "Like, girls and boys like different things"

This interaction starts with Jamie giving his opinion that "there are hundreds of different girls and boys. A thousand of them actually…" Jamie is offering a more nuanced opinion on gender than the stereotypical narrative that all boys and girls necessarily behave or feel the same way. Gregory shows agreement with this comment adding "two hundred thousand". However, when Jack states "girls and boys like different things", he seems more accepting of binary narratives of gender, and rejects the premise girls and boys are too variable to make simple assertions around gender. Through this comment Jack positions himself and other boys as fundamentally different to girls.

Next, the boys discuss objects that distinguish the two genders. Jamie gives his opinion that "girls like dolls, boys like Nerf Guns". This comment provides a more stereotypical view of the toys girls and boys enjoy playing with. Some of the boys argue about who has the most Nerf Guns at this point. There are elements of antagonism in the interaction, with some boys deflating the status of others and asserting their own status. For example, when Gregory claims to have "tonnes of Nerf Guns", Jack replies "no, he's only got three". Bradley

claims to have nine guns and Gregory disagrees "no you do not Bradley!" At this point I try to re-direct the conversation, possibly fearing this tension or seeing it as a distraction. I am positioning myself as a central to the interaction between the boys.

Felix claims that "boys like X-Box and girls like horrid Miraculous" the other boys burst into laughter. This is the first example of humour in the group, possibly used to release tension amongst the boys. Felix positions himself as different to girls, and as someone to bring humour within the interview interaction. Jack positions himself outside of this humour saying "I don't know what that is?", a comment I reinforce by saying I also don't know what Miraculous is. Felix excitedly explains that it's a very "girly" TV programme and if he refuses to watch it, then his sister throws him "in the door". This is another use of humour that brings laughter from some of the boys. Felix has also introduced the concept of being forced to do 'girly' things by girls. He positions himself as being in conflict with femininity within his narrative about Miraculous, and positions himself within the group interaction as a boy who will only take part in 'girly' activities under duress.

Gregory, who up until this point has been fairly quiet in the interaction, offers his opinion that "boys like Lego". This comment positions boys as liking Lego, and potentially girls as not liking Lego. There is stifled laughter at this point which, perhaps as a result of his uncertainty, leads to Gregory adding the humorous comment that "boys like…girly stuff". This is greeted by laughter from the boys and cries of "NOOO!" Similarly to Felix's comment that he has to be forced to watch 'girly' TV programmes, the boys are positioning themselves as horrified at the idea of liking 'girly stuff', and as different from girls. Within the interaction they communicate this through laughter, shouting, and the use of humour. This humour could be seen as a release of tension in relation to the sensitive subject of gender, as well as a unifying tool in terms of positioning themselves as united in their horror.

Toby gives his opinion that he "loves reading books". This comment is an exception to the narrative that literacy is a more 'feminine' subject and pulls

against the idea that boys and girls necessarily enjoy different subjects in school. Within the group interaction, this comment is rejected by Gregory, but reinforced through agreement by Jack. I pick up on this disagreement, highlighting that different opinions are ok. I am attempting to give orientation to the interaction through repeating and analysing what the boys have said. Jamie shows antagonism around this interaction, saying "I hate books!" He positions himself as someone who doesn't like books, and in opposition to other boys within the group interaction. This reinforces narratives around stereotypical masculine preferences in school, and differences in self-identity as learners between the genders. Once boys begin laughing at this comment, Felix reinforces this humour with the comment "girls like lipstick!" which causes general laughter amongst the boys, with various boys repeating "lipstick". The mentioning of an object associated with femininity causes prolonged laughter.

Bradley explains that boys like "X-Box, TVs, computers, computer games and spinning chairs." This opinion reflects a narrative of differences in the behaviour of boys and girls, where boys' taste involve games, technology and being active. Bradley adds to this narrative of physicality when he says "I want a spinning chair so I can spin around and fly at the TV." This active language is reminiscent of Felix's narrative that his sister 'throws him through the door', and involves active drama as part of the narrative. The laughter Bradley generates through this comment is a further illustration of how the boys use humour throughout the interview interaction.

Jack rejects the idea all boys like computer games, stating "I don't know what X-Box is anyway. SO I don't play it because I don't know. I hardly even play computer games". Jack positions himself outside the narrative that all boys like computer games, and places himself in a position of disagreement within the interview situation. I pick up on this nuance and question the boys in order to seek confirmation of this nuance. Some of the boys take issue with this approach shouting "No!" Gregory states that he plays "lots of computer games" and Toby states he "always plays computer games."

4.2.2 "Girls have boyfriends and boys have girlfriends"

Felix tells the group "at Sophie's I play X-Box 360 and GIRLS like spinny chairs so they can spin themselves into the wall!" This brings the language of physicality into his narrative. Felix positions himself as someone who likes computer games and uses the idea of girls being silly and hurting themselves to add humour to his comment. Jamie produces a loud fake laugh in order to show solidarity with this comment. Encouraged, Felix adds "and they like little beads so they can throw them in their eyes!" which brings more fake laughter from Jamie. However, Jack shows antagonism at this point when he says indignantly "what did he say? Because I couldn't hear, because everyone was laughing". Jack positions himself outside of this humorous interaction based on the idea of girls being hurt. Felix continues "boys like thunder but it makes girls cry" which brings more laughter from some of the boys. This positions boys as less likely to be scared than girls, and is a further use of humour based on disparaging girls in comparison with boys.

Through the shared laughter the boys are unified in the idea that this is funny. This laughter demonstrates solidarity with Felix's comments, rewarding his humour and raising his status within the group interaction. Jack continues to openly challenge the narrative of boys finding humour in girls being scared by thunder. He says "I do not like it because of that! I do not like thunder for that reason…I just like it." Toby adds that he doesn't like thunder at all. In a sense, this show solidarity with Jack's disagreement with Felix. Jack continues, seemingly exasperated with the laughter in the room, "I don't like scaring girls, I do NOT like scaring girls." Jack's willingness to contradict the generally unified humour in the group positions himself as someone who doesn't like the idea of making girls unhappy, and as willing to assert himself against the consensus of the group. Whilst some of the boys support the narrative that boys like thunder and girls find it scary, other boys are prepared to challenge this narrative by saying they don't like thunder or don't like scaring girls.

Jamie exclaims "I *hate* girls", positioning himself as separate to, and in conflict, with girls. At this point the first mention of physical differences between boys

and girls is raised in the group. Bradley says "girls don't have winkies", leading to a lot of laughter in the group. I say that this is true, attempting to give orientation through confirming what Bradley has said is true, and an acceptable topic. Gregory adds that "girls have daisies", leading to laughter from Jamie. I ask Jamie to calm down, potentially deflating his status in an attempt to regain control during a discussion of a sensitive topic. Bradley persists "but girls don't have winkies", with Felix adding "their willies are just flat things". The boys are positioning themselves as different to girls through a focus on sex differences. The topic provokes a lot of laughter, and I move them on to think about school rather than their bodies. The boys release tension through laughter, but in my role of interviewer I attempt to maintain control through moving away from this tension.

When the topic is brought back to girls and boys in school, Jack explains that girls "…play different things and sometimes they know more than others. They play different games and some learn more than others, or they know more". It isn't clear whether Jack is directly comparing girls and boys, but his narrative positions girls as 'playing different things' and 'knowing more'. His comments support narratives around differences in expectations of academic ability for boys and girls. However, Felix adds a more nuanced comment "…sometimes girls join in with boys playing…because no one else will play with them and sometimes boys will play with girls because no one else will play with *them."* This narrative suggests boys and girls can play together, rather than entirely 'differently', but there is an element of necessity rather than choice in his description. The idea of boys and girls playing together seems too much for Jamie, who exclaims "ooooh! they're going to be in love with each other!"

Gregory adds that "girls have boyfriends and boys have girlfriends". Gregory has been relatively quiet up until this point, the comment he offers here reinforces the normality of heterosexual relationships and the roles boys and girls play. Bradley adds that he used to have a girlfriend, and Felix adds that he has a girlfriend now. These comments reinforce Gregory's comment that boys have girlfriends. However Jamie attempts to deflate Felix's status in the group interaction by saying Felix's girlfriend is his sister. Jamie continues that "I've got

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a girlfriend called Sarah and that's a stupid name!" Toby says, "Jamie said they're going to have a wedding!" to which Jamie happily replies "yep!". Jamie shows some ambiguity about relationships here, undercutting other boys' claims to have girlfriends, accepting he has a girlfriend but adding she has a stupid name, before agreeing he is going to marry her. His use of humour suggests this is not an area he is entirely comfortable talking about. This may also be true for some of the boys who remained quiet during conversations around sex differences and relationships. Through remaining quiet, they were possibly revealing their tension through withdrawing from the interview interaction.

4.2.3 "Normally girls be teachers, not boys"

I tell the boys that I went to another school and some of the children said "I want to be a teacher when I grow up" I use questioning to gain the boys' opinions through asking them whether boys, girls or both genders made the statement. Some of the boys answer 'girls'. I use questioning to repeat what the boys have said and ask them to give more information. Toby clarifies and confirms the belief girls want to be teachers by adding "because normally girls be teachers not boys". Felix concurs when he says "because normally boys don't like being teachers." Together Felix and Toby are supporting a narrative that females are more likely to become teachers than males, and that males don't like teaching. This positions females more closely with education, and positions men as somewhat outside the experience of education. This relates to wider narratives that stereotypical masculinity is somehow at odds with engaging with education. When Gregory adds "oh! someone…my grandad is a teacher" he is evaluating the previous comments by giving an opinion related to his own experience. He is giving an example of how males do indeed teach in schools. This contradicts the narrative being formed and positions both males and females as being associated with education.

Jamie interrupts with the statement "oh I hate girls!", he is positioning himself antagonistically within the interview situation and as in opposition to girls. I use questioning to extend Jamie's opinion that boys are more likely to want to be teachers. He replies "because they like being teachers and they like bossing

everyone around! Like Mr Bossy Teacher! Like Mr Cross Teacher!" Felix replies humorously, "like Mr Granny Teacher!" Jamie's comments suggest that male teachers are seen as bossy and cross, this positions female teachers as less bossy and cross than their male counterparts. Felix's concept of a male granny teacher uses humour to present the absurd idea of a teacher both strict, feeble, male and female. This could relate to the previous conversation about sex roles and gender stereotypes, he is playing with the idea of gender roles within education. Jack shows disapproval of this humour saying "that is *not* funny". This disagreement illustrates that the boys don't always show complete consensus in how they approach the interview interaction and their opinions on gender.

Attempting to give orientation to the interaction, I repeat what the boys have said but also question why no one has said "boys and girls" want to be teachers. Jack answers "oh I think boys and girls because boys and girls can do it". This challenges the idea that females prefer teaching. It may have been that Jack was led by my comment, or it may be that he felt safe in having this opinion after I have opened up the concept. Felix maintains that he thinks "just girls" would like to be teachers. Jack uses anecdotal experience to back up his opinion when he says "because I've seen a boy teacher and a girl teacher." This analysis positions both males and females as possible teachers and positions Jack as someone prepared to argue with the consensus in the interview interaction. There is complexity in the boys' discussion in terms of how it relates to wider narratives of how masculinity and femininity fit with education, and particularly primary education. The boys are able to draw on their experiences to move away from earlier binary notions that "boys don't like being teachers".

4.2.4 "I know a boy who's really good at maths"

I ask the boys whether girls, boys or both said they were good at maths. Jamie gives his opinion "boys, because they're always working". Gregory continues "yeah I want to be a teacher when I'm older but I'm not older yet". Gregory is associating himself with education, something he didn't do when we were

talking about whether boys or girls wanted to be teacher. It may be that the mention of boys working hard makes him feel safe to position himself this way within the interview. I use questioning to elicit analysis around the boys' answers. Jack answers "I know a boy who's really good at maths, he's in our class, he's *really* good at it". Jack doesn't position himself as good at maths, but he uses the anecdotal example of a boy in his class to suggest boys can be good at maths. Toby adds "and I've seen really good girls at maths". This comment isn't a disagreement as such, it seems to orientate Jack's comment by adding further information. At this point in the interview, there is an element of nuance in the conversation, moving away from binary notions of gender towards the idea that both boys and girls can be good at maths. These opinions seem to relate to the boys own anecdotal experiences rather than general principles. For example, when I ask Felix why he has said boys are good at maths he replies "because *I'm* good at maths". However, he is positioning himself as good at maths, and he is prepared to discuss this within the interview interaction.

In comparison with previous discussions around gender differences earlier in the interview, the boys seem more comfortable at this point of the discussion. They seem able to contain nuance, give different opinions without shouting over each other and the use of humour is reduced. This may be too much for Jamie who interjects to announce the reason Felix is good at maths is because he "copies girls". This deflating of Felix's status comes directly after Felix has accepted he is good at an academic school subject and used this experience to back up his view boys are good at maths. It may be that Jamie disapproves of this narrative or is made uncomfortable by it, and is showing antagonism for this reason. After a brief flurry of disagreement Jamie ends up fairly isolated within this interaction, as Toby continues "I think girls and boys because I've seen lots of boys being really good at maths *and* lots of girls being good at maths". I orientate this comment by adding "so Toby thinks both", which leads to Felix saying "I actually do as well". This continues the feeling of nuance and moving away from binary gender stereotypes. Some boys are quiet at this point, which could be seen as a sign of tension, as they have withdrawn from the conversation. On the other hand, Jamie's feeling of tension boils over as Felix

and Toby agree together, and he lets out a long, loud "waaaaaaah!"

4.2.5 "It's not my fault, it's my brain's fault"

I ask the boys whether girls, boys or both said they were good at spelling. Bradley, Gregory, Toby and Felix all say "girls" one after the other. It may be that the agreement they show is based on positioning themselves as the same within the interview interaction. Possibly as an attempt to show further antagonism, Jamie says "boys and girls" before Jack agrees with the other boys "definitely girls, just girls!" This agreement is different from the conversation around maths, where there was a more nuanced discussion around boys and girls having individual strengths in relation to maths. Bradley gives evidence to back up his view that girls are good at spelling, "because they're good at figuring them out like Lucy is…" Felix adds that another girl is also good at spelling. This serves to position girls as good at spelling, which relates to the wider narrative of different subject strengths for boys and girls. It also positions Felix and Bradley as being in agreement during the interview.

Gregory, who has not spoken for a while, mentions that Bradley is also good at spelling. This is a rare example of one of the boys showing solidarity during the interview process through raising the status of another participant. Up until this point there have been more disagreements and attempts to deflate the status of others. Bradley appears unable to accept this compliment, saying "no not me. I'm rubbish. And like Sarah…" Further to positioning girls as good at spelling, he positions himself as being 'rubbish' at spelling and resists the solidarity shown by Gregory. Jamie attempts to say that he is good at spelling but Bradley says no "because you're not a girl are you!" Bradley is trying to explain that girls are good at spelling, other boys positioning themselves as good at spelling, or positioning him as good at spelling contradicts the narrative he is forming. This relates to wider narratives of differences in self-identity as a learner for boys and girls.

Felix adds an element of competitive speed to his argument around spelling, "so I think just girls, because Lucy, when she just gets started, DOT she's

DONE". This suggests Felix has a fairly low expectation of boys' ability to 'compete' with girls at this level. At this point I ask for the boys' opinion on whether boys in general are good at spelling. Toby and Felix name themselves but Jack says "I'm not that good". Felix reiterates that he is good at spelling. Bradley, echoing Jack's language says "I'm not that good" and Felix, changing his account slightly says "I'm not sure." It seems that the boys influence each other in deciding whether they will claim to be good at spelling or not, their language overlaps and Felix moves from claiming to be good at spelling twice, to feeling he isn't sure. In the interview interaction it seems the boys are looking for agreement at this point and Felix may feel a bit exposed positioning himself as good at spelling when his peers take a different view of themselves.

Jamie shows a rare moment of solidarity with Felix saying "Felix is [good at spelling] because I saw his writing today and that was a-mazing". Felix replies that he also saw Jamie's writing and thought it was amazing too. I raise both the boys' status in the interaction by commenting that it was a nice thing for them to say, I then question the boys as to whether it is good to be "good at school work". Felix and Toby say yes, whilst Jack adds "yes, I love school so much". Bradley and Felix say they don't like school work and Jamie adds that he "hates" school work. The boys are able to contain this difference without arguing, and Jack is able to say he enjoys school without anyone attempting to deflate his status, through making fun of him for example. This exchange contradicts narratives that masculinity is in tension with doing well at school. The boys compliment each other's' skills at writing, before Jack states that he 'loves' school. Whilst Jamie pulls away from this, it demonstrates the boys are able to hold their own views around school, rather than being exclusively led by what they 'should' think or feel.

Bradley adds "sometimes I don't listen and it's not my fault, it's my brain's fault…I just try to listen really carefully and then POOP! someone talks." Bradley is positioning himself as quite helpless in this narrative. In this account, he tries to work but factors outside of his control, such as the environment and his brain make it hard for him to feel successful in school. Gregory, who has been relatively quiet, points to some blood on a tissue that has come from his nose. It

could be that he is showing some tension in the interaction through seeking help with his physical needs and hinting that he would like to withdraw briefly. I reassure him and let him know if it gets any worse he can go to the toilet.

4.2.6 "They do a back-flip and all their writing comes out their ideas!"

I ask the participants whether boys, girls or both said "I work really hard at school". Relying on his own personal experience, Jamie shouts "ooooh me!" and all of the boys point to the picture of boys. It could be that within the interview interaction the boys have followed each other's lead. When I question the boys as to whether girls also work hard, Gregory, Jack and Bradley change their answer to both. This seems a rather passive acceptance, potentially lead by my question and the desire to get a 'correct' answer within the interview. When Jamie insists boys work harder in school, Bradley reverts to his original decision and agrees with Jamie. This suggests his view is fluid and relatively dependent on the reactions of his peers during their answers to the question. When I ask Bradley why he has changed his mind back to boys he answers humorously "because they do a back flip". This return to the use of humour causes Jamie to laugh, and possibly relates to the tension of uncertainty around the positioning of the boys at this point. When I probe this answer as not quite making sense, Jamie adds "they try to do a back flip and write their work, they do a back flip and all their writing comes out of their ideas!" Jamie reinforces the humour in the interaction and makes links between the physical act of boys doing a back flip and writing frenetically spilling out of "their ideas".

Felix, who has had less to say in relation to this question, adds to the conversation at this point. He says "I think boys and girls work really hard because when we do maths I just write really fast, and Jamie and Gregory and Toby and Bradley and Jack and me do and some girls do". Felix is positioning himself as part of a gender who can work hard in school, but recognises this doesn't mean girls don't work hard too. By naming all the boys in the group he is positioning them as united in the interview interaction. This process has been hinted at with humour, displays of solidarity and agreement but this is the first time it has been made explicit by naming the boys as all having the ability to

'work hard' in school. Gregory asks to get a tissue for the speck of blood on his nose again. It seems to be distracting him from the interview at this point.

4.2.7 "Mine's perfectly awesome"

I ask the boys whether boys, girls or both said "I'm good at school tests". Felix continues positioning boys and girls as similar in their abilities, explaining "I think everyone is good at school tests in our class because everyone is great and they just write really fast". Similarly to previous examples, Felix's opinion is based on anecdotal experience of what he has seen in his class rather than a general principle about gender. His narrative contradicts binary notions of boys and girls have different identities as learners and that boys and girls behave differently in school. I ask Jamie if he is good at school tests and he continues to respond using humour, producing a fake scream rather than answering directly. When I ask Gregory if he is good at school tests, he answers impatiently "yes". He still seems concerned with his nose and positions himself outside the interaction somewhat. Toby gives a double thumbs up to indicate he is good at school tests, this is echoed by Felix who says "I'm DOUBLE" and puts both his thumbs up. However, Toby has second thoughts and changes his answer to "kind of" prompting Jack to answer "yeah I'm kind of as well". Within the interview interaction boys position themselves in relation to the way others' answer. When Toby answers first it enables Felix to show agreement, and conversely when he changes his answer it allows Jack to show agreement.

Toby continues quietly "I'm not that good at writing. All the Year Ones write a lot neater than me". Toby is positioning himself as having worse literacy skills than children who are younger than him. Within the interview, this sets him apart from some of the boys who are keen to demonstrate absolute confidence in their abilities. For example, Felix comments that his own writing is "perfectly awesome". There is not a consensus in the group around attitudes to writing, some boys lack confidence whereas others position themselves as confident and talented. Felix comments that "girls' is excellent and boys' is scruff and excellent". This positions boys as 'excellent' but in a somewhat different way to girls. Boys writing is not perfect, it can be 'scruff' but still 'excellent'. Jamie feels

boys write well because "they write a little bit scruffy and then they do the rest a little bit neat". This reinforces Felix's comments that boys' writing isn't always perfect, but Jamie still positions boys as being best. They might start with scruffy writing but they make up for it by being neat.

The conversation has moved onto writing rather than school tests, suggesting the boys see the written word as an important part of school work, and an important part of communicating their ideas. Bradley brings the conversation back to school tests explaining "I think boys because they do a bit and they, like, do it wrong and then they have to start again and when they're halfway through they ask for a bit of help…because when I did my spelling test I had to listen to the man really carefully and I had to listen to sounds". Bradley, is positioning himself as someone who sometimes needs to ask for help with work, and someone who can be careful. This is in contrast with some of the boys' narratives around being 'awesome' or being better than girls.

Felix adds that "boys write really neat until they get on the very last line but then some get distracted about playing and then they rush it a bit so it doesn't make sense, and girls do that sometimes too". Felix seems to be drawing on wider narratives that boys behave differently to girls in school, particular in relation to physicality. Felix's comments echo Bradley's earlier comments that his brain is at fault when school work goes wrong. For Felix, boys get 'distracted' from work, which also positions boys as rather helpless in terms of the effort they can make in the face of temptation. Felix begins by seemingly positioning girls as different, but adds that this can happen to girls too. In this sense the narrative moves from a focus on boys to a more nuanced narrative of how boys and girls learn at school.

4.2.8 "The girls were princesses and we saved them"

I ask the boys whether girls, boys or both said "I enjoy playing with my friends at school". Bradley initially points to the picture of girls, and when I highlight his choice he promptly changes to point at the picture of boys and girls, where the other boys are pointing. This agreement in the group interaction seems to

increasingly relate to more nuanced ideas of gender differences. Felix tells a story about boys and girls playing together. "We [group of boys] were playing a secret base game where it was in the stinging nettles, and we were spying on Jessica and we went up to her and she just shouted at us…sometimes girls be mean, sometimes girls be nice, and sometimes boys and girls both be nice". The story starts with a tale of spying on girls leading to conflict. The girl in the story is positioned as aggressive and the boys as playing a fun game. However, Felix adds that children of both genders can show different moods at different times.

Toby explains that "girls, like, play with their best friends who they've made up together with, erm they just make friends with who they thought it would be good to play with". In this story girls are positioned as socially able and willing to make friends with other people around them. This relates to wider narratives of boys and girls behaving differently in school. Gregory asks if he can put his tissue in the bin and comments that he has something to tell the group. When he speaks he seems unsure of what to say "I asked for the, I mean, the second, err, day, the second day, err, he, we, I mean, Felix got cars…" Gregory has been worried about a small amount of blood on his tissue and has been relatively quiet in the group interaction. He doesn't seem sure how to put his thoughts into words when he attempts to speak. It may be that his grasp of verbal language acts as a barrier to him fully joining in with the interview process.

At this point Jamie interrupts with his own comments. He says "when I was a little kid in Reception, Felix played with me and we played Teenage Ninja Turtles". Felix adds "the girls were princesses and we had to save them didn't we?" Jamie is remembering days when he was 'little', positioning himself as older now he is in Year One. Felix positions girls in a traditional gender role, as 'princesses', in relation to the boys who had to 'save' them. I question the boys for analysis, asking "do boys have to look after girls?" Felix says yes and that the boys had to "…get the princesses down from the chains and the dark energy was about to touch them to make them into evil. And we destroyed the darkness". Felix reiterates the narrative that the boys had to save the girls,

positioning the boys as in control within the game, and the girls as relatively helpless.

4.2.9 "So everyone is pointing at boys"

At this stage in the interview, many of the boys are wriggling in their seats and seeming physically restless. I ask if any of the boys need a "wriggle break". This introduces physical activity to the interview process, which up until now has been characterised by an expectation the boys will sit still in their chairs around a table. I stand with them and lead them through jumping, jogging on the spot and turning around quickly. The silence of the boys concentrating on the physical movement is punctuated by laughter. The boys sit down quickly when instructed by me. I have taken on a role similar to a teacher, offering them team points related to the school reward system if they sit down quickly. The boys compete over who sat down fastest.

At this point, following on from the physical movement break, I ask the boys who made the statement "I love PE". Bradley and Jamie relate the question to their own identities, answering "me". Gregory offers his opinion that girls might have said it, before several urgent voices contradict him and insist it would be boys who like PE. I ask why, and Felix explains that "boys normally do their PE thing and when they see the ladder the teacher says 'go climb up the ladder and down do the monkey bars on it'. And so they climb up, jump on the bottom, and then they swing, and they put one hand there and one hand there and when the teacher says 'stop' you just swing". This action packed account positions boys as doing 'their PE thing', and being very physically active. Girls are notable by their absence in this account of a PE lesson. Felix has become a bit of a spokesperson as the interview progresses, he is giving longer accounts than the other boys. Some of the other boys are hardly talking at all at this point in the interview, this could be because they are losing attention as the interview progresses. I ask if anyone disagrees that "I love PE" was said by the boys. Bradley says he still thinks the boys said it, Gregory says he thinks boys and girls said it. This is a rare example of Gregory contradicting other boys in the interview.

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Following on from the discussion about PE, I ask the boys who would have said "I love football". The participants express they all feel that boys would have made this statement, there is no discussion or disagreement. There is also no use of humour to release tension or distract from the topic at hand. The boys appear confident and there is unison in their choice. I point this out to them, saying "so everyone is pointing at boys". The boys are positioning themselves as sporty in this interaction, and positioning other boys as more likely to enjoy certain sports than girls.

4.2.10 "Where is Jamie?"

Sensing the boys are still a little restless, I ask the boys some final questions starting with who would have said "I'm good at reading". Bradley answers "not me, oh yes I am!" suggesting some mixed feelings about whether he wants to present himself to the group as someone who is a good reader. At this point, potentially showing his feelings of tension around the interview, Jamie withdraws from the interaction by asking if he can go to the toilet. He leaves the room for some time. When Jamie has gone, Bradley tells the group "Wednesday we had sports day, on sports day, I was really good at reading so I got a medal". Bradley positions himself as good at reading, and good at reading in a competitive sense. Felix comments that he didn't get any medals adding, "some people got three medals and I got no medals. I think just girls because Julia does reading and [whoosh noise] she's done". Felix positions girls as best at reading, his opinion is based on anecdotal evidence of a girl in his class who reads quickly. For Felix reading well also involves a competitive element of speed.

The interview is coming to an end and we don't really have a proper discussion around reading as I move onto the last question, asking the boys who said "I get in trouble at school". Felix answers, "oh me and Jamie". This suggests even at the end of the interview some of the boys haven't quite grasped the concept that they are trying to imagine other boys or girls giving the answers previously. Felix positions himself as getting in trouble, rather than making general rules

about boys and girls. He also positions Jamie, who is still outside of the interview situation, as getting in trouble at school. I use questioning to ask the boys for further analysis as to whether girls also get in trouble at school. Jack answers "they do, but not most of the time". Jack is making a general rule about girls and boys in school and positioning girls as getting 'in trouble' less frequently than boys. At this point a conversation begins about Jamie, who remains outside of the room. Toby says "sometimes Jamie is really mean to me". Felix shows agreement and solidarity with Toby, stating that Jamie is also mean to him. Toby asks "where is Jamie?" Gregory further positions Jamie as 'mean', adding "once he swung a snake and it hit me in the right eye". Felix adds "yeah and once he threw a brick and it went [makes exploding noise]". Bradley joins in with the other boys, "and last time Jamie was trying to, like, guard me, like trap me around the fence, and he was saying I was playing Bulldog and I wasn't and it made me cry and I was trying to tell the teacher and he wouldn't let me past".

The boys are positioning Jamie, in his absence, as someone who is mean and someone who gets in trouble at school. This positions Jamie as 'meaner and naughtier' than the other boys in the interview. Jamie has used a lot of humour and distraction during the interview, and potentially found the situation quite intense. At the point he removes himself from the room, this gives the boys there first opportunity to discuss one of the participants without their involvement. This may suggest a tension release for the boys who can position Jamie as naughty, rather than themselves. Through deflating his status they potentially bolster their own standing in the interview.

4.3 Summary of the ten stories

4.3.1 Positioning within the boys' narratives

The boys' discussion begins with a focus on differences between boys and girls. This idea of difference focuses on sex differences, toys, games and relationships. Boys are presented as being 'forced' to do girly stuff and as somehow in conflict with femininity. Some boys pull against this narrative,

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claiming not to associate with things like computers or scaring girls. When the discussion is redirected towards education, the boys are sometimes able to contain nuance within their discussion. For example, there are a range of views on whether boys or girls are best at maths and spelling. Some boys feel it is more likely females would be teachers, but when binary ideas like this come up they are sometimes challenged by other boys' anecdotal experiences. For example, boys mention specific examples of things they have seen to back up their narratives, or relate their opinions to their own abilities and feelings. Some boys are confident to say they love reading and school, while others express they hate school. In this sense a range of views are expressed and negotiated, the boys can agree but also express their own individual views.

The boys use the language of physicality within their narratives, people are thrown through doors, they spin on chairs, they climb ropes and do back flips. Writing comes spilling 'out of your ideas'. The idea of speed and competition feature in some of the boys narratives, for example writing or completing spellings quickly. Some of the boys express concerns they aren't as academically able as girls, but some also worry they aren't as able as younger children of their own gender. Some boys express anxiety around the way they learn, feeling easily distracted for example, but others feel they have abilities that are "perfectly awesome", and that boys' writing can be excellent even when it's "scruff". When it comes to physical activity, PE and football for example, the boys seem more confident in positioning themselves as more capable than girls. Some of the boys are happy to admit they get in trouble in school but when one participant leaves the room, the other boys take the opportunity to talk about his behaviour at school, rather than discussing their own.

4.3.2 Positioning within the interview interaction

Within the interaction, the boys rely extensively on humour, which seems particularly evident when the topic is sensitive. It may be the boys use humour to release this tension. For example, the boys laugh a lot when talking about sex differences and relationships. The boys also use humour to raise their status in the group, through making others laugh. Boys often agree with each

other, but also disagree openly suggesting the interview situation doesn't entirely inhibit them expressing their own opinions. However, at times some boys appear to have their views swayed by others, or by me, and change their answers rather fluidly. The boys deflate the status of others at times through mocking or disputing what someone has said. In this sense the interaction provides a situation where there is some element or risk to 'standing out' or moving away from the consensus. However, boys regularly hold views that are in tension with others. The pressure of the peer group doesn't appear to be the prime concern for the boys, who appear to talk about their own anecdotal experiences freely.

Not all boys seem entirely comfortable in the interview interaction. Some boys talk more than others, and some speak very rarely. Two boys attempt to remove themselves from the interview at different times. Gregory worries about his nose bleeding slightly and seems distracted during the interview. Jamie asks to go to the toilet and leaves the room nearer the end of the interview. The boys appear to use the opportunity of Jamie leaving to the room to unify themselves in rejection of his behaviour. In this sense they are positioning themselves as together, and also different from one of the participants. The fact they wait for Jamie to leave the room before doing this suggests they are not entirely comfortable doing this in his presence. The boys become restless near the end of the interview and we have a physical movement break. This break forms part of in the interview, and is a change of tone from the more 'school-like' situation of sitting at a desk in an adult-led situation. This highlights that part of the interview process involved the boys inhibiting their physicality, in spite of the fact the concept of physicality appeared regularly in their narratives. The boys didn't ask each other questions at any point, and I use questions in my role as researcher in an attempt to extend the boys answers and elicit further analysis. The boys often talk about their own isolated experiences or feelings, however they do sometimes reference the role of other participants in these narratives. I take on the questioning role as researcher and attempt to help them reflect on the answers they give. In general I am in control during the interview, and take responsibility for the topics we discuss. In some cases this is because I perceive the boys are becoming restless or 'silly'. In other cases this is because

I prioritise the questions I had planned rather than fluidly following the direction their discussion took to a full extent.

4.3.3 Positioning in relation to wider narratives

The narratives the boys produce relate to wider narratives around gender and education. Some of the boys produce more stereotypical accounts including hating school, not feeling able at school, enjoying football and PE, or feeling males would more often be teachers, rather than females. However, within the interview there are regular exceptions with boys stating they love school, love reading, or feel girls and boys can be equally able at school. The main stereotypical narratives the boys echo relate to their sex, interests and toys. It isn't totally apparent the boys have this same strength of feeling when relating their maleness to education.

The boys don't often discuss how they relate to teachers but there is discussion around boys not wanting to become teachers, or male teachers being particularly 'bossy'. The boys express their physicality throughout the interview, both in terms of their own physical action, their descriptions of physical elements of school they enjoy and the language of physicality they include in their narrative accounts. Some boys position themselves as active and needing to 'save' girls in the games they play. There are also a variety of views expressed in terms of how boys and girls approach different school subjects, self-identity as a learner for boys and girls and boys' and girls' expectations of their own academic abilities. Some of the boys' comments concur with more stereotypical versions of these narratives, but boys also challenge them through more nuanced discussions. The boys draw heavily on their own anecdotal experiences of education, and it is rare they speak from the standpoint of a general principle. It is much more common for them to back up their ideas with specific examples of something concrete they do themselves, or something they have seen happening at school. In this sense, whilst the boys' accounts may be shaped by wider narratives in society, the key factor in their narratives seems to be their own first-hand experience and their own experiences. Sometimes the comments the boys make relate to general narratives, the language of 'boys'

and 'girls' is used at times. However, the boys often speak in the first person, describing their own thoughts, feelings and actions.

5. Discussion

5.1 Chapter overview

This section begins with a summary of the research including the three key research questions, followed by a discussion of the findings. This discussion is split into three sections which follow the focus of each research question. Firstly, the findings are discussed in relation to the narratives the boys formed in relation to maleness and education. Secondly, the findings are discussed in relation to the involvement of young participants in the research. Lastly, the findings are discussed in relation to the specific social context of a group interview interaction. This discussion also returns to previous research literature on the topic of a gender achievement gap. In this sense the discussion of the findings interweaves the previous research literature with a discussion of the three key research questions. Limitations and implications of the research are discussed, including implications for EP practice. I write reflectively on my own role in the research and how the research process has affected me. The chapter is closed with conclusions drawn from the research and a summary of the research process.

5.2 Summary of the research

The underlying explorative stance of this research relates to the concept of a 'gender achievement gap' between boys and girls in UK schools. In order to explore this multi-layered concept, the research focused on male identity and attitudes to education for a group of young boys in KS1. The rationale behind this choice was that young boys are not always included in research around this topic. A qualitative methodology was chosen in order to explore rich data in a small group interaction, as opposed to seeking broad statistical trends. A group of boys were sampled from a small rural primary school. The boys were drawn from school year groups 1 and 2, with ages ranging from 6 to 7. A semi-structured interview was transcribed and re-storied into ten narratives based on a three level narrative analysis 'small stories 'framework (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). The three key research questions were:

- How do a group of boys in KS1 understand gender and education?
- Can a group of boys in KS1 have a 'voice' in the research around gender and education?
- How does the group interaction process affect the boys' responses?

A discussion of the findings, related to these three research questions, follows with reference to previous research literature on this topic.

5.3 Discussion of the findings

5.3.1 Narratives of maleness & education

The first research question in this thesis relates to how boys in KS1 understand maleness and education. Across the quantitative and qualitative literature, stereotypical masculinity is frequently presented as being in tension with boys' attitudes towards education, and their educational performance (Renold, 2004; Smith, 2004; Skelton & Francis, 2011). The research literature suggests that attitude, motivation and ability are closely linked (Logan & Johnston, 2009), and that boys' attitudes to school work may affect their progress, when the work is perceived as 'feminine' for example (McGeown et al, 2012). The narrative analysis carried out in this research doesn't seek to separate process from content. This research focus was always about how understanding comes about, as well as what the boys have to say in the interview. This research focuses on 'attitudes' and boys' 'voices', but these attitudes and voices can be understood as socially produced and subject to change. For the group of KS1 boys in this present study, there was no 'one size fits all' approach to gender and school. The boys held strong views around associations between masculinity and physical elements of school such as PE and football. They also had a strong sense of male identity, which they understood as relational to female identity, particularly in terms of their male gender and 'male interests'. However, in terms of specific academic subjects at school, such as spelling, writing or maths, the boys held more variable views. At times they boys were able to think through this complexity as a group, drawing on their own anecdotal

narratives. Warren (2003) draws a distinction between narratives about personal experience and more general narratives boys might hold about masculinity. Similarly, this current study highlights the differences between anecdotal accounts and more general feelings around gender. The boys in this study often draw on their anecdotal experiences, rather than making more general points about boys and girls. The boys in Warren's study were 10-years-old and similar patterns of thinking can be seen with the younger boys in the current study. The boys express their enjoyment of the physical elements of school, as well as using the language of physicality in their narratives, and becoming restless and needing to move during the interview.

Warren's (2003) themes of boys' conceptualisations of gender included physicality, action and bodily presence, in sport for example; beliefs around superior intellectual and cognitive ability for males; importance of the correct male appearance including clothes and accessories; biological differences; and relationships to school authority, the idea boys 'get told off more' for example. In the current study, whilst the contrast between the genders was made most stark in terms of the boys' bodies, interests, hobbies, their physicality and 'relationship' preferences, the picture seems more complex when focused on education specifically. Whilst some boys articulated they 'hated' school, or worried about certain school subjects, at other times boys were able to celebrate their perceived ability or express their engagement with school. The findings of this study suggest the boys' understanding of maleness and education contains a level of nuance, and differed in relation to the particular topic being discussed. For example, boys were able to change their views, negotiate meaning or challenge stereotypes through relaying their own experiences around education. Whilst there were times when the boys were unanimous, at other times they were able to hold different views from fellow participants, even when these views might have risked them being seen as less stereotypically male than others in the group. Most boys were able to accept girls and boys might both be good at particular elements of school, and back this up with evidence from their experiences. Some boys pointed out there are too many boys and girls to draw generalisations.

It doesn't seem that the boys made a particular association between being male and 'failing' at school. The boys weren't proud if they struggled with a particular lesson. For example, when one participant left the room they made it clear they disapproved of some of the more negative behaviours he showed at school. For the boys in this current study, there is an element of them seeing themselves as different to girls in relation to stereotypical versions of male interests, pastimes, physicality and relationships. The boys also see themselves as more likely to be interested in sport. This is in line with other studies (Swain, 2005), finding male pupils saw themselves as 'different' to females. For Swain the boys in his study saw themselves as different rather than better. In the current study the boys felt girls' interests are somewhat poorer than boys, found humour in the idea of scaring girls and talked about saving girls from monsters. In his study, Swain found variation in masculine constructs but argued that a dominant form of masculinity existed for the participants. He understood this masculinity as needing to be 'policed' and reinforced in terms of sporty, dominant, heterosexual norms.

This research extends themes in previous research literature highlighting that the differences between boys and girls are not completely binary, with many studies explicitly mentioning that not all boys or girls behave or feel the same way. For example, some girls have negative views of school, some boys have positive views of school. Children might give opinions that differ from stereotypical views of gender, and children may disagree with each other and negotiate meaning in group interviews and discussions. Similarly, in the current research, the boys' understanding of gender and education does not appear to be completely straightforward. The boys do not speak with one voice and their narratives are situated in a group social process involving a sense of interaction and negotiation. The boys held views based on their own experiences but these views are contradicted by others, and sometimes the answers given change fluidly with the mood of the group. Warren (2003) argues masculinity 'exists as a reality' in the lives of the children in his research. Whether masculinity is a useful term or not, the current research sought the experiences of young boys in primary school and accepts they may experience a sense of 'maleness' as part of their identity. Whether maleness is cast as stereotypical 'masculinity' by

the participants is not altogether straightforward. The boys express their maleness strongly at times, but there is an element of ambiguity in the interaction that challenges a more linear understanding of boys as 'disaffected' or removed from education. This is illustrated by the participant, who is particularly vocal about his dislike of school, being criticised by the other boys once he has left the room.

Whilst the boys in this study present a strong sense of their maleness at times, this doesn't necessarily provide insights into the 'roots' of all boys' dissatisfaction with education, as some authors have called for (Connolly, 2004). If anything, this study lends more credence to the notion boys' attitudes to education are variable, highly dependent on the individual and the social context they are part of. In this instance the context was a relatively middle class rural primary school. The boys were interviewed in a group situation, in their school, led by an adult. The results might be very different outside of this specific context. Furthermore, this study didn't seek out schools where boys were explicitly underachieving, as some other authors have done (Warrington et al, 2003). This research sought to focus on a group of boys, their narratives around gender and education and the group social processes by which these narratives were formed. In this sense it wasn't pivotal to find boys who were underachieving, nonetheless it is interesting to think if focusing on contexts where boys were falling behind academically would lend more power to the results of the research.

This study highlights the nuance, variability and social situation of the boys' attitudes to education. This develops the idea that male identity is not necessarily in tension with positive attitudes to education. The 'Boys' Reading Commission' (National Literacy Trust, 2012) argues that boys are not always given the chance to develop an identity as a reader, that adults need to encourage a male identity that is associated with reading. In the current study some of the boys were able to resist narratives that school was boring and talk about their love for school. This research highlights this nuance, and that some of the participants were able to maintain these positive views of school in a social interaction with other boys of their age. The Commission's idea that

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adults need to encourage this identity is an interesting one, as it raises questions around how my presence in the interview might have affected the responses from the boys. Whilst some statistical trends suggest boys are more likely to view elements of literacy as 'boring' or 'hard' (Clark & Douglas, 2011), the current research emphasizes that these views are not held by all boys. Whilst some participants stated they "hated" school, others expressed they loved reading or loved school in general. The boys were able to hold these differing views in spite of being in a group interaction.

Connolly (2006) calls for increased nuance in the comparison between boys' and girls' attitudes towards school and argues in favour of moving away from simplistic representations of boys and girls and their view on education. This current research sought to move away from comparing boys and girls, and instead looked at the views of a group of boys in their own right. The results of this study echo Skelton's (2001) notion of 'multiple masculinities', where the boys were able to disagree with each other through showing positive, negative and also ambiguous feelings towards education. This research moves away from the concept of a 'hegemonic masculinity' whereby maleness is seen as one particular mode of 'being'. The participants were willing to talk about positive elements of school, and the fact it is possible for both girls and boys to be good at academic subjects. The boys echo Renold's (2004) findings that boys might distance themselves from perceived feminine traits. However, this current study also found the boys were prepared to publically develop a sense of a "softer" (Renold, 2004) masculinity and in some cases outright reject notions of how boys 'should' behave.

Concepts of maleness and education may be quite different for each participant. Whilst they were engaged in a joint meaning making within the interview, it would be a mistake to assume they all think in exactly the same way. The boys are negotiating meaning in a specific context and their views may be subject to change as they become older. Hamilton & Jones (2016) state that there should be more focus on the differences within, and between boys. This current study extends this concept, highlighting that boys have different views from each other in the interview process, as well as accepting the

possibility they may change their views in future or they may have different views in another social context. In this sense Connolly's idea of 'roots' of male attitudes might become slightly problematic. It might be interesting to carry out a longitudinal study that follows up boys from KS1 when they are in secondary school. This would give a sense of how particular boys' attitudes adapt or solidify as they get older. This might make more sense than extending a general idea of 'roots' of male attitudes from specific samples of boys.

5.3.2 Including young voices in the research

The vast majority of the studies looking at male attitudes to education, focus on older children. The studies predominantly focus on children at the end of primary school and moving into secondary school. There are very few studies, quantitative or qualitative, which include children under the age of eight. In spite of calls for research with younger children (Connolly, 2004), this is the principal gap in the literature on this topic. Some authors cite the fact that very young children will have a more naïve sense of gender (Skelton, 2009), or give examples of young children being excluded from studies for 'not understanding' or giving the 'wrong' answers (Hartley & Sutton, 2013). This suggests a need to create a research methodology that anticipates and accepts the nature of working with very young children around this topic. For example, younger children's potential to be less verbose; to have a more limited vocabulary; to show an increased need for physical movement; to show a limited attention span; and ways to enable understanding of the research process and informed consent. Connolly (2004) discusses the idea of getting to the 'roots' of issues related to gender, identity and achievement by studying the beliefs of younger children. Whilst this current research can't be generalised to all boys, it adds something new to the current research literature. The study takes a further step towards Connolly's vision of seeking views around maleness and education for young boys in KS1. In this sense it develops the idea that young boys can be involved in the research around gender and education and considers methodological implications for working with boys of this age successfully.

The findings from this study suggest young boys of this age can have a voice in the research around gender and education. This isn't the first time boys in KS1 have been included in research in this area, but it remains uncommon. The boys in this study were able to talk about issues related to gender and education and connect these concepts with their own experiences. Gray & McLellan (2006) note that, within the literature on gender and achievement, limited attention has been paid to children's attitudes to school, and that the attitudes of younger children are particularly rare in the research literature. This may because some researchers lack faith in very young children to engage with the concepts at hand. For example, Skelton et al (2009) sampled Year 3 pupils aged seven to eight. They considered sampling younger children, but argued children younger than seven to eight years old theoretically have a less established sense of gender identity, and are more eager to express the 'right' gender identity. This current research goes some way to setting out how young children might engage in this type of research, and that their involvement is perfectly possible. It challenges notions of 'acceptable' involvement. There seems to be a paradox in the idea of wishing to hear the views of younger children, and how these views are formed, but feeling these views have to come in a certain 'form' to be valid.

This research set out visual and physical methods to help the boys engage with the interview, showed consideration to the children's attention span and need for physical movement and allowed the children to take part in a group interview process. In this sense the nature of the data collection process took account of the developmental stage of the participants and sought a flexible approach towards the nature of an interview. The narrative analysis allowed for a nuanced approach to the nature of 'acceptable' narrative and took account of the fact children's utterances may be shorter than those of adults. The data analysis process focused on the group interaction rather than simply on isolated verbal 'content'. The length of the interview was kept relatively short in order to maintain the boys' attention. I gave the boys a wriggle break during the interview so they could expend energy that might have been distracting for them.

The boys were able to engage with concepts of maleness and education. The boys' narratives were somewhat shorter than might be expected from adults. This is not necessarily a problem as the Bamberg narrative approach to short stories moves away from the "tyranny of the transcript" and allows a focus on narratives that might not be related to long autobiographical accounts. The group interaction meant that the boys were not expected to talk for very long periods of time individually. This meant that language, as well as meaning, could be shared amongst the boys. In this sense, the narratives presented in the interview were co-constructed and inseparable from the group dynamic where they were generated. Physical and visual methods seemed to help the boys engage, however it isn't clear whether they fully understood the concept of me asking children in "another school". The boys were more inclined to discuss their own anecdotal experiences rather than talk about general principles or abstract notions of what others might have felt.

5.3.3 Narratives within a social interaction

In line with the social constructionist research position of this thesis, the narratives discussed by the boys are inseparable from the social context in which they arose. The 'small stories' narrative analysis approach highlights social 'positioning' in interview interactions. Bale's (1950) categories for analysing small group interaction helped bring further clarity to understanding the way narrative content was underpinned by social processes. The boys used a range of techniques including solidarity, tension release and agreement. The boys also disagreed, show tension during the interview and, at times, antagonism. Most boys happily gave their opinions but the use of questioning during the interview was initiated exclusively by me. The boys didn't question each other or question me. Hartley & Sutton (2013) explain that children as young as four can conform to 'in-group' bias. The boys in this study showed that sometimes they were swayed by each other's answers and the effects of working together in a group. However, at other times boys were able to stake their claim to views that differed from the group consensus, or stereotypical notions of boys being 'disenchanted' with school (Connolly, 2006). This is

important as it is a further move away from the simplistic language around boys not enjoying education.

I played a central role in the group interaction as I lead the boys through the interview process, deciding the topics that would be discussed and when to move on. I questioned the boys' responses and sometimes it seemed the boys changed their answers in response to my questioning. The interaction was similar to other interactions the boys would experience at school, whereby the participants found themselves in an adult-led situation, with rules to follow within a small group situation in their school. It is interesting to question how the boys might have answered differently if they were at home, or in a one-to-one situation for example. Many of the authors writing on the topic of male identity and education are female. Feminist perspectives are a pronounced theme in the literature, offered as a critique of the notion of a 'simplistic' masculine identity (Skelton, 2001; Skelton, 2003; Skelton & Francis, 2011). My role as a male researcher will have influenced the way I approached this research, it may also have influenced the way the boys answered during the interview interaction. It is possible they would have answered differently to a female researcher. It is hard to say whether my gender had a large effect on the way the boys behaved in the interview, but it is worth discussing reflectively that within a social interaction about gender, my own gender may have impacted responses from the boys. In a sense this is an inescapable part of qualitative research, which moves away from a more experimental approach to psychological research, and accepts and highlights social interaction and the centrality of the researcher.

Frosh et al (2011) reported that children saw group interviews as being more fun and free, without the feeling of being 'singled out'. Similarly, in the current study the boys generally engaged with the group interview process, and there were signs not all the boys were completely content with fitting themselves into a stereotypical male identity. Boys were able to move away from the 'pressure to conform to gender stereotyped viewpoints' (Myhill & Jones, 2006) in spite of being interviewed alongside their peers. These ideas were negotiated within the interview, which could be understood as a process of 'production and

performance' of male identity (Skelton & Francis, 2011). Some boys spoke more than others during the interview and at times some of the boys fell silent. Two boys showed a desire to leave the room at different times. Generally the boys were talkative, there was a lot of laughter during the interview process and no one got openly upset or agitated.

To an extent, identity in this current study is 'policed' (Swain, 2005) through the process of a group interaction. The participants showed solidarity with others they agreed with, laughed at ideas they viewed as absurd and deflated the status of boys they disagreed with. However, the boys maintained the ability to negotiate narratives that pull away from stereotypical ideas of maleness and education. This is particularly true in terms of specific academic subject interests and the ability boys and girls might have to enjoy, and succeed in, these school subjects. Whilst the boys in the current study highlight biological differences between the genders, they didn't always feel males were superior in terms of their intellectual ability. This is in spite of being in an interview situation comprised solely of male participants, led by a male researcher. The boys seemed able to maintain a level of balance in their responses, despite being in a room populated by males. For example, through showing disagreement, challenging simplistic arguments and adding credence to non-binary narratives of gender.

5.4 Implications of the research

The findings of this research reinforce a move away from simplistic narratives around gender and achievement. The results of a small qualitative study can't be generalised widely, however they give us an insight into the opinions of a group of boys, generated in a group dynamic, in relation to maleness and education. The gender achievement debate is a contested topic, and has faced repeated criticism as a construct that is too broad to reflect the complexity of differences between and within children of both genders. This study extends this notion of complexity, illustrating that even within a small group of boys, opinions around maleness and education changed fluidly, were negotiated, contested and variable.

The boys presented a fairly unified sense of what it meant to be male, but it was less clear how they related this maleness to school and education. The young boys are developing a sense of identity, and in many ways their sense of this male identity was more rigid and simplistic than its relation to education in particular. In this sense a major implication of this research is to move forwards with a healthy scepticism that a generic concept of 'male attitudes' to education can be located within boys of any age. This sense of developing identity for boys in relation to their education suggests a role for parents and education professionals, including educational psychologists, in terms of reinforcing the variability in how children from each gender can approach school. This reinforces arguments, in the research literature, against 'boy focused' teaching in place of an open conversation with children from an early age in terms of the many ways of relating their gender to school and life in general.

This research reminds us that a focus on context and specific participants will yield specific results. I am realistic about how far the specific views of six boys can be extended, they represent the product of a social interaction in a given place and time. However, the 'content' of the boys' narratives was never the sole focus of this study. The boys' views around maleness and education are heavily related to the social processes and questions around a methodology that would allow them to take part in research on this topic. This implies that a focus on context is important when thinking about complex issues of identity, gender and education. Just as the boys' ambiguous responses disprove that all boys feel apathetic about education, it would be a mistake to assume all boys feel the same as the boys in this study. The implication is that a focus on context makes studying such issues more meaningful. Educational psychologists are used to placing an individual pupil in a wider systemic context. This research reminds us that thinking about gender and attitudes to education is well suited to this flexible, context-based approach.

This research has implications for methodologies that enable young children to take part in research around gender and education. It is clear from the analysis of previous research literature that young children are often left out of research

in this area. Some authors have called for this situation to be rectified, whilst others have felt very young children's identity is too fragile to warrant their inclusion in research on this topic. This research has implications for children in KS1 as a group of boys, aged between six and seven, were able to have a discussion around gender and education. The narrative methodology employed was flexible enough to separate the concept of 'narrative' from extended verbal output, in favour of shorter accounts and a 'mosaic of meaning' embedded in a shared social interaction. The boys benefited from clear visual explanations of research prior to the interview, a group interview that was relatively informal, chances to move physically, and timings that meant they didn't become too restless. An implication of this research is that young children can be included in research on this topic, but that their involvement and narratives might look slightly different to older children or adults at times.

Future research might focus on an extension of these small interviews across different schools in order to compare how boys' views, and the social processes involved in forming narratives, might vary across contexts. It would be interesting to explore the views of boys across KS1 to spot any patterns or variation in findings. This research argues for a focus on context, the variation between contexts would also be an interesting area for study. This research sought to explore rich detail rather than trends. However, exploring different boys' views in various schools, even alongside quantitative data gathering, might enable for more comparison and further insights into variation in boys' views. However, an acceptance of variation between and within boys is a key implication from this research, and therefore moves towards blanket generalisation based on further studies should be treated with caution. This research has implications for accepting this complexity, as well as accepting the role of younger children in the research, and methodologies that might help them engage.

5.5 Limitations

I acknowledge that as a researcher I am heavily present in the research in terms of research questions, methodology and interpretation of findings. I don't

believe in the concept of a transparent researcher and accept that the findings of this study are open to various interpretations. With this in mind I have an awareness that the results I gathered will be affected by the choices I made. For example, I made a decision to focus on what particular areas the boys would discuss, PE, football, maths, behaviour and spelling for example. This meant that the responses the boys gave were somewhat framed through the lens of my own preconceptions about what was relevant to gender and education for the participants. I began the interview with a more open question around the differences between boys and girls in school. Whilst the boys drifted from education to more general gender differences, perhaps this more open style of questioning could be extended in the future. I made an assumption the interview would need to be quite tightly constrained, but perhaps this reflected a lack of belief boys of this age would be able to engage with the concepts at hand in their 'own way'.

I gave the boys the option of choosing girls, boys or both which may also have lead their answers in a certain direction. Whilst the option of both was given, if the boys were unsure about what to say there was a probability they would be directed towards choosing any option just to give an answer. Perhaps if the categories had been less explicit the boys might have answered more freely or imaginatively. There is a risk that the boys were looking to give the 'correct' answer or direct their answers to me, as the adult in the room. It has to be acknowledged entering a school in the role of the adult in charge reflects the norms they are used to, such as following a teacher's instructions. In this sense there was an in-built power dynamic between myself and the boys within the interview process. This is part of my interest when looking at group interactions, however it is worth asking how the boys might have behaved differently if the interview was carried out in a different setting.

The findings of this study are qualitative and not generalisable to wider populations. This is a specific study with six white boys in a rural, relatively middle class primary school. The study did not take account of intersecting factors such as race and class as the participants were sampled on a convenience basis. The purpose of this study was to move away from large

samples of older boys and work with a group of boys in KS1. The research followed up on these aims, however it would be difficult to extend the findings beyond the particular group of boys involved. However, what the study does achieve is an exploration of how to involve young boys in a topic where they are often missed out, and to look at the group processes and approach to gender and education taken by the participants. This invites further studies to extend the process began in this thesis, both in terms of involving children from KS1 in research around complex issues, as well as drawing a particular focus on how they approach gender and education.

This study involved one interview and I didn't check back with the boys for "their meaning" at a later date. The process of meaning making, particularly when analysing data using a narrative technique, can be highly subjective and personal to a particular researcher. In future it might be worthwhile returning to the boys with a presentation of the main findings, perhaps in a comic strip or pictorial form, in order to gather their feedback and reflections before drawing conclusions. This research is based on a social constructionist perspective and conclusions are not seen as final and permanent. The conclusions are seen as 'live' and related heavily to context, time and my positioning as a researcher. The transcript was annotated carefully, the narratives were analytical pieces based on a framework but the interpretation is not final and reflects my best understanding at the time. This is in line with the research perspective which moves away from the idea of knowledge as perfect, constrained and complete.

5.6 Research reflections

The research process has been an interesting journey. When approaching the subject of gender and achievement, I was simply interested in why boys might underachieve in comparison with girls at school. The UK Government figures around permanent exclusions, SEN and test results for boys and girls painted a statistical contrast between the genders. However, it became clear that this area is an evocative academic minefield, and much more complex than I first thought. As researcher I have had to embrace the complexity and reject generalisations around this topic. I also had to find an angle to approach this

broad concept, the role of male identity and how it might link to attitudes towards education for boys starting out in school. I am pleased I chose to work with a group who don't often have their voice heard in research, and I feel I chose a suitable group interview method, using a semi-structured approach to enable relative fluidity and flexibility throughout the process.

I have placed myself as central to the research in terms of research questions, leading the group interview and using a narrative analysis that relies on my own re-storying and interpretation of these stories. I am aware that this means the meaning of this research is shared between myself and the participants, and in fact the final 'voice' in this research is my own rather than that of the participants. I feel slightly guilty that without time constraints I would have returned to the boys for a follow up session. However, I feel I have been as transparent as possible and embraced the role of researcher as 'meaning maker' throughout the research process. I have not used codes or other tools to present the meaning as arising separately from my own subjective experience. I have set this approach in the context of a social constructionist research perspective, that ultimately accepts 'reality' is heavily linked to time, place and personal experience.

If I were to repeat this research I would more than likely move away from the underlying concept of a gender achievement gap. It is a much contested concept and it could appear that the purpose of the research is to raise test scores, accepting a narrative that achieving in school can be quantified in this way. There may be other reasons to place intrinsic value on the links between male identity and attitudes to education for young boys, enjoyment, motivation, and emotion for example. In this sense the underpinning of the study through a focus on the gender achievement gap may have provided a strong rationale for asking the research questions, but added less when it came to making sense of the data. I feel I asked interesting questions, sampled a population who is not always included in research, used the concept of an interview flexibly to include the boys, and challenged ideas of what can constitute an acceptable narrative or narrative analysis process. I have to accept time constraints may have

pushed my role as researcher in certain directions, in terms of participant selection and number of interviews for example.

5.7 Conclusions & summary

5.7.1 Research conclusions

This research set out to explore the attitudes of boys in KS1 to maleness and education. This exploration was set in the context of a perceived 'gender achievement gap' between boys and girls. For the participants in this study, narratives of maleness and education contain ambiguity, negotiation and nuance. The way the boys view gender and education moves away from a 'hegemonic masculinity' and lends more credence to the argument that boys' views towards education vary within and between boys. The research highlights the social processes involved in this negotiation within a social context. The boys' 'production and performance' of their maleness is linked closely with the content of their narratives. In this sense, their views around maleness and education are understood as co-produced and tightly linked to the social processes of a small group of boys. The research considered methodological implications for working with young boys in KS1, often missed out of research in this area. It was questioned whether children of this age could have a 'voice' in the research on this topic. The findings suggest these boys were able to engage with these issues, and that their identity as males seemed more fully formed than how this identity was related to education. The boys didn't speak with one voice, their responses were generated socially, reinforced or contested by each other, variable and negotiated. This ambiguity and context-focus are suggested as key implications of the research, insomuch as they reinforce themes in the research literature that seek to move away from generalisations around 'boys' attitudes' to school or 'boy-focused' teaching. The findings suggest young boys can have a voice in research in this area, but that the methodology and results might have to be carefully considered. There is also a need for an acceptance that meaning for children this age, and the social processes through which this meaning is created, is valid even when the end result may be different to what we would expect from older children or adults.

5.7.2 Summary of the research

In summary, this research sought to explore the perceived gender achievement gap between girls and boys in the UK. In order to draw focus, the research focused on male identity, and its relation to education, for a group of boys in KS1. A literature review of research in this area, across the last 20 years in the United Kingdom was carried out. Across this literature 'stereotypical masculinity' is frequently presented as being in tension with boys' attitudes to education. However, the notion of a gender achievement gap is contested, and there are tensions in the literature and a need for nuance in any analysis. A qualitative methodology was employed involving a semi-structured group interview and a "small stories" narrative analysis. This analysis focused on positioning within the boys' narratives, positioning within the interview interaction, and the relationship between the interview narratives and wider narratives. The data was presented in the form of ten stories, re-storied from the transcript, based on this narrative analysis framework.

This data suggested the boys presented a strong sense of maleness, particularly in relation to their bodies, interests and some physical elements of school. However, how the boys related this maleness to education in general was less straightforward. The interview interaction suggested boys' views were open to change, challenge and disagreement. The boys were able to negotiate their views at times, and their responses, often based on their anecdotal experiences, contained a level of nuance. Moving forwards this research suggests ways of including young children in the research on this topic, methodologies to make this possible and reinforces a move away from simplistic binary notions of how all boys or all girls might feel about school. The research argues for a close focus on context, differences between and within pupils, and attention to the specific social processes that link male identity and attitudes towards education.

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Appendix A – Overview of literature reviewed

Qualitative Research			
Authors/Date	**Focus of study**	**Methods**	**Country**
Frosh et al (2001).	Emerging masculinities.	Interviews with boys aged 11 – 14. Vignettes presented and discussed.	England.
Renold (2001).	Boys' masculine identity formation in the classroom.	Ethnographic study; two schools; two Year 6 classes. 59 children. Group interviews. Vignettes presented.	Wales.
Warren (2003).	Masculinity, identity, self-creation.	Observations; friendship maps; interviews. 31 10-year-old boys; 2 classes in 1 primary school. Comparison of friendship maps.	England.
Warrington et al. (2003).	Gender constructions; organisational and socio-cultural factors; intervention.	Four pilot primary schools. Interviews with teachers, head teachers and pupils. Vignettes presented and discussed.	England.
Renold (2004).	Further discussion and analysis related to Renold (2001).	See Renold, 2001.	England.
Swain (2005).	Boys' relations with girls during final year of primary school.	10 – 11 year olds; 3 junior schools; ethnographic study; observation; interviews – about a month in each school.	England.
Connolly (2006).	Male identity and education; early primary school.	Ethnographic study; primary school; boys aged 5 – 6. Three classes drawn from Reception/Year 1.	Northern Ireland.
Myhill & Jones (2006).	Pupils' perceptions of how teachers treat girls and boys.	Single interview question; 40 teachers; 144 pupils; 36 classes; KS1-KS4. Answers "compared" and discussed around themes.	England.
Skelton et al (2009).	Pupils' and teachers attitudes around gender and school.	Year 3 pupils and teachers. 307 pupils (153 boys, 154 girls). 51 classrooms, 51 teachers. NVIVO software; themes presented.	England.
Skelton & Francis (2011).	High achieving boys breaking away from	71 Year 8 pupils (12 – 13 year olds); semi-structured	England.

	'hegemonic' masculine identity.	interviews. Content analysis; Focauldian analysis of discourse using NVivo.	
Lloyd (2011).	Literature review; gender and achievement. UK.	Literature review involving sections on boys' perceptions and male identity.	England.
Hamilton & Jones (2016).	KS1 boys' perceptions of education. Teachers' perceptions of 'what works'.	13 primary Year 2 boys aged 6 – 7; 2 female teachers. Observations; discussion groups; semi-structured interviews. Inductive approach to analysis, vignettes presented and discussed	Wales.
Hamilton & Roberts (2017).	Exploring primary boys', girls', and their teachers' perceptions of gender and education.	Single primary school; 20 children; 4 teaching staff; mixed Year 5/6 class. Observation, discussion groups, semi-structured interviews. Inductive approach to analysis, vignettes presented and discussed	Wales.

Quantitative Research			
Authors/Date	Focus of study	Methods	Country
Whitelaw et al (2000).	Gender & achievement; pupils' perceptions.	Questionnaire data; single school; age range 11 – 19. 135 pupils. Frequency count, correlation and chi-square analysis using SPSS.	England.
Gray & McLellan (2006).	Boys' and girls' attitudes; primary school.	Year 5 pupils. 1310 pupils in 21 primary schools. Factor analysis of questionnaire responses.	England.
Logan & Johnston (2009).	Gender differences in reading ability.	232 10-year-old children in 8 different schools. Reading comprehension tests and questionnaire. ANOVA analysis.	England.
Clark & Douglas (2011).	National Literacy Trust survey of pupil' attitudes towards literacy.	17,089 pupils aged 8 to 16 drawn from 112 schools; online survey. T-tests; ANOVA; Chi-Square.	England
McGeown et al	Sex differences in	182 primary children 8 –	England.

(2012).	reading skill and motivation; gender identity.	11; questionnaire & assessment. ANOVA analysis.	
Hartley & Sutton (2013).	Stereotype threat & gender achievement gap.	Three studies: Study 1 n = 238; study 2 n = 162; study 3 n = 184. foundation stage to Year 5; fixed choice from visual prompts; test results. Quasi-experimental between groups design. ANOVA.	England.

Appendix B – Information & consent form for parents

Thesis information sheet.

Dear parent/carer

I am writing to request some time with your child as part of my doctoral thesis project:

Gender and achievement: exploring boys' narratives of male identity and education during key stage 1.

I am hoping you will see this as a really fun and interesting opportunity for your child to take part in a piece of research relating to education of young children in 2017. It is an important that all adult and child participants understand the nature of any study involving them before signing consent forms.

The key points of this research are as follows:

- I am hoping to work with your child as part of a thesis project I am completing as part of my professional doctorate in educational and child Psychology at the University of East London. I am currently working as a trainee educational psychologist at [council] and have had contact with the school your child attends.
- The focus of the research is how boys view their learning in school at a young age.
- I am asking your child to participate in a group interview of around six boys . This interview will involve a group discussion amongst myself and the boys around how boys and girls view school.
- The interview will last no longer than 1 hour, with the possibility of a follow up session also lasting no longer than an hour. Both sessions will take place at school.
- I will record audio of the us talking, however no photos or video will be taken during the project. The audio recording will be to enable me to write up what has been discussed after we meet and will be destroyed after it has been written up (July 2018 at the latest).
- The finished project will be shown to staff and students at the University of East London, with names anonymised. The name of the local authority and name of school will not appear in the research. In other words, there will be nothing in the research to give away the identity of your child or his school.
- The research is dependent on the upholding of strict ethical procedures and securing on-going informed consent from the participants involved.
- You can withdraw from the project or withdraw consent for your child's inclusion in the project at any time without having to give a reason.

- I have produced an information sheet for your child to help them understand what he is agreeing to take part in.

If you have any queries about this project feel free to contact me at any time, we can talk informally about the nature of this project so you are completely happy with what is happening.

Yours sincerely,

Barney Wade
27th June 2017.

PARENT CONSENT FORM

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge

	Y	N

HAVE YOU:
- read the information sheet explaining about the study?   ☐   ☐

DO YOU UNDERSTAND:
- that you are free to withdraw your consent for the study at any time during the study,
through contacting the researcher , school SENCO or university tutor?   ☐   ☐
- without having to give a reason for withdrawing?   ☐   ☐
- that the interview will stop if your child asks or appears uncomfortable?   ☐   ☐

I hereby fully and freely consent to my child's participation in this study

I understand the nature and purpose of the procedures involved in this study as communicated to me on the information sheet.

I understand that the investigation is designed for a doctoral thesis project and I agree that the University of East London can keep and use the data my family provide for the thesis purposes only.

I understand that the data my child provides will be kept **confidential**, and that consent is conditional upon the University complying with its obligations under the Data Protection Act.

I understand that on completion of the study my child's data will be anonymised by removing all links between his/her name and his/her study data. All audio recordings will be destroyed. This will be done before the thesis is submitted.

Parent/Guardian signature: _____Date:

_____

Name in BLOCK Letters: _____-

Child's name _____ Child's DoB: _____

<u>What is a research project?</u>

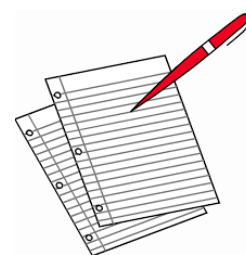Research means finding something out by asking questions.

As part of my learning at university I want to find out more about boys in primary school in year one and year two.

I would like to come into your school and talk to a group of boys about how boys and girls think about school.

I am going to find out about this topic and write it up in a project.

Saying No.

Being involved in a project like this is your own choice. Helping with a project like this is not school work.

You will be asked to write your name to prove to my teachers at University you have agreed to help with the project.

This is a way of treating you like a grown up person and checking you are happy to take part in the project.

Hopefully you will enjoy taking part and helping me understand about boys in school. But there are two main important things to understand.

1). You can say NO to any part of the project. If there is something you don't want to do you can say "I don't want to do that."

2). You can change your mind about helping with the project and say "I don't want to do the project after all."

Using a different name in the project.

Children that help with a project keep their real name private. They help with the project without other people reading the project and seeing their name.

This means the things you say will be private to you. People will read what we have spoken about but they won't know who said certain things or see your name in the project.

Project Agreement.

NAME: YEAR GROUP: DATE:

Instructions: tick one box for each question. If you agree tick 'yes' if you disagree tick 'no' or if you have questions tick 'I need more information.'

1.) I am happy to be involved with the research project.

☐   ☐   ☐
Yes   No   I need more information

2.) I understand people reading the project won't see my name.

☐   ☐   ☐
Yes   No   I need more information

3.) I understand I can say no to anything I don't want to do in the project.

☐   ☐   ☐
Yes   No   I need more information

4.) I understand I can change my mind about helping with the project.
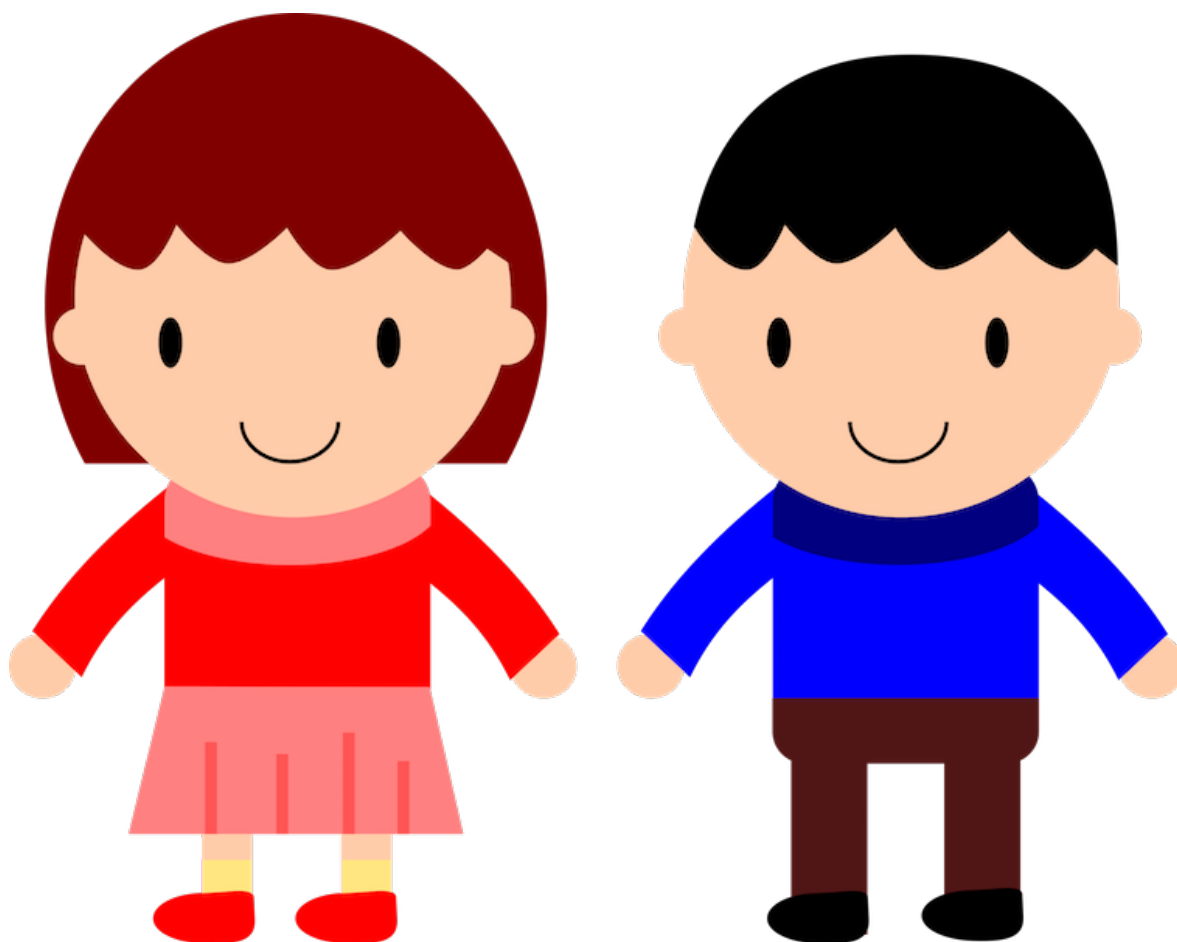
☐   ☐   ☐
Yes   No   I need more information

Signed _____

Appendix D – Sorting hoops used during interview

Appendix E – Images of children used during interview

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION **For research involving human participants** BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates

REVIEWER: Dr Zetta Kougiali

SUPERVISOR: Dr Miles Thomas

COURSE: Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

STUDENT: Barney Wade

TITLE OF PROPOSED STUDY: Gender and achievement: exploring boys' narratives of male identity and education during key stage 1

DECISION OPTIONS:

1. <mark>**APPROVED**</mark>**:** Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.

2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED <u>BEFORE</u> THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is <u>not</u> required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made <u>before</u> the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.

3. **NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY
(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)

Approved

Minor amendments required *(for reviewer)*:

Major amendments required *(for reviewer):*

ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEARCHER *(for reviewer)*

If the proposed research could expose the <u>researcher</u> to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

☐	HIGH
☐	MEDIUM
x	LOW

Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any):

Reviewer *(Typed name to act as signature)*:   Zetta Kougiali

Date: 20/01/2017

This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

Confirmation of making the above minor amendments *(for students)*:

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name *(Typed name to act as signature):*
Student number:

Date:

(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)

PLEASE NOTE:

*For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's insurance and indemnity policy, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

*For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's insurance and indemnity policy, travel approval from UEL (not the School of Psychology) must be gained if a researcher intends to travel overseas to collect data, even if this involves the researcher travelling to his/her home country to conduct the research. Application details can be found here: http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/fieldwork/

Appendix G – Sample of marked up interview transcript

█████ I always play computer games.

████████ look behind you! Computer (pointing to laptop)

Story two: "Girls have boyfriends and boys have girlfriends"

[margin note: p·1 validation]

Barney: Remember I'm giving team points to people listening and joining in. It's ok to have a bit of a laugh because some of the things we're talking about are funny aren't they but... thank for you waiting ████ off you go.

[margin note: p·p different games/interests]

████ Erm so at Sophie's I play on the X-Box 360 and GIRLS like spinny chairs so they can spin themselves into the wall! *[D·D] p·1 humour / girls v boys*

████ (like laughs raucously) — humour p·1 — agreement

████ And they like little beads so they can throw them in their eyes! *humour p·1*

████ (fake laughs raucously) — agree p·1

████ (Indignantly) What did he say because I couldn't hear? Because everyone was *laughing.* *p·1 — pulling away from interaction disapproval.*

████ And boys like thunder but it makes girls cry. *L D·D*

(Laughter). — p·1 agree

████ (indignant) I do not like it because of that! I do not like thunder for that reason. I don't like thunder for that reason, I just like it. — p·1 difference

████ I don't like thunder at all — p·1 — validating difference

████ I don't like scaring girls, I do NOT like scaring girls. — D·D — against
D v g — p·D p·1   p·1 disagree.

████ I *hate* girls. *disagree*

████ Girls don't have winkies! *p·p — physical difference ← p·1 humour*

(Laughter) *p·1 humour*

Barney: It's true.

████ Girls have daisies.

████ (laughs)

Barney ████ calm down a bit. — p·1 — moving on from humour

Appendix H – Sample of narrative stories marked up

interview, there is an element of nuance in the conversation, moving away from binary notions of gender towards the idea that both boys and girls can be good at maths. These opinions seem to relate to the boys own anecdotal experiences rather than general principles. For example, when I ask Felix why he has said boys are good at maths he replies "because *I'm* good at maths". However, he is positioning himself as good at maths, and he is prepared to discuss this within the interview interaction.

In comparison with previous discussions around gender differences earlier in the interview, the boys seem more comfortable at this point of the discussion. They seem able to contain nuance, give different opinions without shouting over each other and the use of humour is reduced. This may be too much for Jamie who interjects to announce the reason Felix is good at maths is because he "copies girls". This deflating of Felix's status comes directly after Felix has accepted he is good at an academic school subject and used this experience to back up his view boys are good at maths. It may be that Jamie disapproves of this narrative or is made uncomfortable by it, and is showing antagonism for this reason. After a brief flurry of disagreement Jamie ends up fairly isolated within this interaction, as Toby continues "I think girls and boys because I've seen lots of boys being really good at maths *and* lots of girls being good at maths". I orientate this comment by adding "so Toby thinks both", which leads to Felix saying "I actually do as well". This continues the feeling of nuance and moving away from binary gender stereotypes. Some boys are quiet at this point, which could be seen as a sign of tension, as they have withdrawn from the conversation. On the other hand, Jamie's feeling of tension boils over as Felix and Toby agree together, and he lets out a long, loud "waaaaaaaah!"

Story Five: "It's not my fault, it's my brain's fault".

I ask the boys whether girls, boys or both said they were good at spelling. Bradley, Gregory, Toby and Felix all say "girls" one after the other. It may be that the agreement they show is based on positioning themselves as the

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