

## ABSTRACT

FROM WHOM DO THEY TAKE THEIR LEAD? A STUDY OF MASCULINE IDENTITY  
CONSTRUCTION BY MALE YOUTH IN CONTEMPORARY TRINIDAD AND  
IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOLING

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This dissertation explores the construction of male gender identity among a cross section of male youth in contemporary Trinidad. Analysis is made of their discourse gained via interviews, with special attention to lived circumstance and social codes which may incline young males to particular choices and behaviours. This qualitative study employs the methodology of modified grounded theory with the dual aim of explaining how young men make sense of the world around them and what this implies for the leads they take.

The main finding of this study is that in the Trinidadian context there are a variety of sources from which young males take their lead forming a web of influences with multiple levels and loci. This web comprises personal agency and, as expected, role models such as have been traditionally envisaged: parents/ relatives and teachers who represent the paradigm of vertical mentoring. Of great and often underestimated importance also is the phenomenon of horizontal mentoring which takes place via the influence of peers and peer groups. The lead-providing role of the media is also explored as straddling both the horizontal and the vertical. More abstractly, persons and groups do take the lead provided for them from social constructs among which the codes relating to masculinity remain dominant.

In conclusion, this thesis argues that there is no vacuum of leaders or of value constructs to draw on. Male Trinidadian youth are availed of formidable sources of influence from which they take their lead at times with disastrous results. The challenge for educational intervention, which seeks to prepare young people for life in society, is to identify and deconstruct these sources of influence and to explore what this implies for the schooling of males in Trinidad.

Keywords: Young males, masculinities, gender-identity-construction, social codes, role-models, power, peer, lead-providers, follow, school goals, school practices, Trinidad.