VIEWING ART HISTORY THROUGH WINDOWS AND MIRRORS: EXPLORING THE PLURALITIES OF 21st

CENTURY MASCULINITY WITH YEARS 12 and 13 BOYS

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Abstract

As an educator of boys, I have observed that some teenage boys feel increasingly isolated and "othered" not only by society at large but by their peers and often their families and whānau. I wanted to explore whether examining contemporary masculine stereotypes in Renaissance and 19th Century French portraits could provide a space for boys to reflect on their own masculinity. I chose my combined Year 13 and Year 12 Art History class and explored their understanding of 21st Century Masculinity. We compared and contrasted this with the presentation of masculinity through portraiture of the Renaissance and 19th Century France. The boys selected five portraits from either the Renaissance or the 19th Century French context and explained why they chose this artwork, what stood out most about the sitter in the portrait, and explored what the sitter and artist were trying to communicate about the sitter. Then, in small groups, the boys identified ideas and key words that they perceived were characteristic of 21st Century masculinity. The boys reflected on the extent to which they agreed with their peers, and where their understanding and engagement with masculinity differed. After this discussion, the boys redefined their thoughts on masculinity and each chose a new and possibly different portrait that reflected their developed understanding and engagement.

The boys also explored the concept of the Renaissance Man and the model of ideal masculinity, *honnête homme*, from 18th Century France, to identify the similarities and differences between these representations and their 21st century experience. As an astute boy noted during this exploration, Baldassare Castigilione's *The Ideal of a Well Rounded Man*: *The Book of the Courtier* has many similar pursuits for men during the Renaissance that boys' schools have for their students today. The boys then went back to their original five artworks and reflected on the extent that their

original choices were driven by notions of masculinity influenced by peers, whānau, and lastly, social media. I collected data through individual reflection, group work, full class discussions, and interviews. I used this action to see if this could help boys to further understand and communicate their own masculine identity.

During this action research I found that although many of the boys prescribed to the perceived mainstream rhetoric of what it means to be masculine in the 21st Century, ten out of 37 boys seemed to welcome a safe space within which to discuss their experiences and understanding. It was evident that the boys placed importance on discussing masculinity and were deeply engaged in the exploration of the pluralities of masculinities. I witnessed the boys' asking one another to expand on their understanding as well as speaking candidly and openly about their ideas. As highlighted by a student, the concept of the Renaissance Man is not so dissimilar to what single sex boys' education tries to instill. The boys valued time within the curriculum for them to explore themselves and relate this to a variety of masculine role models. This has implications for my future practice as providing time within the busy curriculum for discussion about masculine identity is clearly needed.

Viewing Art History Through Windows and Mirrors: Exploring the Pluralities of 21st Century Masculinity with Years 12 and 13 Boys

In 2021, when teaching the 19th Century French artist, Gericault I tended to gravitate to artworks such as "The Raft of the Medusa 1819", "A Study of Truncated Limbs 1819", and "The Severed Heads 1818" (See Appendix). I consider these artworks to be 19th Century French art equivalents to the "blood and guts" that the boys enjoy in movies today. To explore another aspect of Gericault, I selected "Evening: Landscape with an Aqueduct 1818" (See Appendix). This artwork forms a stark contrast to those previously mentioned, as it depicts a serene, yet grand and awe-inspiring landscape, whereby Gericault explores the concept of the sublime through the impact of nature on man, and man's irrelevance in the face of nature. In 2021, I surveyed my previous class and asked what their favourite artwork was and why. Over half the class responded saying that their

favourite artwork was "Evening: Landscape with an Aqueduct 1818" because it was "quiet" and "serene." In this reflection the boys stated that it allowed them to "sit with the artwork and create their own narrative" and "it did not challenge them nor was it overtly violent." This gave me food for thought: was I teaching them art from *my* perspective of what I thought they would enjoy? In my attempt to compensate for my/the perceived femininity of Art History as a subject, had I in turn reinforced stereotypes within my class and misunderstood the plurality of their masculinity?

This led me to consider the possible impact of creating a space within the prescribed curriculum for the boys to explore the confines of 21ˢᵗ Century masculinity, their relationship to it and how they could use the art we study in class as both a mirror and window to their understanding and relationship with masculinity. It was important to me to create a safe space for my boys so that they could share their understanding and ideas. I also wanted to question the extent to which I am giving my boys the opportunity to explore, vocalize and articulate in writing their understanding of masculinity and how they engage in this. I wanted to challenge myself, as both educator and woman, to actively teach the pluralities of masculinity. This led me to my research question: How can an exploration of portraiture in Renaissance and 19ᵗʰ Century French artworks encourage Year 13 and Year 12 boys to reflect on how contemporary stereotypes influence their masculine identity?

To answer this question I used action research as my methodology. Firstly, I wanted to undertake research that was specific to the needs of the boys in my class in response to the feedback that I had received from a prior cohort. The action needed to both prepare the boys for their external examinations, by following the prescribed curriculum, but also be unique in its application to ensure that they were able to explore, articulate and better understand their engagement with masculinity. Action research provided me with the ability to "better understand and … improve [the] quality or effectiveness" (Mertler, 2020, p. 6) of my boys' learning and my own pedagogy. As Mertler argues, action research provides the opportunity to "connect theory with practice" (Mertler, 2020, p. 26).

Literature Review

The topic of masculinity has been a topic of conversation for decades. These discussions focus on descriptions of its structure, its role in society, as well as, the behaviors, characteristics and attitudes associated with being masculine. Due to masculinity being a social construct and culturally distinct (Jackson, 1991), the consequence of such rhetoric to define masculinity has resulted in a complex and at times contradictory landscape (Messner, 1997). Historically, boys' issues have been poorly addressed in educational research (Imms, 2012) and mostly referenced in terms of their impact on girls and issues of equity. When discussed, boys were mostly treated as having a singular masculinity (Imms, 2012). Kimmel (2010) argues that men have been "misframed" based on how society idealizes and socializes what it means to be a man. Gender expectations, maintained and upheld through systems of patriarchy and shown through one dimensional masculinity, create contrived ways to "be a man" in society (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Hooks, 2004) in turn creating a "box" of behaviors where men feel the need to fit a mold that often reproduces itself through influences from society (Kimmel, 2008). Kimmel (2015) goes on to argue that as women's lives changed with the rise of feminism, the expectations around masculinity have yet to change, which creates some challenges in our rapidly advancing society involving men and boys. Chu (2014) argues that masculine rituals and definitions are developed from a young age and can only be confirmed by other "men" who have achieved that ideal male identity – strong, sturdy, emotionless. Due to this boys are kept from truly being aware of their identity and, thus boys can resort to expressing their masculinity through performativity (Hooks, 2004). This performativity is often dictated by dominant masculine tropes, that are validated by media, images, music, parents, role models and education systems (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The various attributes and qualities of what it means to be man or masculine that are considered normative are: being a provider, a bigger muscular person, always strong, dominant, aggressive, sexually aggressive, non-emotional, in-charge, short hair, etc. (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Hooks, 2004; Kimmel, 2008). Though some of these expectations are often associated with being a "good man" they often go unchallenged in most conversations between men. However, scholars have recognized that

masculinities have evolved (Kimmel, 1996), but that the pace and meanings attached to contemporary change has been a source of significant research and debate (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). Through this evolutionary change the theory of inclusive masculinity has emerged, which suggests that where dominant forms of masculinity, hyper-masculinity and homophobia prevailed, masculine rhetoric has opened up to differing, more inclusive, masculinities (Anderson, 2005). However, as Jackson (1991) notes, there is little guidance… for men who wish to challenge the patriarchal assumption of male supremacy and adopt more emancipated, less oppressive, forms of masculinity. He goes on to argue that gender identities are formed from birth as children are molded into socially approved performers of masculinity. While early childhood is undoubtedly a crucial period in the formation of gender identities, masculinities are being created and recreated throughout the lifecycle: confirmed, negotiated and modified on a daily basis.

Boys are typically taught early on how to negotiate and navigate their masculinity, both implicitly and explicitly, by their parents, teachers, peers, and society and may find this isolating and precarious, experiencing feelings of insecurity, confusion, and self-doubt that they have been taught to disguise (Heinrich, 2012-2013). They learn how to be "male" by abiding by a specific code, yet it is an act that must be continuously maintained, and is monitored by oneself, one's peers, and, most crucially, by society at large. Buckingham (1993) argues that masculinity is neither fixed nor given but actively curated through social interaction and explains how masculine identities become a matter of social definition where boys must prove their worth of their masculine identity. To add complexity, Imms (2000) argues that masculinity is not consistent and that it is ever evolving. Gender, he argues, is created by individuals as well as by societal groupings, is a relational construct and lastly, dominant power structures can impact, resulting in constant change. Reiner (2020) empathizes with young men arguing that no-one is teaching them how to negotiate the demands of masculinity, which he argues paralyzes and results in their misery.

One way in which boys can navigate this unknown territory of masculinity, especially in the classroom, is through code switching or performativity. Gealy (2021) argues that performance of

gender follows boys' throughout their life and that teachers can have a significant impact on this performance via their communication with boys as to what is and is not appropriate. The messages sent, both verbal and non-verbal, as a result are internalized and replicated by students, so it is important for teachers to be aware of the messages they send. As Connell (2005) explains, "address[ing] the diversity of masculinities, and the intersection of gender with race, class and nationality," (pg.833) will permit society to end the "sterile choice between celebration and negation of masculinity in general". (pg.833) Lastly in a classroom environment, it is crucial to consider the role of intersectionality, a term Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) coined to help account for the ways in which race and gender overlap to represent the many forms of the establishment of identity.

In an educational setting, Imms (2000) argues that although schools and curriculum have seen numerous gender studies, the plurality of masculinities has rarely been the focus. Imms (2000) highlights that studies using a pluralist approach to masculinity have been limited, as they focus on identifying characteristic behaviors and attitudes as well as on deconstructing and reconstructing masculinity in the classroom. This is surprising, as Reichert and Hawley (2010) point out, by engaging boys in consideration of their own lives, as males and masculine identities, connections can be made with somewhat removed subject matter and provide intrinsic value and meaning. They use examples of topics such as: Global Women's History, creation of a ceramic portraits, the study of philosophy and religion, and literature e.g: *To Kill a Mockingbird,* and *Moby Dick* to demonstrate how boys can engage with life issues and their understanding of masculinity. Imms (2012) discusses how Visual Culture pedagogy could be a possible tool for engaging boys in the process of exploring a range of masculinities. He argues that emerging Visual Culture pedagogy in Art Education mirrors the type of curriculum boys believe helps them develop fair and equitable masculinities. Imms (2012) finds that the arts has the capacity to do what many other subjects could not; it engages boys and allows them to personalize their learning and identity development. Visual art can provide boys with the opportunity to access their unique cultures making learning inspiring, personalized and relevant. Visual culture pedagogy fosters and nurtures academic, and intellectual freedom as it scaffolds the

expression of personal thoughts, beliefs and opinions which can then be used to facilitate communication between boys in the classroom Justin Paton (2005), helps to educate the viewer on how to best "look at a painting" and suggests that the viewer needs to answer "what do I notice," and that there should be no opinions before observations. Training the eye to critically look before verbalizing opinion could help boys to see their masculinity, as mirror, reflected in art before trying to articulate it, as window to self-exploration. Reichert and Hawley (2010) argue that effectiveness of lessons can revolve around the resonance in the boys' personal lives. Therefore, a choice in engagement of artworks, or in Visual Culture, can more deeply stimulate learning especially around the complex subject of masculinities.

Research Context

Westlake Boys High School is an all boys decile nine school, situated in the suburb of Forrest Hill in the North Shore of Auckland. It follows a traditional yet progressive model of education, whereby boys are encouraged to fully participate in academia and co-curricular pursuits. The school community includes approximately 2,600 students and 220 faculty members, all who reside in Auckland. Westlake is a school of excellence for boys, it is an environment where boys are shaped, challenged to reach their full potential. The Westlake Boys' Graduate Profile aims to see our boys graduate Westlake with competencies in Character, Change Readiness, Citizenship, Communication, Collaboration, and Creative and Critical Thinking.

The participants in this action research project were my Art History class made up of a combination of 12 Year 12 and 25 Year 13 students. The group had a strong relationship as we were nearing the end of the academic year and I had either taught several boys in the cohort before or had spent significant time with them through their co-curricular involvement, particularly in water polo, swimming, and hockey. I gained permission from both the boys and their parents/caregivers and clarified that, although the curriculum work involved in this investigation was compulsory as it was linked to their assessments, the boys' voice, opinions, and writing would not be included if they did not choose to participate in the research. All the boys and parents gave permission and several

parents contacted me to share their discussions with their sons due to the work we were doing in class. To assure participants' of anonymity I shared a previous IBSC Action Report as an exemplar and explained they would be named "Boy A" or "Boy B."

The Action

First, the boys chose five portraits. The Year 13 boys chose from the Renaissance and the Year 12 boys chose from 19th Century France, They then answered the following questions:

1. Why did you choose this portrait?

2. What stands out to you most in this portrait and why?

3. What is the artist/patron trying to communicate about the sitter?

In self-selected groups, the boys brainstormed ideas and key words on the qualities and attributes regarded as characteristic of 21st Century masculinity. Although I had originally intended this to be a 20 minute task, the boys were thoroughly engaged. They discussed and challenged each other for the whole 55 minute period.

In the next session, we came together to share their ideas as a whole class with the emphasis on discussing views in a respectful manner. This activity was intended to take one 55 minute period but due to the boys' eagerness this discussion took place over five periods in succession. During these discussions I tied in the portraits that the boys had initially chosen in their first activity. I wanted the boys to reflect on how the portraits could act as both mirror and window to our discussion of 21st Century masculinity. To further emphasize the connection between their discussions and art, the boys then needed to choose an artwork that they felt depicted masculinity. Through this targeted focus they needed to articulate, with reference to specific passages, how the artwork expressed masculinity to them.

Next the boys undertook an inquiry project that was linked to their prescribed curriculum whereby they researched the philosophical context of The Renaissance Man. Using Baldassare Castiglione, The Ideal of a Well Rounded Man: The Book of the Courtier, the boys needed to find the similarities and differences between the concept of The Renaissance Man and the qualities or

attributes associated with 21st century men. For those boys in Year 12, they took this further by researching masculinity in 18th Century France and the criticism of honnête homme, which required that aristocratic men spend time discoursing with women in order to achieve refinement. This was an important part of the action research as it highlighted to the boys that portraiture is not made in a vacuum; that contexts such as philosophy, politics, economy, society and religion impact the production and output of art.

Lastly, the boys reflected on their original five selected portraits and the following questions:

1. To what extent do your personal views/ideas of masculinity shape what artwork you are drawn to?

2. To what extent do you think your original choices were impacted/affected by 21st century male attributes/ideas?

3. Is there anything else that influenced your original decisions?

4. If you could change any of your artworks which, would you change and why?

Key to note in this action research, is that the boys had full autonomy to engage with artworks of their choosing, rather than artworks selected by myself that neatly fit the prescribed curriculum set out by New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA).

Data Collection

I collected data from a number of sources to help support the credibility of the research in the form of written individual work from the boys, small group discussions, full class discussions and, one on one interviews. Oftentimes these one-on-one interviews were student-led whereby the boys shared their questions and understanding. I used the boys' OneNote personalized folders and collaboration folders. Westlake Boys High School is a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) school; therefore, all the boys' work was completed on the students' individual device. I also conducted individual interviews with the boys who volunteered. I did not want the boys to feel as though they had to say yes, as I thought that this might in some way limit the credibility of their responses. Several boys asked if they could be interviewed in pairs, which proved to be very successful, as they

could bounce ideas off one another, and in a few instances ended up asking for each other to elaborate.

Data Analysis

Through inductive analysis I analyzed then organized these qualitative data gathered from the boys initial engagement with portraits, their group and class discussion, their individual reflection on 21ˢᵗ Century masculinity, their second chosen artwork, their engagement with the concept of the Renaissance Man and honnête homme, and then lastly their reflection on their initial chosen portraits, as well as the interviews that I had with the students. Initially these data was differentiated by year group, to explore whether a subtle difference in age impacted the boys' responses. Following Parsons and Browns advice, I followed a three-step process for conducting analysis: organization, description and interpretation (Parsons & Brown, 2002). I then experimented by organizing these data by ethnicity and co-curricular involvement at Westlake, as I was curious to see the impact that potential performative masculinity and code-switching could have on my findings (Heinrich 2012/2013). As this is a focussed process, I was sure to step back from the data and apply introspection to ensure I was continually reflecting on my findings and what they meant. As Schwalbach (2003) warns it is important to ensure objectivity and emotional unattachment.

To ensure validity and reliability of my results, I gave the boys a significant amount of time in class to engage with the differing steps of the action: individually, with their peers in small groups and with the class as a whole. This was important to ensure that all boys had the time to clearly articulate their thinking both verbally and in written form. This also provided me time to gather field notes and make observations which I was then able to incorporate in our class discussions. Due to the variety of areas within which I gathered my data I was able to corroborate the results and probe deeper to ensure sound understanding for myself and clarity of communication from my boys.

Discussion of Results

I wanted to assess the degree to which these self-selected artworks were driven by individual understanding and their relationship with masculinity. Like the pluralities that can be

found in masculinity, I found the extent to which the boys' perception of masculinity and how it impacted their choice of artworks, the art that they are drawn to, varied. For some boys it was the driving force, as one boy noted in his reflection, "like attracts like," he argued that "we like images that are like ourselves." However, others explained that their selections were based on their intrinsic interest in artistic style and subject matter, or that it would lead them to success in their external examinations. One key finding that this action research highlighted is the impact that standard based and credit based assessment has on the boys. Due to the boys' competitive nature of acquiring as many credits as possible and the restrictions on learning that the standards based assessment creates, there is little scope for learning that falls outside of this. Wider educational explorations, such as the impact art has on 21st century masculinity, does not form part of the formal assessment and therefore trying to get student buy in and interest was difficult.

Code-Switching/Performative Masculinity

As Heinrich (2012/2013) found in their study, students sculpted their masculinity and held public and private performances, therefore, my Art History classroom provided a stage or safe space within which the boys could openly discuss their understandings and engagement with their pluralities of masculinity. During the group work that would inform our full class discussion of key words and/or attributes regarded as characteristic of 21st century masculinity, I circulated round the groups asking clarifying questions of my own. It became quickly apparent during these conversations that the boys had their own vocabulary here, that I, as female and older, was not privy to. However, when I did ask for clarification, I could see a sense of pride in the boys when they explained their ideas to me. I also noticed whilst circulating the room during this activity that when I questioned "why" there were several times that the boys could not articulate this. For example, at one point I asked a group why it was (in their words) men "needed" to be competitive with one another, they said because "no-one wants to be a loser" and I asked why this mattered and they could not articulate this.

During our full class discussion of key words and/or attributes regarded as characteristic of 21st century masculinity when asked about masculinity boys were generally reticent to make comment and, almost immediately, a student shared his concern of sharing out loud for the fear of either myself or one of his peers "cancelling" him. This instantly signalled to me the need for exactly these types of discussions. In a society that is so quick to "cancel", boys need to be given opportunities to make mistakes and learn in a safe space where the consequences are less catastrophic. However, a few brave boys did share their ideas and from this a robust, full class discussion took place. During this discussion the boys shared masculine attributes and qualities that ranged from physicality and body image (height, muscles/bulking), emotional stoicism, the role of competition in platonic male relationships, the pressures to stand out and be a desirable partner or employee, their role and behaviour in heterosexual relationships (economic provider, virility and fertility, relationship experience) and masculine body language (posture, open body language, self-confidence). During this conversation one student used the word "alienation" to describe 21st century masculinity. He expanded on the idea of competition between men and explained that he feels alienated from his male peers because of this and that he personally did not want to appear weaker/less able to his peers. I noticed nodding heads of agreement from other boys in the classroom. Reiner (2020) argues that this alienation is a common among men, as they place far more importance on smaller networks for emotional support and limit their disclosure about the issues and problems that most trouble them.

Lastly, as a class we explored 21st century masculine celebrities, whereby one student air quoted the words "role models." During this people such as Andrew Tate, The Rock, John Cena and Keanu Reeves were noted as embodying and communicating 21st century masculinity. However, the boys were also able to articulate that there are celebrities that challenge this rhetoric such as Harry Styles, Timothée Chalamet, Lil Naz X, James Charles and Tyler the Creator. At the end of the lesson, I witnessed the extent to which some of my boys' code switched or enacted performative masculinity. Two boys in my Art History class, who were also in my History class, which was the lesson directly

after, were quick to ask that I rub off our discussion from the white board as they did not want their peers in History to see our discussions. When I probed as to why, one student was quick to say, "because they won't get it" whilst the other said "I don't feel like I necessarily fit the stereotypical masculine mould and I don't want the class judging me."

Negating Code Switching/Performative Masculinity

In a bid to negate code switching and performative masculinity, at the end of the full class discussion lessons, the boys reflected individually on the extent to which they agreed with the class on the qualities and attributes that were regarded as 21st century masculinity. Here I was able to gain a deeper understanding of how my boys individually engaged with their masculinity and their reflections were perceptive and showed deep thinking. To a certain extent, some boys agreed with the discussion we had as a class. They found our discussion, however, was a more stereotypical and exaggerated evaluation of what masculinity actually is. One boy reflected that "in many senses, what we wrote about on the board and discussed as a class was focussed on the small, yet vocal minority that express their opinions louder than those of the majority." Another thought that "this is representative of the influence social media has over forming the shape of 21st century masculinity." We discussed that social media is the biggest influence for toxic masculinity where one boy explained that "toxic masculinity is the exaggeration of traditional 21st century male traits, and the exaggeration is to an extent where it becomes inherently toxic." One boy found the more reasonable aspect of our discussion being that which "centered on traits of men that when aren't overdone, are good traits to have as a human. From our discussion of leadership, confidence and chivalry, it is evident that these are more constant traits of the traditional 21st century man." Other boys reflected that "there has been some development in the idea of masculinity, but the general idea has been the same where men are playing the dominant role in society." However, he did go on to explain that "masculinity in today's time also includes going to the gym to get fit and look good. I think this is what real masculinity should be like as it encourages men to become a better person." However, one boy did not agree with our discussions on 21st century masculinity and concluded that

"it may be the best we can do, as 21ˢᵗ century masculinity is specifically subjective and difficult to comprehend and describe. Masculinity is a social construct just like subjects such as femininity, gender, and beauty." He went on to reflect that "masculinity is about service, being expected to be thoughtful of those around you."

The Role of Art as Window to Masculinity

The boys were able to establish that art and specifically portraiture can act as a window to masculinity. We had explored the concept of the Renaissance Man, the etiquette of 18ᵗʰ century masculinity and honnête homme and compared this to depictions of 21ˢᵗ Century masculinity. By comparing masculinity from these distinct time periods, the boys could see the progression, and according to one boy the regression ("chivalry is a thing of the past") of masculinity. Another boy concluded that the definition of masculinity today is "more fluid and vague" compared to during the Renaissance and 18ᵗʰ century France. Whereas one boy argued that "it is now the middle class that is shaping Western masculinity, and the fear of effeminacy, from the 18ᵗʰ century, has continued to exclude women and femininity from "masculine" spaces." He also went on to argue that this "fear of effeminacy has given rise to hypermasculinity and by extension the more shocking rhetoric of figures such as Andrew Tate." Lastly, one of my boys concluded that "18ᵗʰ century Frenchmen were expressly discouraged from receiving guidance from women. Because of the significance of this new code of masculinity in 18ᵗʰ century France, some of its' ideals have prevailed for a long time, and only recently are we seeing real pushback to these values. Today, some men are afraid of asking others, especially women, for help, especially emotional help. Men have been told to bottle up their feelings and hide it because being emotional is a 'feminine' trait. Because of this, men do not want to be seen as weak by their peers, especially female peers who are not able to understand this struggle. Because of this 21ˢᵗ century men are generally apprehensive of asking for advice and guidance from women."

The Role of Art as Mirror to Masculinity

The boys articulated their understanding of masculinity through visual analysis of their chosen portraits. For example in Bronzino, *Portrait of Cosimo I de'Medici*, oil on panel, 74 x 58cm, Uffizi

Florence, 1543-45 (Fig. 5) one boy identified that the depiction of Cosimo in armour was to "communicate to the viewer ideas of guardianship and protector of both his family and by extension the state of Tuscany." He went on to explain how Bronzino "depicted Cosimo's character such as stoicism, through facial expressions with the sitters averted gaze and a ¾ profile view." In Raphael, *Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione*, oil on canvas, 82 x 67cm, Louvre Paris, c.1514-1515 (Fig. 6) one boy noted that "Raphael uses the body of the sitter to connote importance as the body fills the pictorial space" and that this emphasizes Castiglione's "intellectual dominance." Another boy went on to explain that the "sitter's body is used to convey character traits such as composure of emotions," and that "body language such as the folding of the hands to rest in the sitter's lap depicts a well-refined etiquette and elegance." Similar to Bronzino's portrait, the boys noted that Raphael also uses clothing to convey the sitter's wealth which as they deduced is "typically associated with or is a conveyor of masculinity." Lastly, the boys noticed how both Bronzino and Raphael use light to illuminate the sitter's forehead which symbolises the sitter's intellect. And unlike the Bronzino where Cosimo does not make eye contact with the viewer to assert his dominance, Raphael employs a direct gaze for Castiglione to "give an air of authority, power and dominance."

Lastly, the boys went on to argue that portraits are didactic in nature especially in their ability to communicate the masculinity of the sitter. In response to this one boy made the connection that advertising of products and social media "function in a similar way today. These media outlets provide aspirational, inspirational, or stereotypical character traits of masculinity with some promotional material going so far as to isolate the viewer if they do not fit or seek to fit this mould."

The Study of Art Provided a "Safe" Space to Discuss the Pluralities of Masculinity

My Art History classroom provided a stage or safe space within which the boys could openly discuss their understandings and engagement with their pluralities of masculinity. To begin with, one boy shared his concern of sharing out loud for the fear of either myself or one of his peers "canceling" him. Two boys in my Art History class who were also in my History class, which was the

lesson directly after, were quick to at the end of the lesson, ask that I rub off our discussion from the white board as they did not want their peers in History to see our discussions. When I probed as to why one student was quick to say, "because they won't get it", whilst the other said "I don't feel like I necessarily fit the stereotypical masculine mold and I don't want the class comparing me."

Conclusions

During this Action Research I learnt that boys crave opportunities to discuss, in a safe space, their experiences, struggles, challenges, strengths and wins that center around their masculinity. When asked about masculinity boys are generally reticent to make comments (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2001). Almost immediately, this, combined with my own experience of the process, signalled to me the need for exactly these types of discussions. In a society that is so quick to "cancel", boys are not able to make mistakes and learn in a safe space where the consequences are less catastrophic. However, a few brave boys did share their ideas and from this robust, full class discussion took place.

As Reiner (2020) highlights, unlike girls/women, boys/men are not encouraged to articulate their understanding and experiences of masculinity and as an extension of this, are not given scope to celebrate their masculinity. It saddened me to learn that my boys are feeling increasingly alienated by society, their peers, their family, and whanau due to the stereotyped pressures that are placed on them and how to be masculine. They are fearful of both being too masculine or not masculine enough and this tension has created the need to be both and neither at the same time. The fear of being "canceled" and the perceived losses that come with this also govern their actions. This is particularly alarming when analysing the suicide rate among men. In the 2021/2022 financial year, there were 583 suspected self-inflicted deaths in Aotearoa New Zealand, of which 401 were male, whilst 137 were female (https://www.tewhatuora.govt.nz).

I found that due to the familiarity with Microsoft Teams and OneNote, and their ability to access this work both in class and out of the classroom, the boys were at ease with sharing their

personal reflections, understanding, and learning. Several times when work in class had been completed students would go back to their work at home and add, expand, and elaborate on what they had done in class that day. I found that through the innate personalisation of this action research the boys tended to want to continue working on this outside of the classroom, which I believe highlights a need in education to ensure that the curriculum, although prescribed, is also adapted where appropriate to seek out the boys' voice and link to their own lived experiences.

As Imms (2000) argues, the concept of masculinity as "multiple" has limitations and theorizing does not encompass nearly the range of masculinities that may exist, as masculinities are flexible and continually changing. Therefore, as is typical of action research, to ensure I best serve the boys in my classroom, each year I must endeavour to adapt and continue an exploration of masculinity making links to the art that is studied to ensure that my boys have a space within which they can explore their pluralities. By being a student driven exercise, whereby they define their parameters of masculinity, this will ensure that the definition does not become stale, and rather evolves over time.

Reflection Statement

I set out to explore the plurality of masculinity alongside my boys. I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of 21st century masculinity as well as to help facilitate their navigation, understanding and engagement with masculinity. I wanted my boys to be able to articulate what made them unique and to empower their sense of identity and be proud of their masculinity. I was hoping that through the study of Renaissance and 19th Century French portraiture we would be able to use this to mirror and window masculinity and see how historic masculine ideals have shaped masculine ideals today. During this action research I feel that I challenged my boys and myself to articulate, understand and be empathetic of each other's ideas. Reichert and Hawley (2010) emphasize that a connection between students and the curriculum needs to be fostered. This has made me question the extent to which I in Art History make the content relevant to my students. In particular, I am questioning the extent in which the men that feature in my courses, such as artists

and political leaders for example, act as agents of masculinity. Am I actively teaching the plurality of their masculinity and am I doing this in both an implicit and explicit way? Am I teaching these men in a two-dimensional way and emphasizing the good or am I explicitly discussing the pluralities of that man.

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Appendix

Théodore Gericault, The Raft of the Medusa, oil on canvas, 4.91 x 7.16m, Louvre Museum Paris, 1819

Théodore Gericault, A Study of Truncated Limbs, 1819

Théodore Gericault, The Severed Heads, 1818

Théodore Gericault, Evening: Landscape with an Aqueduct, oil on canvas, 250.2 x 219.7cm, The Met New York, 1818

Bronzino, Portrait of Cosimo I de'Medici, oil on panel, 74cm x 58cm, Uffizi Florence, 1543-45

Raphael, Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione, oil on canvas, 82 cm x 67 cm, Louvre (Paris), c. 1514-1515

Raphael, Portrait of Agnolo Doni, oil on wood, 63cm x 45cm, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, circa 1506

Botticelli, "Portrait of Giuliano de Medici", tempera on panel, 54cmx36cm, Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, 1478