



# "Pullin' Rank": School Violence and Neocolonial Hegemonic Masculinity

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## Abstract

In my research on school violence at a secondary school in Trinidad, I found that students and school personnel spoke often of 'rank'. 'Pullin rank' is an emic term that refers to a hyper-exertion of authority and power, and as the name suggests, it refers to a social hierarchy. In this article, I employ this term as an explanatory framework for the various configurations of hegemonic masculinity that I documented during this qualitative research project. I discuss how masculinities intersect with school violence, not only among students and school personnel, but also on a structural level. By focusing on both direct/material and structural violence, my analysis reveals a spectrum of what I call 'masculinist posturing' that is in itself violent and perhaps contributory to violence. Masculinist posturing, as I employ it here, is qualified as both dispositional/behavioral and structural. I posit that the instances of direct/material violence I witnessed are influenced by and nestled within a wider web of structural violence; a structural violence that has a neocolonial character to it. Thus the term: neocolonial hegemonic masculinity. The data provided in this article have been sourced from observations, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and classroom discussions conducted over a 7-month period in 2010, with a 3-week follow-up in 2013.

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**Key words:** Authority, power, violence, neo-colonialism, Trinidad

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- Researcher: So what else causes violence in schools?
- Mark: Fame
- Researcher: Fame? What do you mean by that?
- Mark: ...people might want to show that they are really bad...and that they have **rank** so they just like beat up people to look for a fame. (Student Focus Group 5SG, June 16, 2010)
- Ms. Thierry: School violence ... at least in this school, is really each person's ignorance really of how they view things and it comes about as a result of that old thing called **rank**, you know? And a sense of masculinity ... who is more masculine than the other, more or less. That is concerning the boys really. (Teacher Interview, May 7, 2010)

In my research on school violence at a secondary school in Trinidad, I found that students and school personnel spoke often of 'rank'. 'Pullin rank' is an emic term that refers to a hyper-exertion of authority/power, and as the name suggests, it refers to a social hierarchy. In this article, I employ this term as an explanatory framework for the various configurations of hegemonic masculinity that I documented during this qualitative research project. It is my aim to discuss how masculinities intersect with school violence,<sup>1</sup> not only among students and school personnel, but also on a structural level. The data that inform this article on masculinities emerge from a larger data set I procured while researching school violence in Trinidad.

My interest in school violence aims to focus on both direct violence and structural violence<sup>2</sup>. This dual focus reveals a spectrum of masculinist posturing that is in itself violent, and perhaps contributes to or perpetuates violence. Masculinist posturing, as I employ it here, is qualified as both dispositional/behavioral and structural. In my observations at my research site, I witnessed many instances of direct/material violence, a form of violence that is influenced

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by and nestled within a wider web of structural violence; I posit that this structural violence has a neocolonial character to it.<sup>3</sup>

The Caribbean region, per capita, is considered one of the most violent areas of the world (UNDP 2012)<sup>4</sup>. Trinidad and Tobago (TT), despite its economic prowess and international status as a high income, non-OECD country, is also one of the Caribbean's leaders in terms of violence.<sup>5</sup> School violence, rather unsurprisingly, has become an issue of national import in TT (Phillips 2008). Research indicates that school violence, and violence in general, has diverse causes/influences; therefore, there usually is not a singular cause/influence to which the violence can be attributed (Cornell 2006). In this article, although I hone in on my data pertaining to masculinities, it is not my aim to craft a causal relationship between masculinities and school violence, but rather to acknowledge that masculinities do play a role, and that it is of significance, for academicians, educators, and policymakers, to analyze this role. As Khoja-Moolji does, I too argue that "schools, teachers, and students draw upon this hegemonic construction of masculinity to legitimize and willfully ignore structural and direct violence in schools and, in doing so, participate in normalizing the relationship between violence and masculinity."(2012, 1)<sup>6</sup>

### **Research Design and Methodology**

In TT, the Ministry of Education (MoE) is aware of the types of direct violence that occur within schools. I did not wish to replicate this data. I was (and remain) interested in the meanings people make about school violence, as well as the practices and structures that influence school violence. I employed a case study methodology since it is commensurate with investigations of phenomena within their "real-life context" (Yin 2003, 13). My in-school study permitted multi-level analyses, running the gamut of the global through to the micro level of the classroom.

I utilized purposive sampling to choose the research site based on desired characteristics (Johnson and Christensen 2008): 1) school in an urban center (since statistics show that violence in schools occurs more frequently in urban spaces (Noguera 2008; Phillips 2008<sup>7</sup>); 2) co-educational (to facilitate analyses around gender); and 3) a post-independence school site (former Junior Secondary School)<sup>8,9</sup>. I eventually selected Survivors Secondary School<sup>10</sup> (SSS); one that is nationally known for its academic underperformance and violent notoriety. SSS has about 900 students (over 90% of whom are of African descent), and features a much higher number of male students than female students.<sup>11</sup>

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

I collected data from the beginning of December 2009 to the end of June, 2010 (seven months), and I utilized ethnographic tools such as observations, participant observation, student focus groups and class discussions, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. I conducted nine focus groups/class discussions with a total of 84 students, 29 in-school interviews (two administrators, four deans, two safety officers, one guidance counselor/officer, 20 teachers), and four interviews with high-ranking, Ministry of Education (MoE) officials. I returned three years later for three weeks in May/June 2013. During this time, I spent one week in the Deans' office conducting observations, and two weeks in one classroom (of all male students; 21 total). Over the course of those three years (i.e. from 2010 - 2013) I stayed in touch with some of my adult participants, and it is my intention to return in two years' time for another seven-month follow up with the students whom I observed last year (May/June 2013) during my three-week visit.

Since the commencement of my research study, I have written theoretical and regular memos and field notes; these, along with observations, interview

and document data, provide the basis for inductive analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

### **Theoretical Framework**

For this analysis, I merged grounded theory and critical peace education. Since one of my main research concerns is with meaning making and interactions, grounded theory provided a good fit (Charmaz 2006; Glaser and Strauss 1999). Grounded theory permits themes to emerge from the data. Peace education is concerned with both negative peace (the cessation of direct violence) and positive peace (the creation of a culture of peace through the proactive dismantling of structural violence) (Harris 2002; Reardon 1988). Critical peace education insists on the analysis of power dynamics and intersectionalities (Bajaj and Brantmeier 2011). Taken together, grounded theory and critical peace education facilitate emergent themes around masculinities and school violence but with a critical eye on structural violence.

In the next few sections, I briefly sketch why it is important to study masculinities, and what constitute hegemonic masculinities. This sketching is vital because a great aspect of my analysis aims to posit what I call neocolonial hegemonic masculinity, as both dispositional/behavioral and structural.

### **Why focus on masculinities?**

There has been much theorization of masculinities; in fact the number of studies of men and masculinities is increasing (Connell, Hearn and Kimmel 2005, 2);<sup>12</sup> although Barriteau contends that “Caribbean masculinities are yet to be adequately theorized” (2003, 325). However, this overall increase in studies may indicate willingness, and perhaps compulsion, to submit men to scrutiny. This submittal emanates from several sources: inter alia, the ruinous effects of

patriarchy, and desires to envision alternative, non-masculinist epistemologies and ontologies. Indeed, masculinities are being analyzed because masculinism has run amok. Masculinism attempts to ossify male domination by presenting it as unquestionable. However, masculinism is a self-corrosive ideology because masculinity itself is not ossified. Theorists posit that masculinity is not preformed (Messerschmidt 1993); that "it is rarely static or unchanging" (Parker 2002, 3). Kimmel conceptualizes masculinity "as a constantly changing collection of meanings that we construct through our relationship with ourselves, with each other, and with our world. Manhood is neither static nor timeless; it is historical" (2001, 29). Brittan adds that "[s]ince gender does not exist outside history and culture, this means that both masculinity and femininity are continuously subject to a process of reinterpretation" (2006, 51). Despite the ever-shifting terrain of masculinity, there still exists a hierarchy of masculinities, with hegemonic masculinity perched at the apex.

### **Hegemonic Masculinity(ies)**

Connell notes:

At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy. Which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (2005b, 77).

The parameters of what is masculinity may morph, loosen or tighten but amidst the new/er configurations there exists a masculinity that reigns supreme, because "[a]ll masculinities are not created equal" (Kimmel 2001, 31).<sup>13</sup> Hegemonic masculinity stakes its ground atop this power disequilibrium; it procures and sustains<sup>14</sup> this power by besmirching an array of other masculinities. Such debased masculinities are called subordinate or marginalized masculinities (Connell 2005b). Other categories of power relations,

such as race/ethnicity, class, sexuality also intersect with gender to foster complex social relations. For example, 'working class masculinities', 'black masculinities', and 'homosexual masculinities' can often be within the ranks of subordinate or marginalized masculinities.

However, heuristic considerations aside, one should be vigilant of reifying 'working class' or 'black' masculinities as fixed types<sup>15</sup>; Connell is emphatic that "terms such as 'hegemonic masculinity' and 'marginalized masculinity' name not fixed character types but configurations of practice generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships" (2005b, 81). It is therefore my intent to document the 'configurations of practices' within this secondary school that constitute what I characterize as neocolonial hegemonic masculinity.

In this next section, I briefly look at the hallmarks of hegemonic masculinity because they feature prominently in the data I present in my analysis.

### *Hallmarks of hegemonic masculinities*

There is much subjective space that permits men (and some women and transgendered persons) to self-identify the boundaries of their own masculinities, giving rise to a wide assortment. Hegemonic masculinities, because they occupy the apex of masculinities, and because they are self-sustained by necessarily exclusionary apparatuses and processes, are demarcated by a generally common set of attributes and manifestations.<sup>16</sup>

Kimmel asserts that "[t]he hegemonic definition of manhood is a man *in* power, a man *with* power, and a man *of* power; simply said, "[m]anhood is equated with power—over women, over other men" (2001, 38). This seems to be one of the major hallmarks of hegemonic masculinities: the ardent desire and drive toward dominance and control (Messerschmidt 1993).<sup>17</sup>

Violence and hyper-aggressiveness seem to be major hallmarks of hegemonic masculinities as well: "[v]iolence is often the single most evident marker of manhood. Rather it is the willingness to fight, the desire to fight" (Kimmel 2001, 35). Another hallmark is hegemonic masculinity's penchant for binaries, for othering: "[h]egemonic masculinity demands a binary, hierarchical view of gender in which masculinity is equated with power, action, dominance, and so on, and femininity with their binary opposites" (Ervin 2011, 71).<sup>18</sup> Linked to this is Adrienne Rich's (1993) notion of 'compulsory heterosexuality'; because hegemonic masculinity can only exist via othering and the distancing of itself from non-hegemonic masculinities, homosexuality and femininity represent real threats, with dilutive or debilitating potentiality.<sup>19</sup> The need to deflect suspicions of weakness and to stave off any manner of questioning or impairing of hegemonic masculinity often contributes to homophobia, sexism and/or racism. In the data I present, all of these hallmarks are apparent: dominance, control, hierarchy, violence, hyper-aggressiveness and homophobia.

In sum, hegemonic masculinity is a standard, an idealized state. It matters not that its full attainment is outside the grasp of most men; in fact, its elusiveness is its charm, lure and *raison d'être*. The competition that it engenders is grist for the general masculinist mill: "not many men actually meet the normative standards...The number of men rigorously practicing the hegemonic pattern in its entirety may be quite small. Yet the majority of men gain from its hegemony, since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women" (Connell 2005b, 79).<sup>20</sup>

Because of space constraints, I will not go into much detail regarding a historicization of the production and globalization of masculinity.<sup>21</sup> However, what is pivotal for my immediate uses in sketching out this notion of neocolonial hegemonic masculinity, is rendering a historical sense of the nexus of patriarchy, masculinity and global imperialism. Connell implicates imperialism as a major development in the historical production of masculinity: "Empire was a

gendered enterprise from the start, initially an outcome of the segregated men's occupations of soldiering and sea trading...The men who applied force at the colonial frontier, the 'conquistadors' as they were called in the Spanish case, were perhaps the first group to become defined as a masculine cultural type in the modern sense" (2005b, 187). It is this historicization of masculinity during European imperialist expansion that provides my analytical departure point to interrogate masculinity as per the Caribbean space. Reddock states that "[t]he Caribbean has often been described as the most historically globalized of all regions" (2004, 185), and as one of the major sites for European imperialist expansion, the Caribbean offers an ideal case study to look at colonial masculinities, which I will revisit later on when I explore the connection between (neo)colonial masculinities and educational structural violence.<sup>22</sup>

## **Findings/ Discussions**

### *Students Pullin' Rank*

In this analysis, I commence with student data from both 2010 and 2013. SSS has gone through several large transitions in the past decade or so: being transformed from a Junior Secondary School (where students went to school part time, and only spent three years there), to a full-day, five-year school, and being part of a national pilot program that was aimed at changing SSS's co-ed status into single-sex (all male).<sup>23</sup> This single sex pilot, after three years, was ended by the Minister of Education in 2013. I therefore have data from the students prior to this change (in 2010) and just at the time when the decision to end the pilot was announced (in 2013).

When the decision to change to single-sex was announced in 2010, I asked the students their thoughts on this, as part of a larger conversation about the influences (or 'causes') of school violence:

- Researcher: What you think about the all-boy business?<sup>24</sup>
- Students: Some boys might be glad. The majority will be small boys and they (older students) will want to tax the boys. The boys might be acting behbehry<sup>25</sup>...
- Researcher: I know. But eventually it's going to turn into all boys...What you think about all boys [being here]?
- Steven: That is madness because all boys...boys are just violence.
- Researcher: So all boys are violence? You are not violent. So all boys are not violent. What do you mean?
- Steven: In a different way. Like what happens in St. Gregory's College<sup>26</sup>; that will happen here as well. With all those boys, it might have some boys on the other side<sup>27</sup> (Student Focus Group with 2bSG, June 17, 2010).

In this focus group discussion, many themes arose: 1) the issue of older male students 'taxing' younger ones, 2) imputing mental/intellectual deficiency to male students, 3) construction of the equation 'boys = violence' and 4) too many young men sharing a space runs the risk of 'becoming overtaken by homosexuality'.

At SSS, several younger male students did hesitantly (and off the record) admit to the fact that older male students did 'tax' them. Sometimes, this taxing was to provide protection from other bullies, and other times the taxing was sheer bullying without any 'benefit' to the younger student. This seemed to have been especially compounded when SSS was de-shifted and there were students of different ages within the same class.<sup>28</sup> In such classrooms, older students (or the more physically developed) definitely 'ruled the roost.'

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As regards the second point, the male students seemed to have internalized that SSS is a place for 'intellectual rejects' (i.e. in reference to 'behbehry'). SSS is a school that is nationally viewed as a place for underperforming students and its violent notoriety.<sup>29</sup> Throughout my time at this school, students and personnel spoke often or intimated about 'rejection'. The school's Principal, Mr. Romany, added:

So from day one now, the status quo is telling them that they would have failed...[the students] come here with no sense of buy-in; they don't want to be here...the status quo...indicates that when you come to a school like this, you are like quote unquote garbage; you aren't worth much (Interview, June 8, 2010).

Internalization of this notion of 'disposability' may have powerful ramifications for student expectations of themselves and others. In an environment where academic success is not expected, this may lead to students 'acting out' in defiance, which further reinforces the national stigma of the school being violent. It thus becomes a loop. In TT, where female students, overall, perform better academically than male students, academic achievement may come to be perceived as 'girls' domain<sup>30</sup>; against this backdrop, the stigmatization of SSS, and the internalization of this notion of 'disposability' may sharpen the lines more boldly between the binary of academic achievement as female domain on one hand and academic underperformance and oppositionality to academic success as male/masculinist domain. In my observations at SSS, many of the boys who were considered a 'bad bwoy'<sup>31</sup> (bad boy) often did not have a book bag and if they did carry one, there were hardly any books in it. Carrying school books or appearing to be studious therefore seemed to belong to the realm of 'subaltern' or 'subordinate' masculinities, clearly separated from the realm of hyper or hegemonic masculinity.<sup>32</sup>

As regards the third point, the young men also characterized their biological sex as automatically implicating them in violence: "that is madness,

because boys is just violence." It is 'madness', thus inconceivable, that young men could share a space amicably and nonviolently. As one male student put it:

Da is it right dey, violence! Team ah man, yuh know when ah team ah man come togedder yuh know what dat does cause? Rukshun yuh know!... Cuz is boys. Sir, remember what I say! Dat goin and make real trouble! Real trouble; sir, if it was up to me sir, I would get outta here before next year. (Student Focus Group 4SG, June 14, 2010)<sup>33</sup>

Many teachers also agreed with the male students' predictions. Ms. Seepersad (a teacher/administrator) added:

[I]t is really a de-motivator looking ahead and it would have a lot of violence because you have all boys coming from Debe, Carenage, John John, Sea Lots where all the gangs are. So what you [are] really doing is putting all the gangs into one school... What I see is just more work for us, more work, more stress and rather than focus on curriculum, all our time would be focused on discipline (Interview, May 19, 2010).

Unfortunately, these responses from both students and teachers, in hind sight, seemed prescient. Over the three years since the implementation of the single-sex pilot by the MoE, some of my respondents (administrators and teachers) reported (in May/June 2013) that violence in the school had indeed increased. Ms. Seepersad said "the experience was horrendous; it has not worked" (May 24, 2013). Another teacher/administrator, Ms. Robertson, added "it was overwhelming; we were just trying to keep the peace rather than teach" (May 28, 2013). One dean, Ms. Jaden, commented that because of increased frustration, more teachers were taking their holidays, resulting in a scenario where some classes were often unsupervised; in my observations,

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indeed many of the classes in which violence erupted were often those unsupervised.

Therefore, the single-sex pilot project seemed to have fostered unintended consequences: frustrations among teachers; increased teacher absenteeism which meant reduced teaching time for students and the provision of more opportunities to fight while unsupervised; and entrenched perceptions among male students that “more boys = more violence”. The latter, I argue, has the capacity to reify unhealthy notions among young men regarding their capacities, or lack thereof, to bond with other men.

The fourth theme from the above quote speaks to the ‘fear’ of homosexuality, which, as mentioned before, is often an attribute of hegemonic masculinity. Having too many male students in one space is perceived as increasing the likelihood that homosexuality will ‘appear’/‘emerge’. My most recent time (i.e. June 2013) I spent with an all-male class for two weeks reaffirmed quite a bit about hegemonic masculinity: that athleticism, fighting/violence/aggression, heterosexuality, homophobia, dominance in relationships, and status, remain hallmarks of hypermasculinity (Klein 2006), a nexus of which helps to perpetuate the ‘Boy Code’ (Pollack 2001).<sup>34</sup> Those male students in basketball and who represented the school nationally on the basketball team were the objects of admiration by the girls, teachers and fellow male students. Since “typically, sporty boys have a higher status” (Swain 2005, 217), these basketball players were at the head of the pecking order and received a host of special privileges and preferential treatment from teachers and the school administration.<sup>35</sup> Involvement in high status sports helped “establish a normalized heterosexualized masculinity” (Martino and Frank 2006, 22).<sup>36</sup>

In this particular all-male class,<sup>37</sup> violence, aggression and fighting were almost incessant. During this two week period, this class was often unsupervised. There was lots of ‘play fighting’ which would often result in serious fights. Fighting was the currency on the masculinist stock exchange so to speak. When the fight

was over, the young men adjudicated who had won and each of the fighters traded post-fight arguments in his own defense, including minutiae regarding which actual punches inflicted the most pain/hurt. It became very clear that the physically stronger young men were at the helm of the hierarchy and were hardly ever challenged. The two to three young men who held sway at the helm hardly ever physically challenged each other; I suspect that they did not want to risk losing any hegemonically masculinist credibility, and a consequent 'demotion'. This was linked to the image of the 'bad john'/ 'bad bwoy'/ 'gunta'. All of these terms, especially the last,<sup>38</sup> were paraded often and worn proudly. Those not in the top tier of hegemonic masculinity were the ones who actually fought the most because those at the top had already proven their might; it was those not at the top who had to prove where in the pecking order they were located. The competition was often a tragic and sad display, and it confirms what Khoja-Moolji argues: "[that] boys who are routinely marginalized [attempt] to re-inscribe power relations through the use of violence" (2012, 9).<sup>39</sup>

Most of the violence I observed during these two weeks of classroom observations centered around indefatigable protectionism of one's heterosexuality.<sup>40</sup> Kimmel notes that "the fear—sometimes conscious, sometimes not—that others might perceive us as homosexual propels men to enact all manner of exaggerated masculine behaviors and attitudes to make sure that no one could possibly get the wrong idea" (2001, 37).<sup>41</sup> As a result, homophobia becomes "a central discourse in the policing of boys' behaviours" (Mills 2012: 102) and such a discourse is "regularly deployed to punish such boys" who fail to live up to heterosexual masculinity (Ibid: 108).<sup>42</sup>

In this classroom, there were several terms used to police (and enforce compulsory) heterosexuality, and excoriate any gesture, posture or speech that might betray homosexual inclinations: 'boysin', 'turnin', and 'bullaman.'

"sir, yuh turnin or wha?" ("sir, you are turning or what?")<sup>43</sup>

“look how he ben ova so, he is a bulla man, boy!” (look how he is bending over, he is a bulla man, boy!)  
“aye boy, doh touch me; yuh boysin or wha?” (hey, don’t touch me; you are boysin’ or what?)<sup>44</sup>

“Turning” (or “changin’”), in this context, refers to ‘turning or changing into a homosexual’. Bullaman is a Trinidadian term, typically used in a derogatory fashion, to refer to homosexuals.<sup>45</sup> “Boysin” means to indulge in seemingly gay behavior; the actual word ‘boys’ has been re-appropriated from a noun into a verb representing homosexual activity.

Apart from policing behavior, these terms were used as general putdowns. As Ken Corbett succinctly argues “Faggot = anything. Faggot = everything” (2009, 173). The frequency with which these terms were deployed made it abundantly clear that these young men were inhabiting an exaggerated masculinity. In this class, the fact that the boundaries of masculinist performativity, including both hegemonic and marginalized masculinities, were so fastidiously policed, demonstrates the porosity of, and therefore vulnerability and fragility of, masculinity itself. “Achieving a masculine identity entails the repeated repudiation of the specter of failed masculinity” (Pascoe 2007, 5; as cited in Khoja-Moolji 2012, 9); and I contend that for these young men, who hail from violence-ridden, economically-distressed communities, and attending a school for ‘academic failures’, a hyper-compensatory masculinity is perhaps the only domain from which they can procure some semblance of control, dominance, registered victory and self-affirmation. The aforementioned discussion of homophobia is also relevant to the topic of academic underachievement; as Odette Parry states: “the data do suggest a link between homophobic attitudes...and male educational performance. This phenomenon materializes in the extremely anti-academic male sex/gender identity which develops as a result of homophobic attitudes” (2004, 175).

However, it was not only male students who policed the masculinity and heterosexuality of other male students. Female students partook in this exercise as well. Mr. Joseph, a safety officer, observed:

[Y]uh might find that there is one guy in a class wit ten girls and dey would pick on him ... he have to be macho; if he not disrespectful and try to stomp authority den he is viewed on as a he/she. And he would be in a lot of trouble because dey would pick on him, dey would lash him, dey would call him names because of that (Interview, March 15, 2010).<sup>46</sup>

In this quote, we see that "subaltern masculinist dispositions offer quasi-homophobic license to be bullied. This therefore enfolds into a vicious cycle, where the boys must be 'disrespectful' and attempt to 'stomp authority' so as to gain masculinist bona fides" (Williams 2012, 138). The male students are therefore constrained by their male and female peers to consistently maintain this masculinist façade.

In fact, not only did many female students actively constrain the masculinist performativity of male students but they were perceived as a vital component in the adult toolkit for addressing school violence. I call this the 'girl as tranquilizer' intervention (Williams 2012). Below, I offer some quotes from both male students and female teachers about the mediating, tranquilizing presence/effect of female students on male students:

"[N]o girls, da is it! Dey lookin to form a team one time. Da is it right dey: violence!"<sup>47</sup> (Student Focus Group 4SG, June 14, 2010)

"[I]f ah boy come an get yuh vex now, and yuh hadda talk to a man yuh goin an get more mad...but ah gyurl go cool yuh dong"<sup>48</sup> (Student Focus Group 4SG, June 14, 2010).

Ms. Clarkson: As a matter of fact, de girls in my opinion help keep classes calm.

Researcher: How so?

Ms. Clarkson: I think is jes because girls are, some of them, their personality tends to keep a measure of control as compared to all boys; yuh could imagine thirty wile boys or twenty-five wile Form One boys, [ages] 11-14 in a classroom? That spells disaster<sup>49</sup> (Teacher Interview, May 13, 2010).

Ms. Seepersad: I talk to a lot of the students and coming from them, and coming from us too, but from what they say, the girls helped to temper the boys in our school down and that is a real calming force, and what they say to me "Miss, Miss, when a teacher tell yuh someting and yuh real frustrated and real wanta tell back dat teacher someting, Miss, we little girlfriend is come and hold we hand and say 'oh gosh, doh worry wit dat, calm down,' but miss that is cool we brain and we don't ting."<sup>50</sup> So from their perspective, the girls really do temper them down and their reaction to the teachers in particular. I think we underestimate how much that happens (Teacher/Administrator Interview, May 19, 2010).

The excerpts above demonstrate this reliance on female students as a 'tranquilizing' intervention for school violence among male students. We see this recurring theme of male students and school personnel stating that if male students are angry/upset, talking to another male student can exacerbate the situation whereas the presence/counsel of a female student can have a de-escalatory impact. Ms. Clarkson believes that this 'tranquilizing' effect is a personality trait among female students; however, I argue that these essentialist notions place an undue burden on female students, and extricate male

students fairly easily from their responsibility for self-regulation of their own behaviors and male-to-male interactions. These also reveal still deeply-entrenched notions of how female students should behave;<sup>51</sup> when I asked adult respondents about increasing violence among girls, many stated "de gyurls geh-in jes as bad as de boys".<sup>52</sup>

Although I did observe many female students actively enforcing compulsory heterosexuality among male students, I did note one case where one male student, who was called effeminate/gay by many other male students, was shielded from these critiques by his female friends. Below, I offer excerpts from my field notes about this male student:

The first time I saw him, he was walking among an all-girl group. Never after did I see him walking with any boys. His linguistic cadence was markedly different from most of the other boys. Most other boys tried to deepen their voices to seem more manly and more mature. Many of the young ones were trying to take early flight from pubescence. His gait was markedly different from the other boys too. Many of the boys had a 'crawl' or 'bounce': those that were high value currency on street corners and in their neighborhoods. But he had a certain saunter, one that automatically revealed his Otherness. Why nary an attempt to disguise his otherness? He walked with a quiet confidence, an embrace of his otherness, a gentle defiance. How did he 'survive' so long with such a differentiated speech and gait?

...Today is a school wide performance in the main hall. It is a hot day. The energy in the hall is frenzied. Some boys seem disinterested in being here. Some, perhaps most, seem content to be out of classes, though not inclined to be stuck in a hall under the gaze of the entire school staff. A group of girls ascends the stage to render a dance performance, and he is the only boy among them. I hear some snickers from different parts of the co-ed audience. The little I can discern however is coming mainly from other boys. Shortly after

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being on stage, the music begins and those assembled on the stage, who have by now settled into their starting positions, launch into a high octane dance routine. This boy is at the center of the entire ensemble and renders his moves with an exactitude that surpasses even most of his female cast. Girls in the audience are cheering every creative move and the boys in the audience, for the most part, seem unsettled by his competent rendition. Some hiss “batty bwoy”<sup>53</sup>, others “bullaman”, others “sissy”. He doesn’t skip a beat it seems. The choreography ends and they are tendered a rapturous applause from the audience. Some boys near me refuse to clap, perhaps demonstrating their disapproval of what they perceive to be his ‘girliness’ (Excerpts from Fieldnotes, 2010).

This male student, I should add, was of mixed ethnicity (seemingly of African and East Indian descent) and hung out with female students of African-descent. In attempting to analyze why black female students offered this male student a buffer from other homophobic male students and from their own enforcement of compulsory male heterosexuality, I conjecture that perhaps his ethnicity plays a partial role. In the social imaginary of Trinidad & Tobago society, men of Indian or mixed descent have been feminized and emasculated by the colonial apparatus and then subsequently by the gaze of the African-descended male.<sup>54</sup> In a school where most of the students are of African descent, this male student is doubly othered: his ethnicity and his differentiated, marginalized masculinity; the latter draws censure, and the former perhaps procures him some sort of social/cultural capital, based in a wider societal context that is immensely colorist. This intricate intersection of ethnicity, masculinity and school violence warrants more in-depth research.

Nonetheless, the case of this male student reminds us that despite the oppressive weight of hegemonic masculinity and the potential lure (and risk) of totalizing, essentializing analyses, he displayed a facet of human agency, which is often overlooked in structuralist perspectives. His consistent, defiant exhibition

of a differentiated form of masculinity provided useful, contrastive analysis in my exploration of the fissures and vulnerabilities of hegemonic masculinity.

### **Structural Violence and Pullin' Rank: Neocolonial Hegemonic Masculinity**

#### *School Personnel Pullin' Rank*

An analysis of school violence and masculinity would be incomplete without an inclusion of the masculinist posturing/ 'pullin' rank' by school personnel and the educational system (as represented by the MoE). Elsewhere (Williams 2013), I argue how the limited discursive parameters around what constitutes actual school violence hinders a comprehensive interrogation of the violence rendered by adults at SSS and the violence rendered more systemically (via, e.g, the MoE).

As Swain states "[s]chools are invariably hierarchical and create and sustain relations of domination and subordination; each orders certain practices in terms of power and prestige..." (Swain 2005, 215). I observed how the MoE's hegemonically masculinist mode of hierarchical interactions are replicated through several strata within SSS. Some teachers, off the record, confided that they feel estranged from the overall administration and management of the school; that they are excluded from democratic participation. However, the largest chasm that existed seemed to have been between school personnel and students. Noted educator, Paulo Freire (1990), decried the hierarchies that separate school personnel and students, and ultimately hinder authentic relationship building and substantive education.

At SSS, there were two safety officers (both male) who were responsible for physically intervening in serious matters at the school. The deans (all female) were responsible for adjudicating disputes and meting out 'punishments' commensurate with the 'infraction'. This gender differentiation within the disciplinary apparatus of SSS, which reflects prevailing notions of men being

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paired with physicality and emotional austerity, and women with emotional expressiveness and nurturance, sends a reinforcing message to students regarding discipline and gender performativity. A teacher, Ms. Faure, characterized many male teachers as “anti-counseling”, who viewed ‘talking’ with students as too “soft” and instead preferred more physical interventions to deal with school violence. She also elaborated on how tensions between male teachers and male students sometimes revealed deeper, problematic issues that the male students have with their own fathers:

Ms. Faure: In our society...we have a macho image of a man in a trini society... they believe that if you counsel a boy, I think men are so much anti counseling, I don't know why, that you're being soft, you goin' that way, you sugar coating, you're tryna be a mommy. But if you hold on to them yuh (you) hit dem (them) a hard lash den (then) they'll wake up and get the reality. Because the fathers in the society have been the ones who distribute licks nah; they would be the beaters in the home, and the mothers would be the ones you run to and cry to, “ah jes get licks (I just got a beating)!” So it's really a role thing that men are perceived in a particular way and I believe some of the men want to counsel but how will they be looked upon by their counter parts?... [It']s how society have painted them...you need to have that physical, you have to show physical dominion.

Researcher: Have you spoken with any male teachers about the effectiveness of their methods?

Ms. Faure: Yes, yes. They say it works for them. [They tell me] “[s]o you could do what works for you and I'll do what works for me.” Now traditionally if you know about these schools the boys are more accustomed to females, they doh (don't) see their fathers at all

which is a big problem in society now...[s]o right away what I could do to a young man, I could probably pass and do him this (motioning to me a slight tap on the shoulder), "come on, behave!" But if a male teacher does that, he's ready [i.e. the student] to fight because he doesn't know his father, he has no strong male input in his life; doh (don't) hit him, don't touch him. But a female could do it so things that we could get away with a male teacher can't. They can't have that communion... I remember walking into a class years ago...was Mr. Farrell, a phys ed. class. I used to teach them; I had no problems with the boys and I walked in and he was there and he is like "son, son," and the boy is like "don't call me son!" And he is like "come on nah son". ("come on son") And the boy got up for him and say "I told you don't call me your son". He (the student) was offended cuz he did not have a father and he was assuming that this teacher wanted to be his father. He doh (doesn't) have a father, so doh (don't) pretend; he got up, I saw the fire in his eyes, and I know if sir stayed there one more minute he (the teacher) would have been lick dong (would have been knocked to the ground). Now female teachers could do that we could say "son, yuh doin wrong (son, you are doing wrong), come on" and they like it! You see that they appreciate it. They don't appreciate it when the male teachers do it (Interview, May 13, 2010).

In this extended quote, there are several issues that emerge regarding discipline and masculinity. The machismo of the wider society is implicated in the disciplinary choices that male teachers make. This female respondent perceives a linkage to physical dominion, itself a hallmark of hegemonic

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masculinity. In the discourse on school violence in Trinidad, this is an under-considered domain: the impact of male teachers' masculinity on school violence. It seems that male students receive the male teachers' masculinist posturing as a form of 'pullin rank' and therefore a breach of the students' own masculinity. In the pecking order of masculinity, the 'pullin rank' by the male teachers pits their own masculinity over that of the students. In this regard, male teachers exert hegemonic masculinity, which may foster tensions in the school, lead to physical conflicts between male teachers and male students (or male students and other students as a form of displacing the disempowered feelings male students experience in their physical interactions with male teachers) or even hinder healthy relationships between male teachers and male students that may be necessary for optimal or improved student learning.

During the first phase of my research (in 2010), I witnessed many instances, with varied intensities, of the safety officers' employing corporal punishment on the students.<sup>55</sup> School personnel closely monitored students' uniforms for any deviations/alterations, and bookbags were often checked at the school gate for weapons. These disciplinary technologies of surveillance seemed to have been aimed at exerting control over students' bodies and eventually 'docilizing' them.<sup>56</sup> I often heard deans and safety officers say "I am going to make my rounds" or someone would suggest to them "you should go police that corridor."<sup>57</sup> This penitentiary discourse, I argue, is a technology of hegemonic masculinity, for it seeks to both characterize the male students' masculinities as subordinate, while policing and dominating them.<sup>58</sup>

This policing and domination come in verbal forms as well. One afternoon, one of the deans was trying to resolve a conflict with a male student. She threatened to call his mother in to the school and he began to cry. She told him "no tears; come be a man, talk to meh (me)!"<sup>59</sup> On another occasion, I was observing the early morning routine where students were being searched at the entrance gate by MTS security.<sup>60</sup> As one male student was being searched, he began to protest and a female MTS personnel said "leave all dat arguin' fuh de

gyuls nah!"<sup>61</sup> During both phases of my research at SSS, I observed many instances of these types of policing and demarcating of male students' masculinity. In these two cases, it is female adults who were reinforcing that emotional expressiveness and verbalizing/articulation of feelings (even those perceived as protestation) do not belong within the domain of acceptable male behavior.

Linked with the verbal policing of male students' masculinity is a verbal violence as it pertains to the perception of students' intellectual deficiencies. Some teachers' calling students "jackass" or "stupid"<sup>62</sup> imputes academic incompetence to them, which reproduces and reinforces the narrative of 'uneducability'/'disposability' that I discussed before. This verbal violence, which many students denounced but which many adult respondents rationalized as culturally specific (thus, acceptable) forms of discipline, not only sometimes aggravated incidents involving physical violence, but can also legitimate violence as a tool for conflict resolution.

I argue that this coupling of heavily surveilled/punished male corporeality and the deficit view of students' minds/intellect has the capacity to augment students' marginalization within school. An in-school marginalization, which can fuel continued dropout rates, disinterest in education, and diminished educational outcomes, risks exacerbating the schism that already exists between the larger society and the economically-depressed and violent communities from which many of these students hail.

### *Ministry of Education Pullin' Rank*

In this final section, I wish to implicate the role of the MoE in school violence and interrogate its relationship with SSS (and other schools in Trinidad) as a structural form of 'pullin rank'. In my conclusion, I will characterize this type of pullin' rank as an exertion of neocolonial hegemonic masculinity. I view this as

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a necessary analysis because focusing solely on ground-level/micro manifestations of masculinity without a critical exploration of the wider structural network in which they are embedded serves to conceal the role of macro factors and influences which, in turn, maintains the narrow discourse on school violence that centers primarily on individuals. As Swain states:

schooling is a political issue that plays a role in wider social developments. Schools exist, of course, within their own structural contexts, including the structure of their national education system, and these pressures have a profound influence on schools' policies and organizations, as "macro" interactions are enacted on the "micro" stage (2005, 214).

In anchoring this final analysis of the MoE, it is important to remember the context of state formation. Feminists make the charge that the "state [is] a patriarchal institution, a vehicle of men's power" (Connell 2002, 103), and that "the masculinization of the state...is principally a relationship between state institutions and hegemonic masculinity" (Ibid, 105). Indeed, the state possesses the resources to regulate gender relations (Messerschmidt 1993). Watson attests that "state sovereignty is a masculinized nationalist signifier that reflects both the unity and the separation the national state expresses" (2003, 57).

In the specific context of Trinidad, one cannot avoid a discussion of colonial masculinity<sup>63</sup> and its role in nation building. Connell notes that "the postcolonial state may appropriate colonial models of masculinity for the project of nation building" (2005a, 76). In order to more comprehensively apprehend the neocolonial web of structural violence in which masculinities and school violence intersect at my research site (i.e. SSS), it is vital to discuss this notion of colonial masculinities.

Expanded imperialism was the channel through which hegemonic masculinities were trafficked from the metropolises in Europe (Connell 2005b); this exportation occurred under brutal conditions and with violent technologies.<sup>64</sup>

Power, the leitmotif of hegemonic masculinity (Synnott 2009),<sup>65</sup> was fully embodied in what bell hooks (2004) calls "plantation patriarchy"; a patriarchy that "rel[ied] on a paternalist masculinity to legitimate [the colonizers'] rule" (Patil 2008, 195).<sup>66</sup> Colonial masculinity, but more specifically, colonial hegemonic masculinity<sup>67</sup> was obsessed with dominance and control. This was exacted through oppressively close surveillance and discipline.<sup>68</sup> The disciplinary technologies were employed for the purposes of permanently casting the colonized body as othered.<sup>69</sup> The othered body was subjected to a sustained regime of emasculation, infantilization, feminization and hypersexualization<sup>70</sup>, all scripted as integral to *la mission civilisatrice*.<sup>71</sup> This schism between the colonizer and colonized echoes Connell's (2005b) postulation about the impact of Cartesian philosophy on masculinities: the splintering of reason from nature, and mind from body.<sup>72</sup> White hegemonic masculinity represented reason and mind, and the marginalized/subordinate masculinity of the colonized em'bodyed' nature, all those attributes discarded from the hyper-rationalized world of colonial hegemonic masculinity.

Theorists, like Linden Lewis, assert that these patriarchal standards have been internalized, and therefore have an impact on contemporary life.<sup>73</sup> This has indeed been the case for the Caribbean: many "are small, fragile island states retaining many administrative and social structures from...colonial rule" (De Lisle, Smith and Jules 2010, 405). This affects not only spheres of governance and culture, but economics and development. Downes argues that "identification of the education system, church and other vehicles as critical purveyors of ruling-class hegemony is relevant to an understanding of hegemonic masculinity" (2004, 107).<sup>74</sup> TT's Ministry of Education (MoE) is an arm of the state and, as such, is a vehicle for the implementation of the country's vision for human capital development<sup>75</sup>; in this sense, it is a highly bureaucratized, functionalist, political organization.

The MoE oversees a bifurcated educational system; one that owes its genesis to the colonial system in TT (Williams 2012). The educational system is

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divided into 'prestige' schools (where the academically strongest students, or those of financial means, attend); the rest of the country's students, constituting the majority, attend a vast array of non-prestige schools. Many of the 'prestige' schools were formed in the colonial era and today are an integral component in the state's maintenance of a class-stratified society. In acknowledging the differential access to resources between 'prestige' and non-prestige schools, Mr. Romany, the Principal, said "we need a lot of resources here to ensure that these children here get the same opportunities as those in St. Gregory's College"<sup>76</sup> (Interview on June 8, 2010). I characterize this educational othering via a 'prestige'/non-prestige binary as a manifestation of neocolonial hegemonic masculinity. By perpetuating a colonial system of education and by inadvertently labeling most schools as non-prestige, it sends the message to many of those students that they are 'uneducable' and unworthy of investment.

During a discussion with students in June 2013, I was encouraging the class (of all young men) to make attending college a high priority. One student lowered his voice and trained his gaze toward the floor as he chimed in "sir, we can't do that; this school is for slow children." Somewhere in his brief educational career, someone or something had conveyed to this young man that he was too 'slow' to amount to anything of worth in life. I am not attributing a direct causal link between the MoE and this particular student's conception of self-worth/esteem etc, but I am categorically saying that students are painfully aware that when the MoE assigns them to a school like SSS, they are cognizant of society's view of such schools. This is confirmed in an interview I had with the Principal at SSS: "That's why [the students] write all over [the walls], they destroy, they vandalize because they don't own this" (Mr. Romany, Interview, June 8, 2010). He stated that society views students who attend SSS as "a waste of time"; a message that they then internalize. He makes a direct link between the violence he sees at the school and the students' conception of themselves and their worth. I characterize this societal message of 'uneducability' as a form of structural violence.

SSS, a school created (circa 1978) in the post-independence era, has had many major changes as a result of MoE decisions. The MoE, a hierarchical organization, have rendered many of these decisions without consultations with the SSS administration, teachers, parents or students.<sup>77</sup> Such a mode of neocolonial governance, which denies democratic participation, in favor of exclusion, alienation, othering, dominance, hierarchy, and control, very much resembles colonial hegemonic masculinity, and provides an environment in which violence in schools is exacerbated.<sup>78</sup>

The multiple layers of hegemonic masculinity from the historical and the global, to the nation-state (via the MoE), and school personnel, exert significant pressure on the surveilled bodies of the young men at SSS. This is all compounded when class and sexuality are factored into the equation. In a society where these men perhaps feel infantilized and feminized by a historically-informed and macro-structural violence, the irruption of neocolonial hegemonic masculinities comes as no surprise.

## **Conclusion**

This article on masculinities represents a sliver of my interests in the violence of educational inequity<sup>79</sup> in Trinidad and Tobago, and the wider Caribbean. The dropout rate across TT has indeed caused much alarm. At SSS, for example, in one Form 3 (grade 8) class, by the end of the academic year, over 50% of the students had dropped out. Most were young men. Black, young men. In this globalized economy, the consequences of not receiving a high school diploma are increasing (Fine 1991). For students from economically-disadvantaged backgrounds, this could spell extended generational cycles of un- or under-employment. What I have not explored here in this article is the alienating nature of anachronistic and unengaging curricula and pedagogies. Many of these young men at SSS are very interested in vocational/technical education and yet the MoE has not upgraded most of the machinery in

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decades, undermining an area in which more young men could be involved and at which more could be excelling. In the end, we see many young men embrace anti-intellectualism,<sup>80</sup> drop out of school, reinforce their class positionality,<sup>81</sup> and thereby materialize into society's expectation/conceptualization of them.

### *Decolonizing Hegemonic Masculinities*

Since my entire argument has been a multi-level constructed one, my main recommendations will necessarily reside there as well. Trinidad and Tobago, and other former colonies, must begin/continue attempts at decolonization. As much as we can, we must stand in 'Third World' solidarity and consider ways in which we can resist, re-appropriate and/or interrupt the hegemonic masculinity of global neoliberalism.<sup>82</sup> Citizens of the Caribbean have to hold their governments more accountable and protest against archaic masculinist nation state-to-citizen relations. Civil society must be widened and deepened to include more voices in decision-making processes. Our political leaders can engender a transformation by enacting more inclusive, horizontalist structures for sustainable partnerships with and for the people.

The Ministry of Education must embark on a historic educational revolution: overhauling curricula, pedagogies and the structure of the educational system itself. The global mandate of *Education For All* has caused discursive *rigor mortis* of radical educational equity; the discourse has stopped at access for all, and nowhere on the horizon is there a serious, participatory debate on equity and social justice in education in TT. The MoE has to envision schools, principals, teachers, parents and students as partners, which requires a significant attitudinal and behavioral shift. At SSS, there are many students who teachers report need some social work or psychological care. At SSS, there has not been a single psychologist, psychotherapist or social work assigned specifically for this school for quite some time. Some students need

professionalized outlets to process their traumas resultant from experiencing sexual, psychological, physical and/or emotional abuse. Within schools, teachers "must think beyond the 'logic' of normal school performance in order to inhabit the 'logic' of the student" and to resist "turn[ing] differences into deficits" (Newkirk 2002, 12, 13).<sup>83</sup> Action research projects as a component of curricula can assist in raising consciousness and critical sensitivity in students (Mills 2012, 109). We need pedagogies that equip our teachers and our students with the knowledges, attitudes, and behaviors to craft, embrace and maintain "fluid selves...[which] can serve to support adaptive responses and resistance to hegemonic masculinity" (Kahn, Homes, and Brett 2011, 52). Caribbean researchers and practitioners need to continue work on looking at masculinities so as to better "understand the gendered dimensions of identity development" (Davis, Thomas and Sewalish 2006, 306).

This entire agenda must be underwritten by social justice and critical self-awareness, toward a dismantling of neocolonial masculinities: structurally, inter- and intra-personally. If the discourse and the attendant interventions to address school violence remain at the individual level, then we are bound to ignore the reinforcing role of history and the contemporary structures and processes that still bear its imprint and inner logic.

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<sup>1</sup> My research is partially driven, in a utilitarian sense, by the gravity of the issue of school violence in TT. However, I do perceive schools as ideal spaces for analyzing masculinities because, as intersectional spaces, "[they] are not passive mirrors of race, class, gender, and sexuality hierarchies in society today. Schools actively help to form those hierarchies in the political, economic, and ideological domains. Education is central to producing ideologies that undergird race, class, gender, and sexuality relations of oppression and resistance" (Weber 2010, 183).

<sup>2</sup> The term structural violence was initially articulated by Johan Galtung (1969). It looks beyond direct or material violence and represents institutions, processes and structures that diminish human dignity and render harm.

<sup>3</sup> See Williams 2013 for a more comprehensive discussion of what I posit as postcolonial structural violence and how it represents the constricted discursive boundaries of youth violence at this secondary school in Trinidad.

<sup>4</sup> The Caribbean has one of the highest murder rates in the world: 30 per 100, 000 annually (UNDP 2012)

<sup>5</sup> In 2012, TT had 379 murders (37.9 per 100, 000 persons) (United States Dept. of State 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Also, see Stoudt 2006 for a study of violence that suggests that violence is embedded in the social fabric of, and in the power relations within, the school.

<sup>7</sup> Noguera speaks to the U.S. context, and Phillips to the TT context.

<sup>8</sup> When TT became independent in 1962, the economic demands for increased human capital development, and a national desire for more educational provisions led the Government of Trinidad and Tobago (GoTT) to expand the educational system (Campbell 1992; 1996; 1997). Before independence, there were some schools (Traditional Grammar Schools (TGS); today called 'prestige' schools) created and operated by different religious denominations (Stewart 1981). In the post-1962 era, the GoTT created many primary and secondary schools (including Junior Secondary Schools, which, from their creation to about 5-8 years ago, used to be three-year schools but have all been altered into full five-year secondary schools) to accommodate more students. These post-independence schools were created in a context where the TGSs retained much of their social capital; this effectively sealed into place a dual educational system. Today, students with a stronger academic background, generally attend the TGSs. London describes many of the post-1962 schools as being "overpopulated, understaffed, poorly resourced...associated with low achievement, indiscipline and a consequent high failure rate" (1994, 412). Student density is much higher than that of the TGSs and many of the students who attend the post-1962 schools are from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Deosaran notes that "the secondary school system seems to be catering to and breeding an entrenched social stratification cycle" (2007, 106). Phillips (2008) has noted that most reported incidents of youth-related physical violence are from the lowest performing post-independence schools.

<sup>9</sup> Secondary schools represent opportune sites for studying masculinities: "it is possible to conclude that the school plays a relatively more prominent role in the construction of identity for boys in primary and early secondary schooling" (Swain 2005, 213). Messerschmidt affirms: "schooling is one of the chief social milieu for the development of youth crime and also a social setting that has institutionalized gender and, therefore, patterned ways in which femininity and masculinity are constructed and represented." (1993, 87)

<sup>10</sup> This is a pseudonym I assigned to the research site; one that recognizes the students' resilience. In this article, I have assigned pseudonyms to each of my participants and I have altered some facts about the school so as to provide it with as much confidentiality as possible.

<sup>11</sup> During my first research study at SSS four years ago, the ratio of young men to young women was 60:40. Three years later (as of June 2013), it was estimated at 80:20. However, this ratio started changing again as of September 2013 when the MoE ended its single-sex pilot.

<sup>12</sup> As per the Caribbean, Reddock notes that caliber work on masculinities is also increasing (2003, 89-117). However, while penning this article on masculinities, and focusing on school violence and young men in a Trinidadian secondary school, I have remained acutely aware of this critique: "Epistemologically, given the patriarchal nature of Caribbean societies, the history of the region, its political evolution, its nationalist struggles, its labor advances, and its literary, creative and cultural productivity have all tended until relatively recently to be examined androcentrically." (Lewis 2002, 57-58)

<sup>13</sup> Kimmel qualifies: "or rather, we are all *created* equal, but any hypothetical equality evaporates quickly because our definitions of masculinity are not equally valued in our society. One definition of manhood continues to remain the standard against which other forms of manhood are, measured and evaluated." (2001, 31).

<sup>14</sup> The sustaining power of hegemonic masculinity is refueled by the surveillance of many men, even those who are not possessors of hegemonic masculinity: "We are under the constant careful scrutiny of other men. Other men watch us, rank us, grant our acceptance into the realm of manhood. Manhood is demonstrated for other men's approval. It is other men who evaluate the performance" (Ibid, 33).

<sup>15</sup> We experience and craft our lives not through singular lens; in fact our lives are constituted by myriad identities that go beyond the oft-cited ones of race, class, gender and sexuality. Intersectional analyses undoubtedly enrich, yet complicate our efforts to comprehend social phenomena such as enduring discriminations and inequalities. For more on intersectionality, see Newman 2007, and Weber 2010.

<sup>16</sup> We ought to be reminded that hegemonic masculinity is also mediated by cultural variances.

<sup>17</sup> This attribute of hegemonic masculinity tends to appear across many cultures. One such example is via the term 'macho': "when applied to Mexicans or Latinos, 'macho' remains imbued with such negative attributes as male dominance, patriarchy, authoritarianism, and spousal abuse" (Mirandé 2001, 43).

<sup>18</sup> Queer theory has been at the forefront in challenging binaries: "Queer theory inquired into the gendered splitting of qualities such as hard/soft, dominant/submissive, along the lines of sharply defined binaries" (Parlow 2011, 216).

<sup>19</sup> Speaking to the American context, Kimmel notes "Women and gay men become the "other" against which heterosexual men project their identities, against whom they stack the decks so as to compete in a situation in which they will always win, so that by suppressing them, men can stake a claim for their own manhood. Women threaten emasculation by representing the home, workplace, and familial responsibility, the negation of fun. Gay men have historically played the role of the consummate sissy in the American popular mind because homosexuality is seen as an inversion of normal gender development" (Kimmel 2001, 37).

<sup>20</sup> Connell qualifies that "Monetary benefits are not the only kind of benefit. Others are authority, respect, service, safety, housing, access to institutional power. And control over one's own life" (2002, 142).

<sup>21</sup> See Connell 2005b for great detail on this.

<sup>22</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt warn that "[i]t is tempting to assume a simple hierarchy of power or authority, running from global to regional to local, but this could be misleading" (2005, 850). However, my analysis seeks to discuss some of the post-colonial discontinuities by disinterring the history of colonial masculinities and linking those with contemporaneous neocolonial forms. As Allen states, "In Trinidad, it is particularly difficult to separate sociological analysis from the history of colonial and imperial domination" (1998, 77).

<sup>23</sup> The MoE's pilot program to transform 20 schools into single-sex schools was aimed at reducing school violence in these schools and boosting the academic performance of their students. Part of the rationale for this was premised on the academic successes of the 'prestige' schools (which are mostly single-sex schools).

<sup>24</sup> This was four years ago (in 2010) when the MoE made the decision to begin, year by year, to eventually transform SSS from co-ed to an all-male school.

<sup>25</sup> "Behbehry" is a derogatory term for someone who is socially inept. Similar to the derogatory use of the term "retarded" in the American context.

<sup>26</sup> Name of nearby 'prestige' (all male) school, where it is purported that some male students engage in homosexual practices. As a child growing up in Trinidad, I did frequently hear of such rumors about most all-male "prestige" schools (i.e. the TGSSs).

<sup>27</sup> "On the other side" is in reference to boys being gay.

<sup>28</sup> Four years later, SSS still struggles with this issue of classes having students of different ages. These cohorts are constituted by students placed at SSS by the MoE after the national exam.

<sup>29</sup> Further research is required in TT to more fully understand how violence may intersect with students' internalization of their perceived academic abilities.

<sup>30</sup> See Plummer and Geofroy 2010, and Sewell 1997 for discussions of the intersection between masculinity and the perception of schooling/academics as non-masculine domains. Plummer and Geofroy add that “the pressures to eschew roles that have become discredited as soft, gay or feminine seems to be driving young men towards dangerous, risk-taking hyper-masculinities” (2010, 1).

<sup>31</sup> A bad bwoy is one who possesses swagger and street cred, and is viewed as cool.

<sup>32</sup> See Richardson 2012.

<sup>33</sup> “That is it right there, violence! Team of guys, you know when a team of guys comes together you know what happens? Commotion, you know!... Because it's boys. Sir, remember what I say! That is going to make real trouble! Real trouble; sir, if it was up to me sir, I would get out of here before next year. “(Student Focus Group 4SG, June 14, 2010)

<sup>34</sup> Pollack concludes “over the years my research findings have shown that as far as boys today are concerned, the old Boy Code—the outdated and constructing assumptions, models, and rules about boys that our society has used since the nineteenth century—is still operating in force” (2001, 72).

<sup>35</sup> They were also encouraged to be good role models for the students, although some often flouted the rules regarding punctuality and uniform usages, etc.; behaviors that may tarnish the bad bwoy image.

<sup>36</sup> Additionally, Khoja-Moolji argues that “such valorization of aggression [in sports] sends a strong message to boys—that it is legitimate for them to employ violence and use their bodies as tools or weapons to achieve an end and dominate others” (2012, 6).

<sup>37</sup> In this class, ages ranged from 12-16; however, this does not occur in ‘prestige’ schools because students are generally within their age cohort.

<sup>38</sup> Gunta is a term used often in Jamaican music, and means gangster.

<sup>39</sup> This point by Khoja-Moolji can serve as a broader explanation for my earlier points on intellectual rejection/ feelings of disposability.

<sup>40</sup> Within the Caribbean, homosexuality “is a fairly complex phenomenon” and within our music there is often homophobia conveyed (Lewis 2003). This is akin to my earlier discussion of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1993).

<sup>41</sup> Moss adds that “it is mostly in men that internalized homophobia generates the extreme and unbearable states of mind” (2012, 63).

<sup>42</sup> Stoudt 2006 calls this “peer disciplining”.

<sup>43</sup> June 11, 2013. Male student said this to a male teacher who had placed his hand on the student's shoulder in an attempt to get him to focus on the task at hand. Another student chimes in “yuh hadda watch sir; sir yuh changin'!” (“You have to look at sir closely; sir you are changing!”) ‘Changin’ here insinuates that the teacher is ‘changing’ from what he was perceived before (i.e. as a heterosexual male) to perhaps someone who is homosexual.

<sup>44</sup> These last two were repeatedly said over the two-week observation period in this class.

<sup>45</sup> To ‘bull’ means to have sex and it is not typically used in a derogatory manner, though many perceive its usage in public spaces to be crass. However, Bullaman is a pejorative term. See Crichlow (2004: 185-222) for a self-reflective discussion of this term in the Trinidadian context.

<sup>46</sup> "[Y]ou might find that there is one guy in a class with ten girls and they would pick on him ... he has to be macho; if he is not disrespectful and try to stomp authority then he is viewed as a he/ she. And he would be in a lot of trouble because they would pick on him, they would lash him, they would call him names because of that" (Interview, March 15, 2010).

<sup>47</sup> "no girls, that's it! They are looking to form a team immediately. That's it right there: violence!" Forming a team refers to male students forming gangs when there aren't any girls present in that social environment.

<sup>48</sup> "if a boy comes and gets you vex now, and you have to talk to a guy you are going to become angrier...but a girl will cool you down".

<sup>49</sup> Ms. Clarkson: As a matter of fact, the girls in my opinion help keep classes calm.

Researcher: How so?

Ms. Clarkson: I think it's just because girls are, some of them, their personality tends to keep a measure of control as compared to all boys; you could imagine thirty wild boys or twenty-five wild Form One boys, [ages] 11-14, in a classroom? That spells disaster.

<sup>50</sup> "Miss, Miss, when a teacher tells you something [by which you feel offended] and you are really frustrated and really want to tell back that teacher something, Miss, our little girlfriend comes and holds our hand and says 'oh gosh, don't worry with that, calm down,' but Miss, that cools our brain and we don't [do anything rash]."

<sup>51</sup> Although in these particular cases female students are conceptualized as 'tranquilizers' for male students, in the wider discourse on male underachievement, I do acknowledge the double bind in which female students are often placed. As Odette Parry notes: "In the Caribbean...it has become popular not only to talk about "male marginalization" in the context of education...but also to see educational successes of females and educational failure of males as two sides of the same equation. That is, males fail because females do well. ...this is seen as acceptable because females are perceived as villains and males as victims of the education system" (2004, 168).

<sup>52</sup> "the girls are getting just as bad as the boys".

<sup>53</sup> Batty bwoy, which is more popularly used in Jamaica, is a derogatory term for gay/homosexual.

<sup>54</sup> See Brereton 2010 for a broader discussion of this.

<sup>55</sup> Regarding the use of corporal punishment, Iadicola and Shupe state "violence represses but does not eliminate the original aggression or disobedience. It only drives it under the surface and may actually feed it for the future...[and is not] conducive to generating positive motivation to learn" (2013, 199). Additionally, at SSS I never witnessed girls being caned, which reinforces "core values of masculinity [which] include toughness, ability and willingness to inflict pain and receive it" (Morrell 2001, 149); "[t]he ability to endure punishment is also an important feature of masculinity" (Ibid, 152). Also, See Brereton 2010 for a discussion of corporal punishment in colonial Trinidad.

<sup>56</sup> These concepts of surveillance, docility and control were analyzed by Foucault 1995.

<sup>57</sup> Ms. Mungal (a teacher) described the students as "bombs" awaiting detonation (Interview, May 13, 2010).

<sup>58</sup> Since the student body is overwhelmingly black, there are considerations as well about the impact of this policing and subordinating of 'black masculinities'.

<sup>59</sup> Observed on June 18, 2013.

<sup>60</sup> MTS security are different from the role that the two male safety officers play within the school. The latter wear civilian clothing but the MTS personnel wear uniforms and are mostly at the entrance gate.

<sup>61</sup> "leave all of that arguing for the girls!" Observed on June 20, 2013.

<sup>62</sup> In an interview with a teacher, Ms. Seepersad reported that teachers call students "jackass" and "stupid". (May 19, 2010).

<sup>63</sup> The term 'Colonial Masculinities' was employed by Sinha 1995 to describe how the colonizer procured masculinist bona fides via the emasculation of the colonized man.

<sup>64</sup> See Brereton 2010 for a discussion of how violence in contemporary Trinidad is steeped in the violence of colonization, slavery, and indentureship. Also see Beckles 2011 for a discussion of the intersection of Caribbean masculinity and slavery.

<sup>65</sup> Synnott posits that "Power: its production, allocation and distribution - its use and abuse – how to get it and how to keep it – has been perhaps the central theme in world history" (2009, 212).

<sup>66</sup> Krishnaswamy frames this in terms of 'moral imperialism': "Masculinity is not only a foundational notion of modernity, but it is also the cornerstone in the ideology of moral imperialism...The cult of masculinity rationalized imperial rule by equating an aggressive, muscular, chivalric model of manliness with racial, national, cultural, and moral superiority" (2002, 292).

<sup>67</sup> I make the distinction because, for purposes of my argument, colonial masculinity is too broad a term and can be misread as encompassing the colonial masculinity (albeit a debased one) of slaves and indentured laborers.

<sup>68</sup> "Control over Caribbean bodies in the eras of slavery and indenture was direct and physical, for instance in techniques such as forced transportation, shackling, flogging, lynching and raping" (Allen 1998, 79).

<sup>69</sup> See Fanon 1967 for a fascinating analytic disassembly of the processes/apparatuses by which blackness was defined and constructed in contradistinction to whiteness. However, there have been many theorists and researchers who have written about the dialectical relationship between the colonizer and the colonized; that is to say, that although extreme violence was utilized in this relationship, it was still a co-constructed one. Indeed the notion of power disequilibria does not preclude considerations of the notion of co-construction. Memmi states: "In order for the colonizer to be the complete master, it is not enough for him to be so in actual fact, but he must also believe in its legitimacy. In order for that legitimacy to be complete, it is not enough for the colonized to be a slave, he must also accept his role" (1965, 88-89). Also see Kalra 2009, and Sinha 1995 for a discussion of the interdependent constructions of masculinities during colonialism. These are not insignificant considerations: "we need to study the ways in which a stereotype frames and limits the stereotyped as well as the stereotype. Otherwise, we run the risk of reifying the omnipotent image of colonialism by granting it total hegemony over representation" (Krishnaswamy 2002, 295).

<sup>70</sup> Tengan notes that "Colonized men were often ascribed a heightened "primitive" sexuality which was perceived as a threat to white women" (2002, 243-244).

<sup>71</sup> Davis offers an intersectional analysis of colonial masculinities and black bodies: "This dominant masculinity (referring to colonial hegemonic masculinity) that served to separate the men with the most power (White plantation owners) from the men with the least power (African slaves), relied on elaborate notions of difference and otherness...In Caribbean slave societies, hegemonic masculinity ensured its own power primarily through the control of black bodies. White heterosexual males at the apex of society positioned themselves not only as economically and politically powerful, but also exercised ultimate sexual control over women's bodies and physical control over black male bodies. They rendered black male slaves powerless through violent, physical control and by denying them legitimate access to both black and white women...constructing black men as the ultimate sexual predators...This fetishism of black masculine sexuality served to reinforce black men's otherness. Physical control over black men's bodies was intimately correlated with the denial of black men's minds, the denial of their ability to exercise social and political power...By stripping black men of rational power, black masculinities could simultaneously be feminised and dismissed as infantile" (2006, 27-28). Also see Nurse 2004 where this is also addressed (and Neal 2013, in the U.S. context, for a discussion of how black male bodies are often constructed as criminal and thus in need of policing). Krishnaswamy reminds us that "masculinity was elaborated...through a systematic 'unmanning' of minorities" (2002, 292).

<sup>72</sup> Allen writes that "Analysts of modernity note that ever since the philosopher Rene Descartes (1596-1650) uttered his famous phrase, "I think, therefore I am", western thought has been riven by the idea of dualism between mind and body. The ascendancy of mind over matter contributed to ideas of superiority of mental work over physical work, of capital over labour, of salaries over wages, of white-collar over blue-collar, or urban over rural, of master over slave. All these permeate the construction of the 'first World' in relation to the 'Third World'. Thus western binarisms are imbued with class and 'race' prejudice" (1998, 79).

<sup>73</sup> He writes "Given the asymmetry of power relationships within slavery, indentureship and colonialism, it is not difficult to understand how colonialism would have imposed its patriarchal rule on Caribbean society and economies. Based on a developed and sophisticated European system of patriarchy, colonial rule in the Caribbean inscribed male domination into the culture and political economy of the region...it is not surprising, therefore, that these African and Indian men who were infantilized by a system of slavery and indentureship were unable to exercise autonomy in any sphere of life, particularly with respect to the type or form of family they were allowed to establish. This European male domination of the social relations within Caribbean society laid the foundation for the institutionalization of gender equality in the region. Though excluded from control over resources and from participating in the exercise of power with their European counterparts, African men, and later Indian and Chinese and Portuguese men, were all socialized by, and all ultimately internalized, these patriarchal standards...In short, Caribbean nationalists did not interrogate the patriarchal system that had been bequeathed to them" (2003, 103). Also, see Watkins and Shulman 2008, and DeGruy 2005 for a discussion of the lingering and deep-rooted consequences of slavery and colonialism. See Gregory 2004 for three detailed case studies in which he outlines deep fissures in modern day Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq and trace their partial genesis to the colonial era. See David 2013 for psychological research done to measure internalized colonialism.

<sup>74</sup> Directing his analysis specifically to the Barbadian context, (but which can be extrapolated to much of the Anglophone Caribbean) Downes asserts "the aggressive masculinity exercised by old boys of the elite schools of Barbados in protecting imperial and colonial interests did nothing to redress the social, political and economic inequities which faced blacks in the empire...West Indian black men...were (and perhaps still are) far from fully disavowing constructs of masculinity predicated on aggression" (2004, 131).

<sup>75</sup> Lipman contends that "educational policies are both embedded in a neoliberal social imaginary and are a means to reshape social relations and social identities" (2011, 10).

<sup>76</sup> Name of nearby 'prestige' school.

<sup>77</sup> I have discussed these throughout, but I will reiterate them. Some major decisions include 1) as part of *Education For All* efforts, the MoE de-shifted schools (including SSS) that once offered two shifts of schooling for two entirely different batch of students on a daily basis. As a result of this change, SSS received, according to interviews with school administration, deans and teachers, many students who scored zero on the national exams, indicating that they would need extreme remedial assistance so as to be successful in school. The MoE's remedial program, collapsed shortly into its tenure and was not replaced with any additional pedagogical tools for teachers. 2) pilot study of 20 schools that included the transformation of said schools into single-sex schools from co-educational status. This decision was handed down in May/June 2010, without consultation and the schools had to prepare for this massive change by September of that year. In 2013, only three years into the pilot, the MoE (albeit under a different national political party in power) decided to dismantle this program and revert to the prior state of affairs. This was again rendered without any consultation (at least at SSS) and without any rigorous evaluation of the program (and its effects). These decisions, among others, lead SSS to feel like a 'guinea pig' in a social experiment, in which its voice is not respected or sought.

<sup>78</sup> The move to de-shift schools and offer *Education For All*, saw mixed age cohorts within classrooms at non-prestige schools. At SSS, I encountered in some classes students who were 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16 years old, all within the same class. This often led to a host of issues around violence, including bullying of the younger students by the older students. 'Prestige' schools and their personnel did not have to deal with these types of issues, and personnel at SSS complained that they lacked the resources and skills to amply deal with mixed-aged cohorts.

<sup>79</sup> This includes the "violence that is derived from the differences in how educational resources are allocated and how this impacts the differences in levels of educational achievement" (Iadicola and Shupe 2013, 205).

<sup>80</sup> In a study conducted by Morris, he observed that "When constructing masculinity, boys...interpreted pro-school behavior as inconsistent with or irrelevant to manliness and interpreted much anti-academic behavior as indicative of the power of masculinity" (2012, 49-50). At SSS, many young men came to school with empty book bags and when they wrote notes from class lessons, many of these were strewn on the floor by the end of the day.

<sup>81</sup> See Willis 1977 for a terrific, and still relevant, analysis on this very topic.

<sup>82</sup> As regards the Caribbean, the effects of Structural Adjustment Programs on education and healthcare, and the potential to further destabilize already economically-depressed communities, are perhaps an example of the hegemonic masculinity of global neoliberalism (neo-imperialism).

<sup>83</sup> It is in this vein that Archer & Yamashita exhort us to "move away from deficit models in which social and educational problems are located within working-class and minority ethnic cultures and families and where the problems of inner-city boys are understood in terms of their 'deviant' masculinities" (2003, 130).

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