Music therapy as an anti-oppressive practice:

Critically exploring gender and power with young people in school

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Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

December 2018

Department of Music Therapy

Faculty of Fine Arts and Music

The University of Melbourne
Abstract

This project sought to locate music therapy within broader health, research, and education contexts, as a participatory and anti-oppressive practice for young people in school to explore issues related to gender and power. In parallel, the research aimed to expand music therapy as an anti-oppressive practice (Baines, 2013), specifically focusing on deepening music therapists’ understanding of critical issues related to gender, power, and young people in education settings.

Predicated on the notion that schools can be both sites of violence, and microcosms for change-making, the project occurred during a time of significant shifts across education settings worldwide to respond to endemic gender-based violence (Chandra-Mouli et al., 2017). Meanwhile, young people themselves continue to demonstrate new forms of resistance to gender-based violence and dominant gender and sexuality norms (Bragg et al., 2018; Keller et al., 2018). This project responds to a need for approaches that support young people’s autonomy and challenge processes of pathologisation and individualisation; approaches that seek to understand social structures, and the ways in which young people are shaped by their relationships with these social structures, and with each other (Brunila & Rossi, 2018).

Framed broadly as a participatory action research project, the study was informed by a series of music-based workshops conducted in the first year, exploring the issues that young people identified as most important in relation to gender. The project then established a music therapy group program in a government school. The school was located in the outer suburbs of Melbourne, with an index of community socio-educational advantage below the national average, and a high percentage of students with a language background other than English. This primary project took the form of a critical ethnography, and generated a wide range of data over nine months. Interviews were conducted with five staff and sixteen of the young people who participated in music therapy groups exploring issues related to gender and power.

Discourses of risk and deficit emerged as critical issues to respond to in the project, and became a key focus of the four chapters of results. The research revealed the complex forms of violence that can occur when exploring gender-based violence in a school context, and how these relate to young people’s layered subjectivities and
The findings demonstrated a need to problematise and expand upon current responses to gender-based violence in the context of Australian education settings, especially where Whiteness and colonial relations remain profoundly underexamined. Chapter Six overviews the five broad, salient themes that emerged in relation to the role of music in creating conditions for young people to explore gender. Chapter Seven outlines the role of music therapists in supporting young people to do so, the unique skillset and critical lens required in this emerging practice, and a new method developed in the project: ‘Insight-Oriented Narrative Songwriting’. Informed by anti-oppressive and decolonial approaches to reframing violence and harm, music therapy is ultimately constructed as a practice congruent with shifting understandings and paradigms related to trauma. Overarchingly, the research exposes the complex conditions of power in schools, and explicates the potential of music therapy within these conditions, to support young people to resist discursive positioning, and rewrite their own subjectivities.
Declaration

The following Declaration, signed by the candidate is to certify that:

i. The thesis comprises only my original work towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,

ii. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

iii. The thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Signed:

Name: Elly Scrine

Date: 18/12/2018
Preface

Data generated in this research project has been published in four publications. The dissertation does not include any of these publications in their entirety. Authorship of these publications have been determined in discussion with the primary supervisor, and a description of these works is provided below.

Publication One in Chapter Three


This paper reports on the initial literature review conducted, and the results of the pilot project, both referred to in Chapter Three.

Publication Two in Chapter Three and Chapter Seven


This co-authored paper reports on the initial phase of data analysis used for the primary project, referred to in Chapter Three. It also contains results that are reported on in Chapter Seven, regarding how the young people in the project described my role.

Publication Three in Chapter Six

This co-authored book chapter contains narrative material from Chapter Six and is currently in press for publication.

**Publication Four in Chapter Seven**


This book chapter contains narrative material from Chapter Seven and is currently in press for publication.

**Funding**

This doctoral research project has been supported through an Australian Postgraduate Award at the University of Melbourne.
Acknowledgments

First and foremost I would like to acknowledge all of the participants in the project, who allowed me to into a little window of their lives.

To Professor Katrina Skewes-McFerran, my supervisor who beckoned me into this project, supported me before I had begun, and advocated for me ever since. Thank you for reassuring me at so many points throughout this journey, especially when I was lost at the school, and hitting brick walls of the system and of my own self-doubt. Thank you for having my back throughout, for reading earlier versions of many of these chapters, and telling when I was off track, knowing that I could shift my thinking and do better. Your insights continually enabled me to finesse my writing, and eventually build these eight chapters of work that are cohesive and congruent with who I am.

To Dr Sophie Rudolph, thank you for entering into supervision with me half way, when the project needed your insight. Thank you for your wisdom, for jumping straight in, answering my most basic of questions, and ultimately reshaping this into something far better than I could have imagined. Your time, patience, perspective, and encouragement was exactly what I needed to broaden this piece of work beyond the scope of my own field of practice. Thank you for reading these many hundred pages, for assisting me in knowing where and how to direct my critique, and for the many waves of encouragement over 2018 as you left the office in the late afternoon and I stayed behind, slowly putting this together.

Thank you to my colleagues and dear friends at the National Music Therapy Research Unit, now the Creatives Arts and Music Therapy Research Unit. Thank you for your support, encouragement, feedback and solidarity over the last few years. To Jen, Bec, Liz M., Mel, and Meg, for not only inspiring me to finish, but inspiring me as kind, thoughtful, strong women, who each do incredible work. To Laura, Jason, Bronte, Helen O., Anja, Astrid, Victoria, Zara, Maya, Ella, Liz A., Helen C., Amanda, Elizabeth W., Jasmin, Kate, Alex, and Maya, thank you for your intellectual support, your heartfelt encouragement, and for walking alongside me through those many Mondays and intensive seminars. Thank you particularly to Tanya, who jumped into the research group when I was nearing the end, but quickly became someone I hope to work and learn and grow alongside for life. Thank you to the broader music therapy team – to Felicity Baker, Grace Thompson, and Jeanette Tamplin for being
powerhouses who inspire me. I especially want to thank Alex Crooke and Lucy Bolger, who not only sat on my advisory committee, but whose work and insights have pushed and motivated me to do good critical work.

Thank you especially to my dearly departed colleague and friend, Dr Ben Leske. You offered me friendship, support, and inspiration, and you offered it to queer and choral communities everywhere. In getting to the end of this project, my respect for you has only grown – for completing your doctoral dissertation in the final months of your life, and for teaching me about life, music, and letting go. I miss you dearly, and I hope one day to pick up some of the threads of brilliant work you spent these years weaving.

To my family, for your love, support, and pride. To my Mum, for inspiring me to achieve, for teaching me to care and take care of myself, and for knowing how important it is to sing. To my Dad, for teaching me how to tell stories, for the art you make, and for the father you are to me. To my siblings, Jack – for being my big brother and reading a chapter at the eleventh hour, to Clare – for being an inspiration and my best friend for life, and to Hannie – for being the little sis I am so proud to watch grow up.

Thank you to my friends, whose everyday support forms the web of community in my life. To my dearest friend, Sufie. Thank you for being my partner in life, and ultimately the person I attribute to getting me through this alive. Thank you for every time you showed up, in every way possible. You have taught me more about friendship, growth, and love than any single person in my life. To Ashlyn Tyler/Veale, for having my back, from the beginning to the end. For the support that you offer fiercely and gently, for proof reading my work, and for every moment you arrived, exactly when I needed you.

To those who made 2018 possible: to my brother Nima, to Rosie, to Elisa, to Big Sam, and to Little Sam (whose work I cannot wait to learn more from). I could never have anticipated that acquiring a desk on Level Seven while I wrote this entire thing would also bring me such true and dear friendship. I can’t wait to watch what each of you do next, and I hope dearly that I can join you alongside it all.

To those who so generously offered me their family homes when I needed to retreat and knuckle down. To my dear friend Kate Pern, for her Mum and Dad’s home in Anglesea. There is a little piece of that house (and Kimba) in Chapter Eight. To the McEwan family, I am so grateful for your generosity, and Andy, for everything you
are, have been, and will always be in my life, particularly on the saddest of Sundays. To Emily, my dear friend, my family, and maybe one day my colleague if I’m lucky – thank you for offering your home on the mountain, and your heart to me always, and for inspiring me to do good work. To the groups who have provided me with community, food, music, and catharsis. To my friend Jazz for keeping our Book Club family going (and everyone there who has put up with me forever failing to read the book), and to my friend Raag for holding the Cool Room family together (and everyone in that team who I am so grateful to work alongside). Thank you to the friends who I truly consider my family: Rachie, Ari, Tava, and Ali. For being there in each of your ways through every single year of this project, beginning to end. There are pieces of each of you in this, and in my heart always. Thank you to Luara for an astute and loving proof read of Chapter Five. And thank you to my oldest friends, Nara, Em, Tash, Kat, Erin, Kate H and Kate E, for being so close even when we’re months or years apart – for being friends I will cherish for life.

Acknowledgment of Country

This project was predominantly researched and written on the lands of the Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung people, of the Kulin Nations. I pay my respects to the peoples of the Kulin Nations, to their Elders, past, present, and emerging. As a guest on unceded land, in which there is no treaty in place, I acknowledge Aboriginal sovereignty and ongoing connection to these lands, waters, and songlines. I acknowledge that these lands hold the memories, traditions, culture, hope, and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the country known as Australia.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background to the Research

This project is contextualised broadly by an intensified and rapidly shifting period of discussion, discovery, and debate related to notions of gender and power. These shifts are taking place across digitally-mediated networks, policy, classrooms, social media movements, the arts, industries, and more. The term ‘gender-based violence’ is often used throughout these discussions, and can describe issues including sexual harassment and assault, violence against women, dating violence, digital forms of sexual harassment, and violence towards queer and gender-diverse communities (Gleeson, Kearney, Leung & Brislane, 2015, p. 6; Ollis, 2018, p. 6). A gender-based violence lens focuses on the gendered drivers behind these issues, examining them as manifestations of power relations and dominant gender norms.

Throughout the last three years in which this project took place, a wealth of literature dedicated to understanding gender-based violence has been published, new policy and legislation introduced, and the #MeToo movement spread across digitally-mediated networks worldwide – dominating public discussion and highlighting the sheer magnitude of particular facets of gendered violence.

Within this magnified period of shifting discourse related to gender and power, a range of programs, research, and policy have emerged, with a particular focus on young people. Literature has noted that young people hold low levels of knowledge and understanding of gender-based violence, and tend to hold attitudes that are supportive of violence against women (Harris et al., 2015). Furthermore, young women are known to experience sexual assault at significantly higher rates than the national average (Cox, 2015). Meanwhile, the literature also documents young people’s resistance. In recent years young people have been described as transforming global awareness of gender diversity, and demonstrating new ideologies to challenge and expand language and practices that rely on dominant gender and sexuality norms (see for example McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2017; Bragg et al., 2018; Keller, Mendes & Ringrose, 2018).

In schools, gender-based violence may emerge in forms of sexual harassment or dating violence, and can be understood as a result of power and patriarchy, rather than
through the more politically neutral and pathologising language of ‘bullying’ (Brown, Chesney-Lind & Stein, 2007). Predicated on the notion that schools can be both key sites of violence, and microcosms for change-making, there has recently been a shift across education settings worldwide to prioritise ‘primary violence prevention’ (see for example Maxwell et al., 2010; Achyut et al., 2016; Renold, 2016; Lane, Brundage & Kreinin, 2017; VicHealth, 2017). Primary violence prevention establishes clear links between gender roles, gender inequitable attitudes, and gender-based violence, and seeks to transform these through cultural and structural change.

Over the course of this project (2015 - 2018), an Australian government primary violence prevention initiative known as ‘Respectful Relationships Education’ (RRE) was piloted, evaluated, and mandated in schools across one state over a five-year period (Ollis, 2018). The initiative aims to expose young people to ideals of gender equity through a ‘whole school approach’, as the most effective means of building young people’s capacity to develop healthy relationships, and reduce gender-based violence. Gleeson et al. (2015) summarise best practice recommendations for such work in schools, calling for contemporary approaches that are “age-appropriate, interactive and participatory” (p. 27). Meanwhile, young people themselves are implementing their own forms of cultural and structural change: writing their own feminist school curriculums (O’Keefe, 2016), coalescing to challenge rape culture (Harris, 2015; Retallack, Ringrose & Lawrence, 2016), and creating autonomous spaces to explore compounding gendered, raced, and classed oppression (Ringrose & Renold, 2016; Showunmi, 2017).

Indeed, as language and understanding around gender expands and develops at a rapid pace, schools are often playing ‘catch up’ with young people, in order to create and support inclusive gender cultures (see Bragg et al., 2018). These shifts are important because as institutions, schools are known to reinforce and preserve gender norms based on a binary understanding of gender, and an assumed link between biological sex and gender (Shilling, 1993; Ingrey, 2013; Neary, Gray & O’Sullivan, 2016). Indeed, the key aim of Australian primary violence prevention is to reduce violence against ‘women and girls’. Although it is understood that women and girls experience violence disproportionately at the hands of men, responses have been critiqued for their tendency to assume heterosexuality, and to conflate sex and gender (see for example Fileborn, 2012). While data suggests violence occurs in similar (or higher) rates within queer and gender diverse relationships (Horsley, 2015), research,
policy, and practice related to gender-based violence are primarily located within a feminist framework that relies on heterosexuality. Campo and Tayton (2015) note that there has been an invisibility of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex, Asexual (LGBTQIA+) people across this research. For these reasons and more, recommendations have been made to expand primary violence prevention to challenge not only sexism, but heterosexism and binary gender structures (Our Watch, 2017). However, within adolescent literature that includes these communities, narratives tend to focus on ill-health, danger, and alarming statistics, positioning LGBTQIA+ young people through a lens of vulnerability and risk (see for example Marshall, 2010; Bryan, 2017). Meanwhile, school-based initiatives that deconstruct gender as socially constructed binary, or actively challenge homophobia and transphobia, remain controversial and plagued by public moral debate (Coleman, Collins & Kearns, 2015; Robinson, Smith & Davies, 2017).

**Motivation for the Research**

Since its cultural ‘invention’ as a distinct developmental stage in the early 20th century, adolescence has been a key site for public and private discussion about sex, gender, and identity (Dean, 1994). The notion that adolescence is a potentially critical stage of development in a person’s life is often stated across a wide range of research and practice paradigms, including health, education, and sociology. Predicated on these ideas, international research emphasises how norms develop in early childhood, intensify during adolescence, and can set trajectories for our adult relationships, health, and wellbeing (Chandra-Mouli et al., 2017). Meanwhile, schools are well documented as places that informally ‘teach’ and reinforce binary gender norms and hegemonic masculinity (Robinson, 2005; Ringrose & Renold, 2010), heteronormativity (Robinson, Bansel, Denson, Ovenden & Davies, 2014), and racialised queer-phobia (Ward, 2017).

Alongside these important critical discussions are equally important considerations of the ways in which sex and sexuality can indeed be a site of harm for young people, especially when it comes to particular relations of power. For example, schools have been widely acknowledged as spaces where girls and young women commonly experience sexual harassment, which is typically normalised as a part of adolescent social-sexual development (Conroy, 2013; Gillander & Stein, 2017). There is substantially less research into how violence intersects with queer and gender
diverse identities. There is even less so investigating compounding experiences of violence in relation to race, gender, and sexuality, despite evidence indicating that LGBTQIA+ young people and communities of colour endure disproportionate rates of violence in this respect (see for example Grant et al., 2011). Overall, the literature widely suggests that young people’s sexualities develop and often operate within oppressive relations of power, both interpersonal and institutional (Markowitz & Puchner, 2016).

Meanwhile, in music therapy discourse, there has been a longstanding interest in analyses of power through a feminist frame, from authors including Sue Baines (1992), Sandra Curtis (1990, 2013a), Jane Edwards and Susan Hadley (2007), and Randi Rolvsjord and Jill Halstead (2013). As a music therapist practicing primarily with young people, I am oriented to the range of functions music can serve young people’s identity formation, emotions, behaviour, cognition, and broader communities. Commencing this project, I began to tune into contemporary discussions, research, and debate about gender and violence prevention, and consider potential congruencies, perspectives, and insight that music therapists could offer. Across the literature I discovered calls to action for schools to forge new spaces for young people to engage in discussion about gender and sexuality (see Ringrose, 2013); for researchers to consider new methodologies for young people to explore gender (see Bragg et al., 2018; Renold, 2018); and for participatory, interactive programs that examine the gendered drivers of violence (see VicHealth, 2017, p. 20).

In parallel, new perspectives have been emerging in music therapy discourse. Researchers are examining music therapy as a site of gender performance (Halstead & Rolvsjord, 2017), developing new ways to think about operations of power and oppression in music therapy (Baines, 2013), and encouraging therapists to unearth and address dominant narratives in their practice (Hadley, 2013a). This literature weaves critical theory into an established body of scholarship focused on music therapy as an effective, engaging, and participatory medium with a wide range of adolescent populations (McFerran, 2010; Albornoz, 2011; Bolger, 2015; Krüger & Stige, 2015; McFerran, Crooke & Bolger, 2017). Outside of music therapy, researchers in youth studies have in recent years been advocating specifically for creative and arts-based methodologies to engender new forms of being, thinking, feeling, and expression with young people across contexts and identities (see for example Brown, 2009; Bratich & Brush, 2011; Massumi, 2013; Ivinson & Renold, 2016; Renold, 2018).
this field Emma Renold (2018), advocates for art-based group practices such as visual arts, dance, sculpting, and photography, because of the opportunities they offer to support young people “to safely and creatively communicate and potentially transform oppressive sexual cultures and practices” (p. 1).

In contemplating the role music therapy could play in this emerging field, I was particularly intrigued by perspectives that acknowledge the need for new spaces and new opportunities, but that also critically examine notions of ‘responsibility’. For example, scholars have noted the forces of neoliberalism at play in shifting social responsibility into individual responsibility, and marketising gender equality (Ylöstalo & Brunila, 2018). Brunila and Rossi (2018) demonstrate how, under neoliberalism, notions of ‘equality’ are subtly reconstructed by positioning particular identity groups through an ‘ethos of vulnerability’. Within such a framework, the authors argue that the only ways groups can be heard is by recognising and categorising them based on their trauma and vulnerability. More broadly, the literature demonstrates the difficulty of finding clear solutions to problems that are complex, multifaceted, and that remain highly charged in public discourse. Researchers across fields have noted the tendency for young people’s gender and sexualities to become ‘battlegrounds’; sites upon which debates about morality and social values can play out.

Seeking to take these critical issues into account while undertaking this project, I routinely questioned how and why certain groups appear to be consistently overrepresented in narratives of trauma and violence. Rather than locating the cause within individual subjects, or particular communities who are positioned as most vulnerable, I drew on the key tenets of music therapy as an anti-oppressive practice (Baines, 2013). A politicised orientation to working with people, anti-oppressive practice locates structural oppression as inextricably linked to what we commonly perceive as people’s ‘personal struggles’ (Baines, 2007). Across the creative arts therapies more broadly, there have been several calls for therapists to take up this work: to bring the political into our practice, and critically examine the sites of power in which we work, or by which our clients are positioned (see for example Hadley, 2013b; Baines & Edwards, 2015; Sajnani, Marxen & Zarate, 2017; Wright & Wright, 2017). In seeking to centre context and examine power structures relevant to young people’s lives, and in aligning with contemporary research on gender with young people, schools emerged as a relevant setting to focus the project.
Positioning

My interest in these questions, the knowledge I construct, and the theory I present in this dissertation is grounded in my own particular ethical stance, which is inexorably shaped by my own subjective positioning. This focus on personal location speaks to Michel Foucault’s (1980) post-structural concept of ‘subjugated knowledges’, and how power delineates what is considered ‘knowledge’, and how ways of knowing are accepted or marginalised (p. 81-82). In the fields of therapy and beyond, practitioners have been prompted to unmask illusions of objectivism and make their political stance visible, informed by work of scholars such as Franz Fanon (1967) in psychiatry, Paulo Freire (1970) in pedagogy, and Laura Brown (1994) in psychotherapy. Consequently, at this point, I turn the gaze on myself to locate my identity in this project, and more broadly.

I am a White, queer person living and working on colonised, unceded Aboriginal land. The custodians of the Kulin Nation, the lands on which I currently live, are the Wurundjeri people, whose sovereignty over this land remains unrecognised. I write these details in order to locate myself as a settler, and contextualise this status within the violent processes of colonisation that have occurred in Australia and that continue to occur in implicit, explicit and under-acknowledged ways. Informed by this context, I maintain that as a White adult conducting intergenerational work and research with young people in schools, I have a relationship of complicity with structures of racism and colonialism. While I seek to acknowledge and disrupt these structures, such a discursive position bestows overt and covert conditions of power that benefit and implicate me as an expert, authority and performer of Whiteness.

In addition to the privilege my Whiteness affords me in a settler-colonial context, I have benefited from other forms of structural power that have shaped my identity and capacity to conduct a Doctoral project. I am physically non-disabled and neurotypical, from a family with mixed middle class and working class experiences; a position that has granted me the physical and social mobility required to access university. While I identify with the label ‘woman’, I also identify as queer in ways that shape not only my sexuality, but my experience of gender. I do not identify with the biological and binary-driven label of ‘female’, and I define my experience and
expression of gender outside of what is typically defined as cisgender\(^1\). My genderqueer identity has been shaped most predominantly by the community around me, where discourse is generated not in academic texts, but within online discourse, digitally-mediated networks, community discussion, artistic spaces, and in protest.

As a white, physically non-disabled, middle class person socialised as a woman, I am representative of the majority of music therapists practicing in Australia, the allied health profession more broadly, and certain fields of academia. I see these aspects of my identity reflected in social, political, and academic realms, which I consider bound up in the ways merit is defined and cultivated by institutions and broader power structures. My confidence to participate in academic knowledge-generation is paralleled by my access not only to these physical spaces, but to the structural power I am afforded. My entry into challenging notions of justice and meritocracy occurred most likely as I began to experience and contemplate the gendered discourses shaping my participation in and access to music. Specifically, I began noticing and critiquing issues of representation, inclusion, and participation as a music student in a male-dominated industry. I arrived at this thesis in my mid-twenties, having studied a Bachelor of Music, Master of Music Therapy, and as a musician/artist. I had been practicing as a music therapist for just two years when I commenced the project, but I had been involved in music for many more.

While I hold an anti-oppression framework at the heart of this dissertation, I also believe theorising is limited, especially when deployed “as a commodity disconnected from its activist moorings” (Mohanty, 2013, p. 972). Critical theory has provided me with powerful conceptual tools from which to analyse, deconstruct and present my data in an intellectual capacity. However, what I believe truly matters is how social justice ethics are committed to and enacted in reality. Having begun to critically analyse my own gendered experiences in music, I commenced this dissertation simultaneously as I began dedicating my time to challenging issues of access, inclusion, and participation in music at a grassroots level. Outside of the clinical, private nature of professional therapeutic practice, I looked to community-building efforts in the music industry, and began organising music and arts-based events, and advocating for cultural and systemic change. Over the course of the PhD project, I have continued to participate in activism, and became a director of a non-

\(^1\) Referring to an identity position in which gender aligns with sex assigned at birth.
profit organisation that seeks to increase the visibility of marginalised groups in the music industry. My advocacy work and experiences in the Australian music industry that have occurred alongside this project have undoubtedly fuelled my interests in the research questions, and informed the ideas I present throughout this thesis. In Chapter Three, I accompany the methodological overview of the project with some further detail on the activism and inquiry that occurred concurrent to this project.

**Key Terms and Theoretical Frameworks**

**Gender.**

Given I refer to gender throughout this dissertation, it is important to first explicate how I locate and define gender and related terms. Traditional theories of gender focus on the socially constructed characteristics of women and men (World Health Organization, 2017). These notions of gender roles and identity are critiqued from multiple queer and feminist perspectives. Firstly, for their failure to account for the system of power relations in which gender occurs and operates (Weedon, 1987). Next, for positioning gender as a fixed ‘thing’ that we ‘become’ as passive recipients, rather than as performative, and continually enacted and reproduced, as explicated in detail by Judith Butler (1988, 1993). Drawing on these notions, queer theorists critique the construction of gender into a rigid, binary classification system of either male or female. While the gender binary operates as a seemingly fixed or natural system, scholars examine how it is created and ascribed meaning through interactions, rewarding those who comply with the ‘correct’ gender performance, and punishing those who do not (Paechter, 2012). Markowitz and Puchner (2016) describe how the policing and regulation of the binary upholds a system of power which “remains hidden inside seemingly power-neutral interactions” (p. 415).

An exploration of how gender and sexuality are regulated also requires reflection upon the ways the gender binary has been normalised and naturalised through overt and covert processes of White dominance and Western imperialism. Theorists such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988) and María Lugones (2008) illuminate the coloniality of gender, pointing out how gender fuses with race in the operations of colonial power and control. Working against misconceptions that diverse expressions of gender are a ‘new’ or Western construct, the literature notes many systems and expressions of gender that exist cross-culturally (Blackwood, 1984; Oyewùmí, 1997), and points to the regulation of the gender binary as central to
processes of colonisation (Lawrence, 2009). I adopt the phrase ‘gender and power’ throughout the research as a simplified, overarching description to capture the inextricable links between violence, oppression and power. While gender was the focus of the research, I sought to locate operations of power as a force that accompanies and fuses with multiple aspects of identity.

**Feminism.**

Feminism has grown into many different branches, and these branches do not necessarily align with each other’s values, or even accept the same key tenets. White feminism\(^2\) has a long history of homogenising, overlooking difference, and theorising as though experiences of oppression and privilege are universal, detaching White women from their Whiteness, and dismissing attention to difference as a distraction (Lorde, 1984/2012). As authors such as Lugones (2003) and Mariana Ortega (2006) have highlighted, more recent inclinations of White feminism can present as sensitive and caring toward women of colour, even claiming to be knowledgeable about their experiences, while Whiteness remains un-examined as ever. I draw on feminism throughout the dissertation, while seeking also to challenge White feminist tendencies, most particularly arrogance, ignorance, fragility, and the reluctance to attend to the perpetration of gendered racial oppression (see Moreton-Robinson, 2000a).

Throughout my use of feminist literature in this project, I strive to recognise and challenge what has been referred to as ‘White solipsism’ and ‘tunnel vision’ (Rich, 1979), referring to the ways White feminists assume their experiences of patriarchy are at the centre. Seeking to disrupt the unspoken subject and scholar of feminism as the White, middle class woman, I draw on the work of Black feminist and scholars of colour who have persistently highlighted the need to attend to patriarchy as it occurs within intersecting systems of subordination. The notion of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) is undoubtedly central to the ways I refer to feminism throughout this dissertation. However, I also acknowledge some existing tensions in using this term, given the potential for it to be misused, adopted, and co-opted. Scholars note how White co-option of the term has obscured and simplified the complex and deeply-rooted nature of the very problems intersectionality seeks to attend to (see

\(^2\) Referring to feminism with a focus on the gendered oppression of White women, displaying ignorance, apathy, and resistance to attending to the oppression of those whose identities cross different intersections.
Alexander-Floyd, 2012; Bilge, 2013). This is further contextualised by tendencies for White feminists to claim intersectionality, while remaining impervious and hostile to critique (Moreton-Robinson, 2000b). Below, I outline several key points of departure from which I refer to feminism in this dissertation.

- Feminism seeks to transform patriarchy as it occurs within the White supremacist, heteronormative, capitalist system. The notion of transformation is important in moving beyond the idea that women can simply gain equality with men by seeking to reform or alter this existing system (hooks, 2000a, p. 5).

- Feminism recognises that gendered oppression is contingent and inextricably linked to other intersecting axes of identity such as race, class, sexuality, disability, immigration status, and more (Crenshaw, 1989). Within this:
  - The interrogation of power relations in Western feminism requires anti-racist and decolonial frameworks which account for this matrix of oppression (Hill Collins, 1990), and which challenge an invisible White standpoint (Moreton-Robinson, 2013).
  - Notions that seek to universalise women are at odds with intersectionality (Mohanty, 2003; hooks, 2000b).
  - Feminism acknowledges the repeated failures within its movements to apply feminist consciousness of oppression to women who experience multiple oppressions.

- Feminism is inclusive of transgender women as women, and seeks to dismantle patriarchy as it exploits and marginalises all genders.

- Feminism does not seek to exclude, invalidate or speak for sex workers; feminism works to support sex workers’ rights and autonomy.

- Feminism works against depoliticising forces of neoliberalism that position equality as ‘already-achieved’ (see for example Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009).

- Relatedly, feminism works against capitalist forces that commodify and corporatise its goals in order to achieve market value.

**Identity labels.**

Within this dissertation, I discuss the importance of analysing and developing new ways to work alongside young people who are located across different subject positions of gender, race, class, abilities and more. Correspondingly, I use identity
terms such as “young”, “girl”, “boy”, “Indigenous”, “multicultural”, “Black”, “refugee status”, “working class” and more, not to imply that to occupy any of these identities is to be a particular type of person with any fixed reality. In fact, I adopt the position that concepts such as race and gender are socially constructed and intersect in complex ways, and an essentialist understanding of these identities is at the heart of racism, sexism and more. When I use these terms, what I endeavour to convey is that the embodied impacts of these intersections, and the way they are experienced within a ‘discursive terrain’ (see Ahmed, 2002; Butler, 2006), are very real. The social, political, and economic meanings of these identity labels have tangible effects. Naming such positions is important in actively working against neoliberal notions of equality as ‘already achieved’, rendering intersecting oppressions invisible, and normalising and centreing Whiteness (Moreton-Robinson, 2013). Within all this, when I use these identity labels to describe participants, I acknowledge that these are imperfect and reductive. I do so with these insufficiencies in mind, aiming to serve the idea that these are real experiences that can be mobilised, as they are produced under social, political, historical and material forces that we can become better conscious of (as described by Moreton-Robinson, 2013).

Relatedly, the terms I use to describe the participants in this project draw on the ways they chose to describe themselves. In the primary project, the collective gendered terms the participants elected to be referred to were the “girls group” and the “boys group”, and the young people referred to themselves as either “girls” or “boys”. However, I preface these descriptions by noting that these terms do not reflect the wide range of gender identities and expressions that exist outside of this binary. Nor do these terms indicate the possibilities for how these young people expressed gender in other spaces, or how they may do so in the future.

**Violence.**

Throughout this dissertation I will refer to violence in several ways, recognising that violence occurs in complex ways across interpersonal and structural planes. Drawing on the work of authors such as Sara Ahmed (2012; 2017), I seek to define violence not only as emotional, physical, and sexual harm, but also as the oblique and institutional violences of positioning, discrimination, speech, and gaze. In doing so, I understand violence through the lens of transformative justice. This means that I locate violence as it pertains not only between individuals, but within structures and
communities, and I seek to shift solutions away from discipline or punitive intervention, and into transformative approaches. Community-based approaches rely on collective resources rather than the legal system; they are action-oriented, holistic, and centre those who are most impacted by violence and oppression. Because transformative justice is rooted in an understanding of structural oppression and systemic injustices, it is cohesive with my approach to situating people’s identity, and how ongoing social conditions and contexts contribute to interpersonal violence and trauma (Nocella & Anthony, 2011). These approaches respond to the need for an emancipatory and liberatory approach to violence, and an obligation to transform the social conditions in which violence occurs (Armatta, 2018).

Scope of the Research

Research goals and questions.

The overarching aim of this research is to explore the role music therapy can play for young people in addressing gender-based violence, while recognising the ways gender-based violence intersects with other imbalances and expressions of power. In relation to music therapy practice, I aim to meet two parallel goals:

1. To locate music therapy within broader health, education, and community contexts as a meaningful and anti-oppressive practice for young people to explore gender and power.
2. To further develop understandings of gender and power as they relate to music therapy as an anti-oppressive practice.

Considering these goals, the inquiry was guided by one overarching question and two sub-questions. The main research question is: what is the role of music therapy as an anti-oppressive practice in exploring gender and power with young people? The sub-questions are: what resources can music therapy offer when exploring gender and power in schools? What must music therapists understand in order to develop this practice?

Scope.

This project is an attempt to explore an emerging application of music therapy practice. While critically informed by the changing discourse in health and education contexts related to young people’s attitudes and beliefs about gender-based violence, there remains limited research or even anecdotal literature on this topic in music
therapy scholarship. The first year of study consisted of a pilot project, informing what would become the primary project. Framed by the emergent and cyclical principles of participatory action research (PAR), during the pilot project, I ran seven group workshops with different groups of young people, during which we used music to explore what they saw as the most important issues related to gender and power. These learnings critically informed my design and approach of the primary project, which I conducted in a mainstream secondary school in Melbourne’s outer suburbs: ‘South East College’. South East College is a mainstream government school, with a multicultural student population, and located by low socioeconomic identifiers. I note this here because the ways in which the students and school community were represented in relation to need and risk became an important aspect of analysing and presenting the findings. The four findings chapters report on the primary project, during which I ran several music therapy group programs over the course of nine months. The pilot project is discussed in the Methodology chapter, as it informed the shape and form of the primary project.

I collected a range of data during the primary project, including one-on-one interviews with five staff and sixteen young people, audio recordings of sessions, songs written during sessions, other arts-based artefacts, and my own personal observations. These observations became critical to the project given what began to emerge, and while PAR oriented my approach to the research broadly, I framed the primary project methodologically through the lens of critical ethnography. Located as change-making that is done ‘on the ground’, both PAR and critical ethnography are informed by an attendance to power dynamics, and the researcher’s infinite responsibility to situate themselves in relation to power. From a methodological perspective, PAR emphasises the embodied and lived experience of researchers in relation to a setting, understanding where we are located on a fluid continuum of positions we assume as ‘knowledge producers’ (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Critical ethnography contests the objective notion of ‘finding’ data, highlighting the need for researchers to implicate themselves in the production of data, and to make their identities, and social and historical roots visible in the analysis of the worlds they study (Simon & Dippo, 1986, p. 200).

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3 This is a pseudonym, which I use throughout the dissertation.
Underpinned by key tenets of anti-oppressive practice, this project emphasises context, power, and critical perspectives throughout every chapter. At times, the literature and theory I draw on departs significantly from the music therapy discipline and into a range of other disciplines. Underpinning much of the informing research is a shared aim to question entrenched power relations, and represent young people as agentic and multifaceted, rather than singular or vulnerable. This literature is located across fields such as education, primary violence prevention, sociology, and youth studies. As the results began to take shape, critical feminist theory, decolonial and critical race theory, and ecological theory became central to the project, as I outline below.

**Overview of the Thesis**

The thesis in its entirety comprises eight chapters. The current chapter serves to situate the project in the context of current discourse related to gender, young people, how they are framed in schools, and in music therapy practice. Chapter Two reviews two overarching areas of literature, commencing by contextualising young people in relation to gender, schools, gender-based violence, activism, and how these relate to discourses of risk, and broader forces of neoliberalism. Part Two of the literature review then overviews music therapy literature pertaining to these issues, and the frameworks that inform and situate this project.

In Chapter Three, I present a methodological overview of the doctoral project in its entirety, and the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the research. I outline my overarching orientation as participatory action research, and how critical ethnography worked to provide a congruent and philosophically-aligned methodology for the primary project within this. Chapter Three departs from a traditional thesis structure in that I also use this section to overview the exploratory workshops conducted in the first year of research, and the data they generated. In Chapter Three, I formally introduce South East College as the setting of the primary project, outline the music therapy group programs I conducted at the school, and the young people who participated in these groups. The Methodology chapter also introduces my narrative approach to data presentation, and includes an outline of the data analysis process, and the theoretical resources used for analysis.

Chapter Four is titled ‘Complex Violences’ and begins the presentation of results and discussion, which are interwoven through critical analysis. The
complexities of violence arose as a key finding in the project, and during this chapter I explore and problematise the ways different forms of violence experienced by the young people were (un)seen and (de)legitimised. This chapter illustrates some fundamental tensions that lie in researching issues related to gender and power in an institutional context in Australia. Following on from this, Chapter Five, titled ‘Processes of Othering’, overviews the politics of representation that emerged predominantly during one-on-one interviews with young people and school staff, which I present through the lens of ‘othering’. I define othering using postcolonial conceptions of the ‘Other’, and I draw particularly on this body of literature in order to understand negotiations of power and agency, structural and historical violence, and the complex ways marginalisation can occur in institutions.

Chapter Six, titled ‘The Role of Music’ addresses the role of music for young people exploring gender and power. The chapter emphasises issues of context, musical affordances, and the ways young people use their own agency in engaging with music to explore gender. I introduce four broad and highly interrelated themes that emerged in relation to the ways music supported the participants to explore issues of gender and power. These themes include: the role of music in expressing and connecting to young people’s identities; the role of music in building and repairing relationships; how music transforms, expresses, and validates emotions; and how “music is a hook” – a metaphor used by one of the participants. Chapter Seven concludes the presentation of findings, and is the section of this dissertation in which I deeply and critically explore the role of music therapy. This chapter, titled ‘The Role of Music Therapy’, builds on the arguments of the previous three results chapters, articulating the relevant skillsets music therapists hold for this work, the potential for music therapists to draw on existing practice frameworks, and the need for a critical lens in addressing issues of gender and power in institutional contexts.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis, contextualising the last four chapters of results and discussion within contemporary broader discourse. In an effort to integrate the broad range of relevant research and practice related to my findings, I provide three sets of implications. First, I offer implications for schools in general, followed by implications for the Respectful Relationships Education curriculum, and related initiatives that address gender-based violence with young people in schools. Finally, I overview how the dissertation relates to music therapy practice, and I offer implications for music therapists working with young people specifically. I conclude
with some pertinent questions raised in the project, possible future directions for exploration, and my final reflections.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

Background

Gender is a complex discursive construct that divides the way we experience and develop in the world, and the way we are read as human beings. Gender categories are based on patterns enacted in the politics, economics and mass culture of our society, patterns that lead to a gender order and expectations implicit in that order. Our experiences and education reflect these broader social, historical and political structures, and shape the way we perform and reproduce gender over the course of our lives. It is broadly accepted that adolescence is a magnified period of growth and change, and one in which young people experience heightened gendered subjectivity as they perform or challenge the dominant constructions of gender available to them in socio-political context. However, public gendered discourses related to teens’ lives are critiqued based on the way they essentialise both gender and adolescence, and reinforce dominant gender norms. Examples of these discourses include moral panics that link adolescent boys’ testosterone-driven ‘risk taking’, or ‘gang activity’ (Connell, 2005), or girls’ premature or ‘hyper’ sexualisation (Renold & Ringrose, 2013). Schools often come into particular focus here, as key sites wherein young people negotiate gender and learn the requirements to successfully perform hegemonic masculinity and traditional femininity, as well as the normalisation of gendered power dynamics (Connell, 2005; Youdell, 2006; Ringrose, 2013; Woolley, 2017).

This chapter commences with an overview of the ways gendered power dynamics impact young people’s lives, focusing primarily on notions of violence and power. Part one introduces the myriad problems that emerge in the literature pertaining to young people and gender. I present these in order to build a rationale for the importance and significance of the project, simultaneously recognising that a focus on problems, danger, and harm can undermine young people’s own agency and construct their identities as inherently vulnerable. I overview the parallel discussions that arise regarding young people’s positioning as victims, but also as leaders in resisting dominant narratives. Part one transitions from the key issues identified in the literature, and into the diverse approaches aiming to address gender-based oppression.
with young people. First, I overview responses from a primary violence prevention perspective, and focus on schools as a significant site of change-making. I then move to overview some key informing research demonstrating the ways in which young people themselves are addressing these issues, particularly focusing on creative, activist, and arts-based responses to gender-based oppression.

Part two of this literature review focuses on music therapy as a discipline with a dedicated interest in analyses of power, specifically around feminism, and more recently, critical theory and anti-oppression. I review relevant political and justice-oriented music therapy scholarship, outlining existing music therapy frameworks that align with initiatives that address gender and power with young people in schools. In doing so, I contend that music therapy offers immense potential in community health, education, and community contexts with young people. However, I also note that up until recently, there has been limited empirical research into the role of music therapy in exploring the gendered underpinnings of power inequities with young people. The need for such research becomes apparent through the chapter, as I introduce emerging music therapy frameworks that consider notions of gender and power (Bain et al., 2016). Furthermore, explicit calls to action have been made for music therapists to challenge dominant narratives in practice and client representation (Baines, 2013; Hadley, 2013a; Fairchild & Bibb, 2016), which I engage with throughout this chapter.

Part One: Gender and Young People

When examining the literature on gender and young people, developmental and social cognitive perspectives on adolescence and gender development emerge as dominant paradigms underpinning much of the health, behavioural science and education literature (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Blakemore, Berenbaum & Liben, 2013). Across psychological and sociostructural perspectives, adolescence is framed as a distinct period of gendered subjectivity, as young people initiate and encounter fundamental aspects of their life and identity, including their self-concept, the talents they cultivate, the sociostructural opportunities and constraints presented to them, and their social and occupational paths (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Kroger, 2004; Davis, 2007; Hertoz & Rowley, 2014). Developmental literature notes how during this period, peer relationships expand and develop in importance and intimacy, and young people may gain the first sexual experiences of their lives (Blakemore et al., 2013, p. 332). This lens considers young people’s capacity to navigate these experiences as
closely linked to their emotional and cognitive development, and therefore such experiences become associated with particular significance, and even risk (Renold & Ringrose, 2011). Underpinned by postmodern and poststructural critique of the ‘grand metanarratives’ produced by the psychological sciences, developmental perspectives are problematised in relation to their universalising, normalising, and regulatory forces (see Foucault, 1979, 1984; Walkerdine, 1993). ‘Postdevelopmental’ perspectives question these developmental hegemonies, and focus on situating young people’s relationship to gender in the context of culture and society (Beasley, 2005).

**Locating gender and young people in context.**

At this point, I signify a shift to a sociological perspective by replacing the more developmentally-focused term ‘adolescents’ with the descriptor ‘young people’, occasionally still using the term ‘adolescence’ when referring to a period in young people’s lives. Sociologically-driven youth perspectives emphasise how different identity groups access power, and how opportunities are prescribed by means of societal differentiation and privilege, based on intersections of race, gender, class, sexuality, disability, and more (Hollingworth, 2015). Rather than considering identity formation as a universal task void of context, this body of research into gender and young people emphasises the layered subjectivities which position young people’s identities. Broadly, the literature points to the way young people are regulated by and negotiate their own gendered identities, foregrounded by rigid and potentially violent governings of heteronormativity (Rasmussen & Gowlett, 2015), race (Kromidas, 2015), and class (Ringrose & Renold, 2011). Within these bodies of research, there are several overarching areas that illuminate why exploring gender with young people in schools is a necessary and meaningful undertaking.

First, there is literature that researches and conceptualises sexism, sexual harassment, and violence with young people, and how they experience and respond to these endemic issues (Phipps et al., 2018). Relatedly, there is research into the construction and regulation of masculinity as a means to understand relationships between boys and men, and the reproduction of violence and patriarchy (Anderson & McCormack, 2018). Next, literature that explores the complexities of gender non-conformity and diversity, and the pace at which young people are adopting ways to learn about and express diverse gender identities (Jones et al., 2016; Bragg et al., 2018). Finally, there is literature that seeks to incorporate all of these issues into
educational practice with young people, seeking to shift social norms in order to prevent gender-based violence (Jewkes, Flood & Lang, 2015; Renold, 2016). Across these discussions, particular gaps have been identified in attendance to issues such as race. For example, Black feminist scholarship has questioned the inherent Whiteness of the category of ‘woman’, as conceptualised in Western feminism and settler-colonial contexts (see Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Ahmed, 2002; Lorde, 1984/2012), and the under-explored coloniality of the gender binary (Mohanram, 1999; Lugones, 2008). Recent youth research has noted how frameworks such as rape culture reify White women’s innocence and victimhood, and erase their own complicity in violence and oppression (Keller et al., 2018; Phipps et al., 2018). A broad link across all of these fields of research and literature is the premise that violence is experienced disproportionately by specific communities. For this reason, it is important to overview the realities of what much of the literature is responding to, in regards to how violence is enacted and experienced, and by whom.

**What is known about abuse and interpersonal violence.**

Global estimates reveal that approximately 20% of women and 5-10% of men report being victims of sexual abuse as children, and around one in three women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual violence from a current or former partner in their lifetime (World Health Organization, 2013). In Australia, at least one woman per week is murdered by a current or former partner (Bryant & Bricknell, 2017), and women are three times more likely than men to experience violence from an intimate partner (Our Watch, 2015a). Violence disproportionately impacts women with disabilities (Krnjacki, Emerson, Llewellyn & Kavanagh, 2016), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (Our Watch, 2018), and young women (Cox, 2015). For young people in school, sexual harassment is well documented as a deeply gendered issue that is chronic and ongoing, with prevalence rates ranging from 40% - 87% (Clear et al., 2014; Gruber & Fineran, 2016; Bendixen, Daveronis, & Kennair, 2017). As reflected by research across the lifespan, girls are more commonly victims of sexual harassment and assault, and boys more likely to be perpetrators (Conroy, 2013).

There is substantially less research into how all gender-based violence intersects with queer, non-binary, and gender diverse identities and relationships (Fileborn, 2012), and even less so investigating intersections of race with gender and sexuality,
despite evidence indicating racialised communities face disproportionate and compounding forms of violence (Subhrajit, 2014). A national taskforce in the United States (Grant et al., 2011) stands as the most comprehensive research conducted thus far into over 6450 transgender individuals’ experiences of violence. The study indicated that 51% of respondents were bullied at school, 61% were the victim of physical assault, 64% the victim of sexual assault, and 41% reported having attempted suicide (Grant et al., 2011). A key finding in the report was that people of colour fared worse than White respondents in general, that Black respondents fared worse than all others in many areas examined, and that transgender women of colour were disproportionately subjected to violence. In Australia, a study focusing on the experiences of young people found that 21% of gender non-conforming adolescents had been physically assaulted on the basis of their gender identity, and that over 90% of those who had been abused had thought about suicide (Smith et al., 2014). The report also found that schools were one of the two most common places for threats and harm to occur. Out of 665 adolescent transgender respondents in a UK survey, 76% believed they had embarrassed their family because of their identity, and 42% feared they would die young (McNeil, Bailey, Ellis, Morton, & Regan, 2012).

Experiences of interpersonal violence, trauma, and abuse can have a range of complex impacts on a person’s wellbeing, including physical, social, cultural, neurological, psychological, behavioural, spiritual, and sexual wellbeing. International perspectives on young people’s experiences of abuse demonstrate the range of short and long term impacts on a young person’s participation within and beyond school, due to cognitive and neurological impacts, health impacts, mental health problems, and a wide range of behavioural challenges (Smith et al., 2014; Guerra & Pereda, 2015). The impacts of young people’s disengagement or behaviour problems in school are complex and multifaceted, and often result in punitive measures. Mallett (2017) explored the common vulnerabilities between young people affected by harsh school discipline protocols and involved in the juvenile justice system, a relationship often referred to in the United States literature as the ‘school to prison pipeline’. Synthesising the empirical research on punitive norms across United States’ primary and secondary schools, Mallett (2017) identified several groups to be disproportionately implicated in the school to prison pipeline, including those living on the poverty line, communities of colour, victims of abuse, students with disabilities, and LGBT young people. However, parallel to these discussions which
focus on abuse, risk, violence, and harm, questions begin to emerge about the dangers of relying on such statistics alone, without adequate exploration into the broader contexts in which they occur.

Critical perspectives on deeming communities ‘at risk’.

Fields of scholarship have examined the potential for statistics to function to remove agency from marginalised groups, failing to account for the oppressive structures linked to ‘risks’ of violence, and instead apportioning blame to victims. Palawa sociology scholar Maggie Walter (2016) points the illusion of neutrality in numbers, questioning the ways statistics are deployed to rationalise dispossession, and serve colonising nation states. Walter writes about the intense pervasiveness and availability of deficit-driven research and data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and how this reifies a narrative that Indigenous peoples are “incapable of helping themselves” (p. 85). Decolonial scholars in Aotearoa/New Zealand point out how simply reporting on ‘disproportionate’ levels of violence in Indigenous communities fails to adequately acknowledge and address the role that colonisation and historical trauma plays in these realities (Pihama et al., 2014; Pihama et al., 2016; Pool, 2016). These perspectives have been echoed by a recent background paper by Our Watch (2018) which serves as a call to action for non-Indigenous organisations to “examine the way colonisation has embedded racist and sexist assumptions, structures and practices into how they operate every day” (p. 6).

Relatedly, in critical youth scholarship, authors elucidate how in positioning certain groups of young people as being ‘at risk’ of harm, we may institutionally (re)position these groups as vulnerable, powerless victims. Critiquing the literature’s tendency to focus on poor mental health, self-harm, and suicide amongst LGBTQIA+ young people, scholars point out the ways in which research with LGBTQIA+ young people tends to generate discourses of hopelessness and misery (Cover, 2013; Bryan, 2017; Rasmussen et al., 2017). More broadly, the literature reveals how questions and practices around risk, health, and safety of young people’s identities often centre upon particular raced, classed and gendered identities (Renold & Ringrose, 2011; Tuck & Yang, 2013). For example, Weekes (2004) explores the ways in which young Black British women are at risk of being positioned through a lens of hypersexuality and deviance, and therefore adopt their own strategies of sexual conservatism and respectability to avoid such labelling. Ringrose (2013) identifies in a more general...
sense, how discourses of risk shape dominant narratives around young people’s, especially young women’s, sexualities. Teen girls are seen as ‘at risk’ of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, ‘at risk’ of falling pregnant, ‘at risk’ of dropping out of school. Within all this, Ringrose (2013) proposes that the question of young people’s sexual pleasure has become marginalised. Indeed, when sex is understood as a site of moral, economic, and physical risk for the young person (and the family/school/community they represent), then their pleasure matters less and less, or is even understood as a route to their downfall (Renold & Ringrose, 2011; Keller et al., 2018).

These ideas echo the arguments of critical researchers across the ‘helping’ professions, who point out how literature routinely focuses on clients’ pathology, risk status and problems, in order to prove the need for our services and strengthen the expert/patient power dynamic. Arguments against the ways particular groups are represented through a lens of weakness and vulnerability can be found in social work (Hall & Slembrouck, 2011), speech therapy (Kovarsky & Walsh, 2011), and music therapy (Rolvsjord, 2010; Fairchild & Bibb, 2016). It is also worth noting the documented failures of those attempting to conduct feminist and liberatory work with young people to acknowledge our own complicity in these problematics, and to adequately address discursive productions of difference (Ellingson, 2011). For example, Ruth Nicole Brown (2009) has explored how well-meaning, White, liberal interventions into the lives of young Black women, with a goal of ‘empowerment’, can serve to sideline young women’s agency. In the education context, Julie McLeod (2012) explores how neoliberal positionings of youth ‘vulnerability’ construct a sense of compassion that is inevitably false, and shapes pathologising and individualising discourses about young people’s ‘problems’. McLeod attributes this false narrative to neoliberal logics in schools, and points out the ways in which young people’s issues are “psychologised”, rather than being named as functions of social exclusion (p. 24). Across each of these diverse bodies of literature that problematise discourses of risk and deficit, scholars reiterate the need to attend to the context and structural conditions in which harm occurs.

**Gender and power in schools.**

In an effort to attend to the structural contexts relevant to young people’s lives, I now turn to the research pertaining to manifestations of violence, regulation, and
power in schools. On this, Ward (2017) summarises, “Discriminatory ideas and
to exist in all schools at every
level, and in every type of school” (p. 469). Although discussions pertaining to gender
in schools focus on schools as a site of violence prevention, the research
acknowledges that young people are already being subjected to, and perpetrating
violence (Flood et al., 2009). Literature in recent years has focused on several areas of
how gender manifests in schools as a complex and discursive construct. These areas
include: dating violence; sexual harassment; queer and gender non-conforming
expressions and experiences; and a postfeminist sensibility, all of which I briefly
overview below. What connects these issues is a sense of the role schools play in
regulating, normalising, and naturalising dominant gender norms, and obfuscating
systemic power imbalances.

**Dating violence.**

Dating violence as experienced during the schooling years, can challenge a
young person’s wellbeing, as well as their capacity to engage, achieve and succeed at
school (De La Rue et al., 2017; Helm et al., 2017; Garthe, Sullivan & Behrhorst,
2018). The literature proposes that dating violence is under-recognised and
underestimated by parents (Hertzog, Harpel & Rowley, 2016), and has only recently
seen a dedicated research interest, as opposed to well-researched issues such as
bullying (Wolfe et al., 2009). Research explores the gendered nature of dating
violence among young people (Hertzog, 2014; Black et al., 2017), as well as the role
that perpetrators and victims’ home lives play in how they relate to others in
imbalanced relational dynamics (Wolfe et al., 2009; Sanhueza & Lessard, 2018). The
bulk of this literature reflects the dominant developmental paradigm driving dating
violence research with young people. Subsequently, research commonly focuses on
how dating violence impacts psychological functioning, rather than embedding a
feminist or gendered perspective into the ways gender ‘discourse’ or ‘performance’
constitute the reproduction of inequalities (as described by Foucault, 1988; Butler,
1990). Within this, it is worth noting how dating violence literature also reifies the
gender binary and an assumed link between sex and gender, commonly describing
participants as ‘both’ male and female, focusing on heterosexual relationships, and
failing to include any other possible expressions of gender.
Sexual harassment and violence.

Analyses of prevailing dominant gender norms in schools also reveal how sexual harassment and assault is normalised in education settings, and legitimised as a means of expressing masculinity (Robinson, 2005; Conroy, 2013). Rahimi and Liston (2011) state that “sexual harassment continues to plague the daily lives of adolescent girls” (p. 800), also detailing the raced and classed dimensions that delineate differential treatment of girls’ sexuality and experiences of sexual violence. A theme arises across these studies around how easily perceptions of sexual harassment are semantically obscured and broadened into more generalised discussions of ‘bullying’ (Rahimi & Liston, 2011; Charmaraman et al., 2013; Gruber and Fineran, 2015). Exploring the affective politics of sexual harassment in schools, Higham (2018) unpacks the violent capacities of words, and the distinctive characteristics of sexual harassment in online environments. Higham (2018) illuminates how sexual violence can be perpetrated from any direction, including from student to teacher, and how “social network sites are digital extensions of the schoolyard” (p. 303). Again, the absence of queer and gender non-conforming young people’s experiences is stark across the literature. Hatchel, Espelage and Huang (2018) note the lack of research into sexual harassment of LGBTQIA+ students as a form of victimisation in schools, despite this being a common experience of queer students.

Heteronormativity.

McGlashan and Fitzpatrick (2017) describe “substantial and compelling evidence” of how schools reinforce and reinscribe narrow gender and sexuality norms (p. 485). This is underpinned by a body of literature pertaining to the ways education settings naturalise the gender binary, and the impacts of perpetuating hidden gendered power dynamics within these seemingly ‘neutral’ interactions (Butler, 1993; Youdell, 2006; Paechter, 2012). Adopting this nuanced lens, Higham (2015) explored the multiple and micropolitical ‘makings/unmakings’ of masculinity as it occurs in the Australian school setting. Higham’s research joins a body of work that examines gender through affect and processes of becoming, and that work to demonstrate the ways time and space construct young people’s identity formation (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill 1997; Grosz, 2010; Ringrose, 2011; Youdell & Armstrong, 2011; Coffey, 2013).
At the same time as schools reproduce and reinforce dominant and oppressive gender norms, they can also be sites of reimagining; wherein young people reject, challenge, and expand upon structures of heteronormativity, sexism, and cissexism. Bragg et al. (2018) describe how schools are having to play ‘catch up’ in regards to young people’s emerging gender cultures, expressions, and practices. Across multiple research sites and interviews with over 100 British young people, Bragg et al. (2018) emphasised young people’s eagerness to promote change related to gender-based inequity and oppression. The authors found that although young people are forging their own spaces to learn about and document gender, race, and class-based inequities, their efforts tend to operate within school cultures that young people themselves describe as “sexist and heteronormative” (p. 428). Contrastingly, in an American context, Markowitz and Puchner (2016) found that even when attempting to transgress the gender binary, students have a desire to maintain norms and gendered security. Overarchingly, there is a sense that a) schools systems are spaces where young people formally and informally learn the requirements for hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity (Paechter, 2012), b) young people have a need and desire to learn about and challenge these issues (Bragg et al., 2018), and c) schools are not yet adequately addressing these needs (McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2017; Rasmussen et al., 2017).

**Postfeminism.**

Gendered operations of power in contemporary Western education settings are also explored as they function within the neoliberal political framework (Gill & Scharff, 2011). This climate, which is distinctly capitalist and economically-driven, positions the individual as responsible for their successful education outcomes and ensuring social and financial capital (Clarke, 2012). For young people in schools, this framework therefore expects and necessitates a particular kind of achievement from young people, not only to ensure their individual success, but for the economic success of the nation. The literature consistently notes the role neoliberalism plays in obscuring systemic inequities, silencing operations of oppression and privilege, and constructing false notions of ‘girl power’, (Ringrose, 2007; Ringrose, 2013; Harris & Dobson, 2015). Neoliberal processes of individualisation, marketisation, and the enlargement of freedom and choice are often critiqued from a gender perspective using a concept known as postfeminism. Predicated on what Banyard (2010)
describes as the ‘equality illusion’, postfeminism implies that women and girls have achieved gender equality – catching up to, or even surpassing, men and boys (McRobbie, 2009; Pomerantz, Raby & Stefanik 2013). Postfeminist scholars note how these discourses operate in parallel with neoliberalism to enforce new forms of self-hatred, self-policing, and sexual self-objectification upon girls (Gill & Scharff, 2011).

Postfeminism is particularly relevant to education settings, because this is a key site where young people identify learning about what constitutes ‘successful’ femininity (Cossens & Jackson, 2018). There currently remains little research into how girls in schools actually conceptualise postfeminist femininity, and even less into how girls from Indigenous and non-White cultural backgrounds relate to notions of girlhood, success, and power (Griffin & Harris, 2004; Cossens & Jackson, 2018). In parallel, research on postfeminist discourses commonly focus on how they impact upon women and girls’ gender expressions, and there is very little research on how postfeminism impacts on boys, or on queer and gender diverse young people. In her exploration on postfeminism as it relates to young people in schools, Ringrose (2013) recommends schools forge new spaces for young people to engage in discussion around gender and sexuality, in order to develop alternative gendered scripts.

**Addressing gender-based violence and inequalities.**

*Through primary violence prevention.*

One of the key sites of policy, planning, and action related to gender is the prevention of violence against women. In Australia in 2010, the government launched a national, twelve-year plan to reduce violence against women and their children. Every state in the country also has a family violence action plan, and many regional areas are developing corresponding actions plans (Keel et al., 2017, p. 20), though these are centred on a heterosexual understanding of family violence. In an effort to address the significant gaps in research and understanding related to family violence in LGBTQIA+ communities, Our Watch (2017) released a report that distilled existing international and national evidence on prevalence, social context, and primary prevention. Primary violence prevention is informed by public health and health promotion theory and practice, and is underpinned by principles of feminism and social change. Overarchingly, primary violence prevention is based on the premise that gender-based violence can be prevented by implementing curriculum,
policy, and cultural change that address gender norms and challenge the gendered drivers of violence (Our Watch, 2015a, 2015b). As a result, the last decade has seen a wealth of research dedicated to developing an evidence basis to demonstrate the most effective and promising approaches to prevention. ‘Change the Story’ (Our Watch, 2015a) is the national Australian framework that outlines the most important characteristics of primary violence prevention. VicHealth (2017) synthesise these characteristics into ‘best practice’ guidelines, recommending that programs:

- target the gendered drivers of violence against women
- are ‘gender transformative’, in that they move beyond gender-neutral or gender-specific approaches and seek to explicitly address and change harmful gender roles, practices and norms
- involve a continuum of interdependent and interlinked strategies
- involve the whole community, including men and boys
- are tailored to, and developed in partnership with, communities who have experienced sustained discrimination and communities from different cultures (VicHealth, 2017, p. 17)

**Building a rationale for working with young people in school.**

Relevant literature states that attitudes and beliefs about gender, relationships, and gender roles are key contributing factors to the occurrence of interpersonal violence (Flood & Pease, 2006, 2009). In Australia, young people’s attitudes and beliefs are regularly surveyed nationally, because “attitudes are an important ‘barometer’ of how we are faring generally as a society in relation to violence and gender relations” (Harris et al., 2015, p. 22). Because young people are a key demographic already experiencing and perpetrating gender-based violence, exploring their attitudes, beliefs, and relationship trajectories during adolescence can work to interrupt these patterns while they are still developing (Harris et al., 2015). Broadly, the research emphasises a crucial opportunity that exists in strengthening young people’s knowledge of these dynamics, patterns, and the prevalence of gender-based violence, and thus shifting intergenerational cycles of violence (see for example, Basu et al., 2017; Chandra-Mouli et al., 2017; Keel et al., 2017; Lane, Brundage & Kreinin, 2017). Correspondingly, education settings are regularly identified across the literature as a key site for action, with distinct advantages for primary prevention
work (see for example, Flood et al., 2009; Ellsberg, 2015; Jewkes et al., 2015; Kearney, Gleeson & Leung, 2016; Renold, 2016).

In their comprehensive report into primary violence prevention in schools, Flood et al. (2009) describe the pragmatic, efficient, and cost-effective benefits of schools as a site where young people spend a large portion of their time. Ellis (2008) describes how schools provide an optimal, engaged audience with a wide reach, with ready-made groups. Furthermore, schools work in partnership between young people, families, communities, teachers, and support workers, and therefore have the capacity to combine prevention, as well as response activities. Flood et al. (2009) report that by locating primary violence prevention in schools, programs increase their accessibility, and are less stigmatising than health, mental health, or youth justice settings. They summarise their rationale with a body of evidence demonstrating how schools are the single most effective site for primary violence prevention with young people, which subsequent research continues to affirm (Our Watch, 2015b). In synthesising international research on family violence in LGBTQIA+ communities, Our Watch (2017) also emphasised the importance of schools as sites of transforming heterosexist attitudes, practices, and norms. One of their key recommendations was to expand the current Respectful Relationships Education to better include gender and sexual diversity in violence prevention frameworks (p. 101).

Across the literature concerning primary violence prevention with young people, best practice recommendations regularly highlight the importance of participatory approaches that are age appropriate and interactive (Ellsberg et al., 2015; Our Watch 2015b). In Wales, Renold’s (2016) government-supported toolkit for primary violence prevention in schools emphasises a fully participatory and arts-based approach, having been co-developed by young people, with an emphasis on youth-driven activism. Alongside schools, the national framework to address gender-based violence named ten other key settings for action, including the arts, the media, popular culture, and entertainment (Our Watch, 2015a, VicHealth, 2017). The research demonstrates several techniques and methodologies that work to address gender-based violence, acknowledging that there remains a clear need for further examination of what works and why (VicHealth, 2017, p. 19). The following types of efforts are identified as effective or promising:
• **Direct participation programs**: targeted at the individual, relationship and group levels that build on skills to establish and maintain healthy relationships, and/or explore the related impacts of gender-based violence.

• **Workforce development**: building the skills of workforces to reshape their organisational culture, and to implement primary prevention.

• **Community strengthening**: supporting communities to address gender-based violence and challenge the norms that make it acceptable.

• **Advocacy**: building collective activity to raise awareness, and challenge the community/government to take action.

VicHealth (2017, p. 20)

**From neoliberal efficiency, into creative, collective resistance.**

Ylöstalo & Brunila (2018) provide a rigorous critique of the ‘marketisation’ of gender equality pedagogy under the current neoliberal social, political, and economic landscape in the Scandinavian context. On the topic of the marketisation of social justice more broadly, an anonymous group of scholars who publish as the ‘Institute for Precarious Consciousness’ (2014) have explicated how feminist consciousness raising (CR) can be drawn upon for formulating “autonomous social movement epistemologies” (p. 278). Parallel to the development and implementation of policy and programs scaled up for efficiency, the last decade has seen burgeoning fields of research with young people in schools that draw on affective, multi-modal, activist, queer, and arts-based methodologies (see for example Martin, Nickels & Sharp-Grier, 2017; Renold, 2018). Martin (2017) explicates some of the key tenets of CR, including speaking from experience, validation, constructing voice, creating a safe space, and emotional transformation, in ways that are slower-paced, interpersonal, and political, and therefore oppositional to neoliberal forces.

Youth-focused literature documents the ways young people themselves are challenging cultures of acceptability around sexism and sexual harassment in their schools, by developing their own school curriculums (O’Keefe, 2014), and forming collectives, coalitions, and clubs (Cayleff et al., 2011). Authors such as Jessica Taft (2011) and Lyn Mikel Brown (2016) explore in depth how feminist activism in schools can open up spaces for girls to deconstruct idealised femininity, and embody alternate versions of girlhood. Victoria Showunmi (2017) and Ruth Nicole Brown (2009, 2013) have outlined the importance of these creative and liberatory spaces for
Black girls and girls of colour, who face compounding gendered and racialised oppression. Brown (2016) unpacks the importance of intergenerational work that cultivates girls’ activism, paying particular attention to those who “are more likely to be discounted or disciplined for their outspokenness and resistance”, due to raced and classed positionings (p. 49).

The ways these intersections relate to young people’s agentic resistance has been well documented in the field of hip-hop feminism (Morgan, 1995; Durham, 2013), and in the relationship between hip-hop feminism and pedagogy (Brown, R. N., 2013). Sitting within the broader field of hip-hop pedagogy, hip-hop feminist scholarship recognises the cultural importance and potential of hip-hop in mobilising resistance, and privileging the situated knowledge and embodied experiences of women of colour (see for example Love, 2012; Tobias, 2014; Lindsey, 2015; Saunders, 2016; Pabón-Colón, 2017). Leading authors including Aisha Durham (2013) and Ruth Nicole Brown (2012; 2013) illuminate the ways Black girls construct hip-hop feminism through movement, dance, games, rhymes, music-making and more, to name and express their experiences, and advocate for themselves. More broadly, their work challenges the erasure of Black girls across both girlhood’ studies, and music-making scholarship. A fitting example of this application can be located in Camilla Stanger’s (2018) articulation of dance as a ‘liberatory praxis’ with Black, working class girls in the neoliberal secondary school context. Informed by Ruth Nicole Brown (2009) and Stephanie Sears (2010), Stanger’s research (2018) uses an explicitly feminist, anti-racist dance pedagogy to confront and challenge the neoliberal discourses of risk and pathologisation that position these girls’ identities.

**Digitally-mediated resistance.**

Recent years have also seen an emergence of research into ‘new mediations’ of feminism, using theories of affect and new materialism to explore young people’s challenges to gender-based violence (Keller et al., 2016). Such literature reveals the affective forces of digitally-mediated forms of documentation and activism in enabling new forms of connection, embodiment, and expression (Rentschler, 2015; Phipps et al., 2017). An example can be found in Retallack, et al.’s (2016) research with teen girls located in the neoliberal secondary school framework, who mobilise social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram to challenge postfeminist sensibilities, and dismantle misogyny. More examples lie with Ringrose and Renold
(2016), who draw on the work of Ahmed (2010) on the ways affect relates to the figure of the ‘feminist killjoy’. Their research explores feminism as a space for raising self-esteem and achievement with girls who are disengaged from formal schooling. They reported on the joy and solidarity the girls experienced in taking part in teen feminism, especially in the midst of uncertainty of their status in education. As well as challenging the postfeminist discourses described in the pages above, their work also illuminates the complexities that teen feminist work invokes regarding teen feminine sexuality (Renold & Ringrose, 2013), which is also explicated in depth by Tolman (2012). Ringrose and Renold (2016) suggest that such work in schools must acknowledge the dilemmas of teen femininity, and must always work to locate girls in context – within their social, cultural, and affective experiences of ‘girlhood’.

**A shift away from ‘helping’ individuals.**

On the topic of gender and young people in schools more broadly, many critical researchers stress the importance of locating young people in context, and engaging them as leaders of creating change. In their study into the views young people in school hold on gender, Bragg et al. (2018) summarised, “it is impossible to make generalisations about the experiences of young people” (p. 431). These ideas once again invoke critical reflection on the ways young people are positioned by discourses of risk, individualisation, and pathologisation, all of which are regularly cited as components of neoliberalism and postfeminism (see for example Ringrose, 2016; Martin, 2017). Calls to action for a paradigm shift away from approaches that seek to single out and help marginalised groups, or position them as inherently vulnerable, have been made across this research (Renold & Ringrose, 2011, Brown, R. N., 2013). Therapeutic frameworks that seek to disrupt problematic notions of ‘helping’ exist in music therapy and beyond, and will be explored in detail in part two. Another key site of advocacy for this paradigm shift in relation to young people and gender can be located in queer theory and pedagogy. Often framed as ‘after-queer’ scholarship, this approach engenders a shift away from universalising narratives of vulnerability and risk, and onto the structures and effects of normativity to which every young person is subjected (Talburt & Rasmussen, 2010). Researchers using this approach focus on the diversity of young people’s experience, possibilities for their futures, and their capacity for joy, pleasure, agency, and creativity.
Paulo Freire (1970) articulated the notion of the ‘dynamic present’, to describe moments of freedom in working with oppressed communities, in which the past, present and future possibilities are created. Jon Wargo (2017; 2018) draws on this idea in his research with queer youth, who engage in storytelling through new media and digital technologies to conduct “multimodal (counter) storytelling”. By cultivating creative, multimodal spaces in which they could render their stories visible, the young people in Wargo’s (2017) research were imbued with agency to remediate their experiences, and reimagine their futures. Such methodologies speak to a dramatically different approach to acknowledging and addressing structures of injustice and harm. Overarchingly, the literature that advocates for this paradigm shift away from ‘helping’ and into more agentic forms of expression and cultural change emphasises the need for a) new modes and spaces for young people to explore gender, b) to account for the ways gender is in constant process, and c) to match the pace at which young people are adopting and expressing discourse around gender and sexual diversity, rights, equity and more (Bragg et al., 2018).

**Arts-based approaches.**

Renold (2018) is a leading advocate for the development of creative practices that engage young people in new ways of thinking, feeling, and documenting their experiences related to gender-based violence. Examples of her arts-based research includes the ‘runway of disrespect’, in which secondary school girls graffitied a long sheet of paper with their experiences of sexual harassment. Renold also refers to the ‘ruler-skirt’, made by teen girls in response to experiences of having their skirts lifted up by the boys in their school. The participants re-appropriated rulers to make their own wearable skirt, each ruler featuring sexist comments that had been made about them. In these examples, Renold (2018) describes how data becomes ‘da(r)ta’ through the process of art-making. Renold’s examples capture the transformative effect of arts-based methodologies in opening up physical expressive terrain around gender and sexuality, which can be felt and embodied, but can also be contained. Her work is embedded in a body of research that draws predominantly on new feminist materialism and post humanism, and articulates key reasons why the arts are relevant to exploring gender with young people. First, how the arts offer a uniquely im/personal means of experiential engagement in exploring these complex issues (Massumi, 2013; Renold, 2018). Next, the significance of young people’s creative
agency in directing and rewriting their own identities in the face of public discourses of ‘risk’ (Hickey-Moody, 2013). Finally, how creating alternative spaces of relative ‘safety’ can allow new possibilities for young people to safely communicate and transform oppression (Bratich & Brush, 2011; Ivinson & Renold, 2016).

Summary of part one.
This section of the chapter has introduced literature to build a rationale for the importance of exploring gender and power with young people. Across much of this literature, discussions have emerged around the ways young people are pathologised, individualised, and positioned as ‘at risk’ or inherently vulnerable, rather than looking to the broader dominant structures to which every young person is subjected. Forces of neoliberalism and relatedly, postfeminism, can be identified as drivers of these narratives that seek to erase, diminish, or marketize notions of gender equality, underpinned by a broader push for de-politicisation. Rather than seeking to help or identify individuals or groups to address rates of gender-based violence, various fields of scholarship note how we may interrupt intergenerational cycles of violence and achieve cultural and structural change by working creatively with young people to explore their experiences, attitudes and beliefs and develop alternative gendered scripts. Links between best practice recommendations for such work emphasise the importance of interactive, participatory approaches and modes, and of locating young people in context. Regularly, the research calls upon the arts as spaces that afford relative safety, that enable new forms of connection and expression, and that oppose neoliberal forces through their focus on the interpersonal and the political. At this point, I turn to the music therapy discipline.

Part Two: Locating Music Therapy
Across the several bodies of scholarship introduced thus far, there are multiple points at which music therapy literature can enter, and I delve into these below. First, music therapy has seen a dedicated interest in feminist theory and approaches to practice. More recently, the literature has revealed an interest in developing music therapy practice in specific regard to inclusive and queer-affirmative approaches. Next, music therapy has several well-established frameworks that are oriented towards social change, that locate people within their social context, and that actively challenge notions of deficit, weakness, and vulnerability. This is particularly relevant
because music therapists work with people who are stigmatised, pathologised, and located in services that frame them based on what are perceived as their personal problems. Finally, there is a developed body of literature documenting the empowering and powerful ways and contexts music therapists work with young people, including work based in schools. However, as the literature I examine below demonstrates, there also exist some clear gaps in music therapy research, offering immense opportunities for further developing music therapy practice with young people. This section of the literature review focuses on music therapy literature pertaining to gender, existing frameworks for approaching critical, participatory and political therapeutic work, and relevant music therapy research with young people.

**Existing music therapy frameworks.**

In general, the creative arts have been posited as fitting therapeutic spaces for working against discourses of risk and vulnerability because they are inherently strengths-based, participatory, and emphasise therapy as something clients ‘do’, as opposed to something that is done ‘to’ or ‘for’ them (Baines, 2013; Bain, Grzanka & Crowe, 2016; Sajnani et al., 2017). The emphasis on clients’ strengths and the use of music to build on these within a therapeutic relationship is widely adopted by music therapists across different contexts and therapeutic paradigms, centred upon notions of empowerment (Procter, 2002; Rolvsjord, 2004, 2010; Elefant, 2010; Stige et al., 2010). Community Music Therapy (Ansdell, 2002; Pavlicevic & Ansdell, 2004; Stige & Aarø, 2012) and Resource Oriented Music Therapy (Rolvsjord, 2010) are two key music therapy frameworks that explore these notions of power and social context in depth. Both of these frameworks challenge a deficit model of health and wellbeing, highlight clients’ strengths, and emphasise collaboration, inclusivity, and the participatory potential of musicking together.

Community Music Therapy (CoMT) is a theoretical discourse centralised on ecological practice, seeking to engage actively and sustainably in collaboration with participants with an emphasis on empowerment and social change (Sitge, 2010). Such an approach to music therapy can be located more broadly within two paradigms. First, the Community Music movement, which sought to dissolve notions of ‘high’ and ‘low’ brow arts, and advocate for the rights and opportunity for all to access and participate in music (Everitt, 1997). Second, community health and health promotion, which are characterised by a grounding in social justice, drawing on the socio-
political and relational qualities of health, and emphasising the use of participatory frameworks (Stige & Aarø, 2012). Importantly, CoMT signals a paradigm shift in music therapy practice frameworks to de-clinicalise and de-institutionalise, with early scholars calling upon therapists’ to de-centre clients’ diagnosis or history (Procter, 2002; 2004), and get ‘beyond pathology’ (Ansdell, 2002; Rolvsjord, 2004).

As CoMT was emerging into mainstream music therapy discourse, O’Grady and McFerran (2006) explored the potentials of Community Music Therapy practiced within a feminist framework. The authors highlighted the anti-oppressive potential within these frameworks, with a mutual rejection of individualism, and a shared impetus to unsettle the power exchanges that exist in the expert/patient dichotomy and the diagnostic focus on disability. Another identifiable link between feminist theory and CoMT is the awareness and acknowledgment of context, specifically CoMT’s recognition that therapy extends beyond the individual in the room, and into a practice that is deeply contextualised (Stige & Aarø, 2012).

Building on tenets of CoMT, Randi Rolvsjord (2010) developed Resource-Oriented Music Therapy (ROMT), an in-depth theoretical framework grounded in health-focused, ‘salutogenic’ (or strengths-based) principles, for working with individuals in mental health care. ROMT similarly emphasises the importance of collaboration, journeying beyond entrenched patient/expert power dynamics, and tapping into existing health philosophies of empowerment and mental health recovery (Solli, Rolvsjord, & Borg, 2013). Since its development as a music therapy framework, ROMT research has been characterised by its focus on the quality of clients’ participation and experience in music therapy. The literature demonstrates the importance of agency and self-determination (Solli & Rolvsjord, 2015), context (Rolvsjord & Stige, 2015), and what clients bring to therapy (Rolvsjord, 2015). As in CoMT, Resource-Oriented Music Therapists advocate for a move beyond the pathologisation and ‘treatment’ of individuals, and into a contextual model that includes “relational, structural, and community levels in our conceptualisations of therapy” (Rolvsjord & Stige, 2015, p. 59). Both frameworks encourage a critical stance that contextualises music therapy as it occurs within complex systems and socio-political conditions (Ansdell, 2003; Edwards, 2011), and clients as active agents of change, rather than passive recipients of ‘help’ (Rolvsjord, 2015).

Aligning with both of these frameworks, anti-oppressive practice (AOP) is a key methodological and theoretical paradigm for understanding how difference and
power is used to oppress communities, developed in recent years in relation to music therapy practice (Baines, 2013) and research (Baines & Edwards, 2015). As an umbrella term that draws on a range of critical theories, AOP seeks to name and challenge structures of oppression such as patriarchy, racism, colonisation, and capitalistic imperialism (Baines, 2010). Central to AOP is the reimagining of people’s problems not as their personal failing, but in relation to these power structures (Dominelli & Campling, 2002; Baines, 2007). Informed by poststructuralism and postmodernism, AOP is also characterised by notions of multiplicity and pluralism, rejecting consensus and control, and challenging the value placed on hierarchies, expertise, and surveillance (Mullaly, 2001; 2010). Baines’ (2014) doctoral dissertation was pivotal in articulating how music therapy as an anti-oppressive practice can function as a tool for advocacy and the amplification of participants’ voices.

In an article on this topic, Baines (2013) explicates music therapists’ responsibility to use anti-oppressive practice as a mechanism to critique the health systems under which our clients are often located, in order to fully embrace the role of ‘health care practitioner’. The article also attributes the roots of this approach with music therapy scholars who utilise an ecological lens such as Carolyn Kenny (2006), and as underpinned by feminist discourse in music therapy (explored in detail below). Baines (2013) refers to formative music therapy frameworks that identify and address power imbalances, including CoMT and ROMT, though importantly explicates the inevitable inadequacy of the term ‘community’ as sufficient in signifying this work. Ultimately she settles on anti-oppressive practice as a descriptor that is both broad and precise, and unlike ‘community’, may be less likely to hold different meanings across multiple contexts.

In their exploration of the possibilities for anti-oppressive practice in health research, Baines and Edwards (2015) again emphasise the links between feminist approaches to music therapy. The authors centralise on notions of power throughout, exploring the ways music therapists themselves must examine their own structural power and privilege. Crucially, this draws on music therapy literature that politicises notions of ‘helping’ (Edwards & Hadley, 2007; Isenberg, 2012). Ultimately, Baines and Edwards (2015) encourage researchers to employ anti-oppressive practice in order to critique the systems we are taught to see through a false lens of objectivity, and that produce the dominant paradigms that oppress the communities we work and
research with. Although the authors do not mention or refer to neoliberalism, their critiques of therapeutic cultures that seek to blame, individualise, and promote objectivity are reminiscent of the critiques of neoliberalism explored in part one (for example, McLeod, 2012; Ylöstalo & Brunila, 2018).

These ontologies, philosophies, and calls to action are reflected in the broader creative arts therapies. A brief look at the wider creative arts therapies literature reveals corollary interests in feminist and social justice-oriented approaches to practice (see for example Sajnani & Nadeau, 2006; Mayor, 2012). These focus on how a feminist lens equips creative arts therapists to question and make visible imbalances of power, and emphasise issues of context. In light of the failures of White feminism to do so, Nisha Sajnani (2012) advocates for an expansion from feminism to ‘critical race feminism’, emphasising the need for creative arts therapists in particular, to consider their own and their clients’ place in the racial economy. A special edition of The Arts in Psychotherapy journal in 2013 saw scholars from across the creative arts therapies explicate contemporary issues of gender and feminism. The issue included calls to examine and dismantle fixed notions of sex, gender, and subjectivity in dance therapy (Allegranti, 2013), the relevance of intersectionality in drama therapy research (Sajnani, 2013), and incorporating feminist pedagogy in creative arts therapies training (Hahna, 2013). Since then, authors such as Wright and Wright (2017) and Sajnani et al. (2017) have documented the necessity of critical, intersectional feminist approaches to the creative arts therapies for reshaping therapeutic relationships, and for situating social justice as central to healing.

**Locating feminism in music therapy.**

In the music therapy context specifically, there is an established body of research highlighting the potential for social and political action in the therapeutic space, theoretically underpinned by critical theory, post-structuralism, and in particular, feminist theory. Baines (1992) and Curtis (1990) initiated feminist discourse in music therapy, followed by a number of scholars’ dedicated efforts to centralise a feminist frame. Overarchingly, these can be categorised under feminist theory (Curtis, 2000; 2012; 2013a; 2013b), feminist approaches to research (Rolvsjord & Hadley, 2015), gender politics (Rolvsjord, 2006; Rolvsjord & Halstead, 2013), and feminist pedagogy (Hahna & Schwantes, 2011; Hahna, 2013). Hadley and Edwards (2004) developed a feminist theoretical framework from which to
understand and approach music therapy, and later examined the historical context in more detail by overviewsing the current applications of feminist theory in the literature at the time (Edwards & Hadley, 2007). In 2006, Hadley (2006a) edited a foundational text which documented a broad range of examples of music therapists around the world working from a feminist perspective, including explorations of violence, trauma and abuse (Amir, 2006; Purdon, 2006; York, 2006), power and voice (Merrill, 2006), feminist research (Wheeler, 2006), and feminist pedagogy (Hadley, 2006b).

In this text, Kenny (2006) writes, “The overall perception of Feminist theories is that they were invented by White women academics” (p. 88). This text made some progress to disrupt this problematic history in music therapy discourse, including Kenny’s (2006) exploration of the intersections between feminist and Indigenous theory. In Korea, Seung-A Kim (2006) situates her feminist practice as a space for Korean women to express collective grief and promote independence. ChihChen Lee (2006) introduced the socio-political implications of feminism in Taiwanese music therapy, and Frances Goldberg (2006) wrote on the underpinnings of Black feminism and spirituality on psychotherapeutic music therapy practice. Ten years on from Hadley’s (2006a) seminal text, Hadley and Hahna (2016) conducted another comprehensive overview of feminist perspectives in music therapy. Within the chapter, the authors note the tensions that exist within the ways feminism is conceived of and applied in music therapy. They describe examples of feminism being perceived only as it pertains to women, and invite a more complex, critical understanding of feminism as a function of analysis and critique (p. 433).

While this chapter focuses on critical and feminist approaches to music therapy, it is important to note that the literature has also explored related issues of race and culture, propelled by the early work of researchers such as Moreno (1988), Kenny (2006), Toppozaza (1995), Bradt (1997), and Darrow and Molloy (1998). The 21st century saw a turn towards situating culture at the centre of music therapy practice, developed by theorists and researchers such as Estrella (2001), Stige (2002), and Brown (2002). Building on this, Hadley (2013b) has advocated for a more critical and reflective perspective on the way music therapy is racialised, with a book of narratives derived from interviews with 17 music therapists who position their own experiences of race in their practice.

Overarchingly, the literature has focused on the need for music therapists to develop multicultural competency (Hadley and Norris, 2016; Young, 2016;
Whitehead-Pleaux, Brink, & Tan, 2017), which requires recognising ethnocentrism (Moreno, 1988), cultivating knowledge and skills around music from non-Western cultures (Shapiro, 2005), and developing new guidelines for practice and supervision (Kim & Whitehead-Pleaux, 2015). Despite this dedication to multicultural competency, the music therapy literature does not yet appear to have a developed body of work that engages critically with discussions of race, racism, and Whiteness. Authors have raised these issues in recent years, highlighting the structural limitations of a field which is dominated by therapists who are White, middle class, non-disabled and more (Hadley, 2013b; Hadley & Norris, 2016; Boggan, Grzanka & Bain, 2017). Some headway has been made with Whitehead-Pleaux and Tan’s *Cultural Intersections in Music Therapy* (2017), integrating a range of cultural perspectives from North America and exploring issues related to music therapy and religion (Robbins Elwafi, 2017; Froman & Jelinek Gombert, 2017), Indigeneity (West & Kenny, 2017), and mixed heritage (Rafieyan, 2017).

**Locating gender in music therapy.**

Curtis (1990; 2000; 2006; 2015) has led detailed attention to feminist issues in music therapy discourse, including its value as a lens from which to approach practice with women (2008), the challenges facing the profession in relation to feminist knowledge translation (2013a), and ongoing reflection and dialogue about the place of feminism in music therapy (2013b; 2015). 2013 was a significant year for critical, feminist, and anti-oppressive scholarship in music therapy, including Baines’ articulation of music therapy as an anti-oppressive practice (Baines, 2013), and the special edition on gender and the creative arts therapies edited by Curtis (2013b). This issue traversed not only a range of therapeutic practice mediums, but also the myriad ways gender locates experiences of power, and works in connection to socio-political context. Authors explored the value of feminist frameworks in questioning power-driven relational hierarchies in therapy (Hogan, 2013), in examining women’s experience of immigration and cultural adjustment (Kim, 2013), and in supporting emancipatory pedagogy in the creative arts therapies (Hahna, 2013).

The edition presented empirical research into gendered experiences of practicing music therapy (Curtis, 2013a; Streeter, 2013), and importantly, expanded the frame from feminism as it pertains to *women*, and into notions of therapy as a highly subjective arena for the construction and performance of *gender* (Rolvsjord &
Halstead, 2013). This issue also saw an expansion from feminist theory and into critical race theory, queer theory, disability studies and more, to examine music therapists’ complicity in dominant narratives, and our responsibility to advocate for a more socially just world (Hadley 2013a). The salience of Rolvsjord and Halstead’s (2013) piece emerged as they integrated notions of gender performativity and musical identities, including the ways singing and vocal range, genres such as rock and hip-hop, and musical roles such as conducting, are codified in highly gendered ways.

Rolvsjord and Halstead’s efforts to highlight gendered subjectivities embedded in music have since extended into in-depth examinations of musical instruments (Halstead & Rolvsjord, 2017). Halstead and Rolvsjord (2017) point out examples in the literature of the ways music therapy can unwittingly affirm male-centric stereotypes (Tuastad & Stige, 2015) and feminised roles in music (Smith, 2012), as well as transgress gender roles (Veltre & Hadley, 2012). Their work appears equally informed by music therapy researchers and theorists who emphasise how music is rooted in socio-political context (Ruud, 2012; Bonde, Ruud, Skånland & Trondalen, 2013; Ansdell, 2014), as well as non-music therapy scholars who emphasise the connection between musical instruments and gendered power relations (Koskoff, 1995; Doubleday, 2008; Wych, 2012). In Whitehead-Pleaux and Tan’s edited text, Curtis (2017) overviews the gendered narratives that shape our lives and Hahna (2017) highlights the conscious and unconscious biases that inevitably temper the therapeutic relationship, both advocating for increased awareness and reflexivity into our own positionings. Also in this text, Hadley (2017) focuses on the effect of microaggressions as they are perpetrated in music therapy, and points to tenets of anti-oppressive practice as crucial in uncovering forms of violence in seemingly neutral and normal interactions and systems.

This recent literature elucidates the gaps where music therapy discourse has not adequately attended to discursive constructions of gender as a delineator of clients’ experience. Halstead and Rolvsjord (2017) address this through their examination of the guitar as a gendered, sexualised object that signifies and affirms power, masculinity, and (hetero)sexuality. This example illustrates the way the social performance of *playing* an instrument fuses with historical, social, and political context to reify these gendered narratives, and thus construct the instrument as a signifier of these narratives. There is a noticeable connection in Halstead and Rolvsjord’s (2017) paper, to the work of arts-based gender researchers such as Renold
(2018) and colleagues, in using new materialism to theorise the intra-actions between objects, human and non-human matter, and phenomena. Across recent music therapy literature more broadly, links can also be made to approaches identified in part one which focus on analysing and transforming these systems of power, rather than on the individuals who transgress or are most impacted by them.

Queering music therapy.

In the last decade, the music therapy literature grew from a small handful of reflections on working with LGBT clients (Chase, 2004; Ahessy, 2011) to an empirical interest in examining music therapists’ attitudes and actions, developing new theoretical models and best practice guidelines (Whitehead-Pleaux et al., 2012; Whitehead-Pleaux et al., 2013; Whitehead-Pleaux & Xueli, 2017). The research indicates music therapists’ interest and support for working with clients who are queer and/or gender diverse. However, over half of the respondents in Whitehead-Pleaux et al.’s (2012) survey indicated they did not feel adequately prepared for such work. A smaller study by Wilson and Geist (2017) subsequently surveyed music therapists in training, aiming to gauge music therapy students’ self-perceived preparedness to work with LGBT clients. Their research revealed inconsistencies in students’ knowledge and self-identified preparedness, and the authors encouraged music therapy educators to more directly address gender and sexuality-related issues.

An important addition to queer music therapy discourse has occurred during this project, when Bain et al. (2016), initiated a music therapy framework for working with young people informed by queer theory. Their work draws on affirmative and liberatory approaches to gender and sexuality, and can be located more broadly within anti-oppression scholarship that situates personal struggles as inextricably connected to broader structures of oppression. The authors explicate how queer theory can both complement and problematise developments in social justice-based music therapy approaches, particularly in questioning notions of ‘fixed’ and ‘normal’ identities. In addition to queer theory, Bain et al.’s (2016) model draws upon an extensive range of key literature that has entered the current review thus far, across critical theory and music therapy. This includes scholars from critical race theory, anti-racist feminism, feminist music therapy, and music therapy frameworks such as Community Music Therapy and anti-oppressive practice. Importantly, informed by such literature and theory, it serves as the first model in music therapy which advocates for dismantling
the existing framework in order to be inclusive of LGBTQIA+ young people, rather than assuming they can be included within the existing framework.

In developing “radically inclusive” queer music therapy for adolescent contexts, Bain et al. (2016) advocate journeying away from “therapy for queer clients”, and into “queer therapy” (p. 28). Such positioning is reminiscent of the after-queer scholarship described in part one, in that queer music therapy rejects notions of young people’s inherent vulnerability (Talburt & Rasmussen, 2010). Within this model, Bain et al. (2016) explain that young people are not assumed to be in need of fixing, or encouraged to adjust to an oppressive culture. Instead, queer music therapy works to create spaces for young people’s celebration and future imaginings – a recurring theme called for across both after-queer literature and queer music therapy. Radically inclusive music therapy techniques include ways of ‘queering’ musical autobiographies, songwriting, lyric analysis, multimodal arts-based activities, and group anthem writing. Their development of queer music therapy particularly centres anti-oppressive practice and youth emancipation, and is an invitation for therapists to transform dense, complex, critical theory into application through music. The authors summarise the model with explorations of power, again emphasising a focus on context and the continual acknowledgment of the realities of systemic oppression.

Building on this model, Boggan et al. (2017) then undertook an evaluation into music therapists’ perspectives on queer music therapy, interviewing twelve music therapists who identify as LGBTQ+ or are experienced in working with LGBTQ+ clients. The authors open the article by noting the lack of substantive engagement with critical theories in music therapy, and the significance of the queer music therapy model in obligating music therapists to engage with critical race theory and intersectional scholarship (p. 376). Departing from the sense of enthusiasm the authors have identified among music therapists to engage with critical theory and the new proposed model, their study attempts to uncover the strengths and weaknesses of queer music therapy. Overarchingly, their investigation points to music therapists’ varied perspectives on politicising therapy, which some participants saw as a complication, whereas others saw as inherent and obligatory. Their findings indicated the strengths of the model to include the theoretical basis of queer theory in challenging notions of deficit, pathologisation, deviance, and neutrality. The limitations the authors identify within queer music therapy centre upon an insufficient engagement with intersectionality, and a lack of attendance to structural privilege.
within the profession. Boggan et al. (2017) explicate the need for further exploration on these issues, and to interrogate not only what happens in music therapy, but also the structural limitations of the music therapy discipline itself (p. 399). Their study advocates for further research into the ways music therapy “may function as a social justice-oriented therapeutic intervention with implications for systems-level change” (p. 400). Specifically, they suggest collaborative and participatory action research, which centres clients’ perspectives in order to co-create inclusive approaches to music therapy.

**Music therapy and young people.**

The significant and multifaceted relationship that young people have with music is well documented across disciplines including music therapy (McFerran, 2010), youth identity (Tarrant, North & Hargreaves, 2002), music psychology (Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007), and psychology (Laiho, 2004). Some shared tenets across these diverse fields of research and practice include the ways young people use music to communicate, support their own wellbeing, and construct and perform their individual and group identity (Ruud, 1997; Miranda, 2013; McFerran et al., 2015; Papinczak et al., 2015). It has been noted for some time, however, that the role of music in young people’s lives will vary along sociocultural lines. Karen Estrella (2001) writes,

> The meaning and function of church music for a working-class African American woman, and of pop rock-and-roll for an upper-class White adolescent girl are different. How culture defines, contextualizes, and prioritizes the experience of music is essential knowledge for music therapists. (p. 54)

Rolvsjord and Halstead’s (2013) critical exploration of the gendered politics of musical acts and instruments indeed come into focus here when considering the different ways young people may experience and express their musical identities. However, there is limited exploration into these issues in an adolescent context, as explained below. In light of a global push for evidence-based practice, music therapy research has invested in standardised assessment tools, randomised control trials, and systematic reviews into adolescent practice. Confining this literature to contexts relevant to this review, the therapeutic benefits of music with young people have been
documented in mental health (McFerran, Garrido, & Saarikallio, 2016; Porter et al., 2017), and schools (Carr & Wigram, 2009; McFerran & Rickson, 2014; Winter, 2015; Wölfl, 2016). Given the therapeutic frame, much of this literature focuses on contexts in which young people are considered ‘at risk’, and demonstrates how music can act as a preventative and supportive resource (Derrington, 2012; Gold et al., 2017). However, music therapists working with young people have also demonstrated a resounding commitment to transforming the socio-political injustices which contribute to young people’s marginalisation. These projects tend to identify with Community and Resource-Oriented approaches to music therapy, focusing less on music therapy as a treatment or intervention, and attending critically to notions of context, power and collaboration (Bolger, 2013; Krüger et al., 2016; Daykin et al., 2017), and rights and participation (Krüger & Stige, 2014; Solli, 2015; Murphy & McFerran, 2017).

**Critical and feminist approaches with young people.**

Pioneering investigation into music therapy with young people who are impacted by systemic inequities has been especially concentrated in school settings (McFerran & Teggelove, 2011; Derrington, 2012), and overwhelmingly emphasise collaborative and participatory methodologies (Hunt, 2005; Bolger, 2013; Fairchild, 2018). Indeed, the suggestion that schools can function as a microcosm for change has been explored in Rickson and McFerran’s (2014) book, which centres theories of justice and inclusion in its advocacy for school-based music programs. However, thus far there remains little exploration into how notions of power relate to gender with young people in music therapy. Hadley’s (2006a) influential text overviewing feminist practice in music therapy documented one example of feminist approaches to working with young people, in contexts of abuse (Purdon, 2006). Since then, explicitly feminist approaches to music therapy with young people can be located in Hadley and Veltre’s (2012) music therapy with adolescent girls, in which they examined lyrics in hip-hop to affirm a feminist sensibility and foster social action. As noted in part one of this review, the liberatory potential of hip-hop to challenge notions of power with young people has been well documented outside of music therapy. Bain et al.’s (2016) queer music therapy model articulates how young people’s participation in music therapy can challenge gender-based oppression through queer theory’s focus on de/reconstructing language through music. This
aligns with critical and intersectional approaches to feminism which preference the goal of a common cause, rather than notions of universality, consensus, or commonality (Lorde, 1984/2012).

In regards to research, feminist methodologies have been utilised in music therapy with young people in mental health contexts (Hense, 2015), as well as within Baines’ (2015) explication of anti-oppressive practice across adolescent and adult contexts. Rolvsjord & Hadley (2016) have also outlined from a research perspective the transformative goals of critical research, focusing particularly on the potential for feminist approaches to cultivate a dynamic and inclusive knowledge base within the music therapy discipline. Rolvsjord and Hadley (2016) suggest five key strategies which music therapists can employ in order to undertake research from a feminist standpoint:

1. Significance of gender: To consider if and how gender (race, class, disability, sexuality) matter;
2. Multiple perspectives: To embrace variations in social locations;
3. Discursive critique: To give attention to the roles that language and other cultural texts play in constructing meaning and reality;
4. Collaborative processes: To foster research communities and engage equally with all parties of the research;
5. Embodiment and emotional involvement: To foster awareness of the role that the body and emotions play in knowledge production.

(Rolvsjord & Hadley, 2016, p. 964)

Conclusion

Through this literature review, I have explicated the importance and value of exploring gender with young people, and the opportunities for music therapy practice to address these needs. As part one demonstrated, young people are a key group who are continually highlighted within health, community, and education contexts due to their unique experiences of gender-based violence, their attitudes and behaviours related to gender equality, and their engagement in gender diversity advocacy. The prevalence and impact of violence are indeed experienced disproportionately by specific communities, and can have a range of impacts on a person’s wellbeing and sociocultural trajectory. However, scholars have argued against the institutional positioning of particular groups as vulnerable and ‘at risk’. In order to counteract
these narratives, there is a need for critical approaches that expand views of young people beyond narratives of risk and victimhood, and recognise the systemic issues underpinning gender-based violence. Primary violence prevention seeks to do so, and calls for a shift from approaches that single out and respond to those most impacted by violence, and into working to address the gendered drivers of violence.

Given that education settings are demonstrated to be effective microcosms for change, programs such as the Respectful Relationships Education curriculum are being introduced in schools to conduct this with young people. Across primary prevention literature, calls have been made for approaches that are participatory, collaborative, and tailored to young people in context. Meanwhile, arts-based methods are already being used to research and practice resistance with young people, and international curricula exploring gender with young people in schools explicitly advocate for arts-based methodologies (Renold, 2016). The transformative capacity of the arts has been explored as feminist and liberatory praxis, particularly for young people positioned by discourses of risk (Brown, R. N., 2013; Durham, 2013; Stanger, 2018). In research, the affordances of creative processes have been demonstrated in documenting, processing and resisting experiences of gender-based violence that are routinely normalised (Renold, 2018).

Music therapy literature has comprehensively documented the transformative impacts of engaging with music, the unique role music plays in young people’s lives and identities, and specifically, in engendering sociocultural change in schools. Seeking to work against discourses of vulnerability and deficit, music therapy has built solid theoretical grounding for critical and de-pathologising frameworks that extend apolitical notions of ‘helping’ into social action (Stige & Aarø, 2012), and building clients’ agency (Rolvsjord, 2010). Informed by these critical approaches, and explicitly seeking to understand how difference and power is used to oppress communities, Baines (2013, 2014) articulated music therapy as anti-oppressive practice. In locating problems within systems rather than the individuals impacted by them, this framework aligns well with contemporary efforts in addressing gender-based violence. However, this framework was only recently established in music therapy, and there remains little empirical research into music therapy as an anti-oppressive practice.

Similarly, while there have been links drawn between gender, music, and young people’s identities, there is limited research investigating these links. Specifically,
there is limited empirical research into young people’s own experiences and perspectives in exploring gender in music therapy within these contexts, or indeed at all (Hadley & Veltre, 2012; Bain et al., 2016; Boggan et al., 2017). Correspondingly, while there is a body of literature supporting the importance of exploring gender with young people in schools, thus far this has not been researched in music therapy practice.

Music therapy has the opportunity to provide an important contribution and unique insights into exploring gender with young people in schools for several reasons. First, music therapy meets key recommendations for best practice, as an engaging and participatory medium tailored to young people’s needs, and one that is sensitive and attendant to the contexts young people exist within. Second, music therapy has already begun to demonstrate how gender norms and subjectivities can be reinforced in music (Rolvsjord & Halstead, 2013; Halstead & Rolvsjord, 2017), but also, how they can be subverted, transformed, and expanded upon (Bain et al., 2016). Music therapists can only respond to the need for new and engaging modalities for exploring gender with young people by better understanding the affordances of their tools in music. Moreover, if music therapy is to be located within broader health, education, and community contexts which seek to address gender-based violence with young people, music therapists must begin to understand the strengths and challenges they may encounter as therapeutic practitioners in this space. This project therefore responds to and connects several pressing issues across health, education, and music therapy practice and research. It is oriented to the goals and contemporary efforts of primary violence prevention; it is informed by frameworks that seek to recognise and transform discourses of risk and vulnerability in research and practice; it offers insight into the affordances of music in engaging young people to explore complex and deeply entrenched issues; and it articulates a new vision for understanding young people’s needs, experiences, and resistance. The following chapter outlines the methodological approach to developing the project, overviews the pilot project results, and introduces the setting in which the primary research project took place.
Chapter Three
Methodology

Introduction

This project aimed to break open and inspect the complex and multifaceted issues that have emerged in recent literature and public discourse about gender and power, and how they relate to young people in school. This demanded a multifaceted methodological approach, encompassed broadly under qualitative research. Unlike large-scale projects aiming to establish evidence about demographics, correlation, attitudes and behaviours, the methodologies I drew upon were emergent and inherently flexible, designed to elicit meaning related to the events that occurred.

Specifically, I sought to understand the role music therapy could play for young people exploring issues related to gender and power. As a music therapist with a commitment to anti-oppressive practice, notions of power and subjectivity described in the previous chapter were central to the design and desired outcome of the project. I commenced with a desire to utilise what Stige and McFerran (2016) describe as underexplored links between feminist and participatory action research (PAR) methodologies. Entering the project with these principles in mind allowed for the emergent nature of these frameworks to inform each new step naturally, and forge space for other methodological frameworks where they were required. The key tenets of each of these methodological frameworks are introduced throughout this chapter.

I began the first year of research running a series of participatory group music workshops to understand the most important issues to young people in schools. Characteristic of PAR, these workshops were a pilot process to inform the primary project, on which the remaining chapters are based. Unconventionally, the descriptions and results of these workshops are limited to this methodology chapter. These results form a key step in the methodological process and so are best placed here to explain the emergence of the methodology and design of the primary project.

During the primary project, it became clear that although PAR provided integral ontological and epistemological foundations to guide the overall project, new methodologies were necessary for the primary period of data collection. Due to the complex issues that I began to encounter as I established the primary project, which I introduce in this chapter, my own observations of the setting became more important
than initially anticipated. Some of these issues were bound up in the power structures I sought to analyse, and it became clear that many components of the project may not be co-constructed with the participants. I looked to other methodologies that shared PAR’s key tenets of collaboration, analysis of power, and social action, and that accounted for the need for researchers to implicate themselves in the data. Critical ethnography emerged as a methodology which integrated power relations, the researcher’s own subjectivities, and the participants’ experiences. I identified the shared aspects of critical ethnography and PAR, and I overview these below. They include common goals of seeking to connect research to broader social justice efforts (Madison, 2011); rejecting neoliberalism’s purported apolitical stance (Jordan, 2009), and equipping researchers with tools to position themselves alongside participants without assuming this will ever equalise power relations (Holland et al., 2010).

With these goals in mind, I took an explicit focus to positioning and power relations during the primary project, noting the ways my position of power as a researcher was amplified overtly and covertly by the context of the primary project. I engaged with power differentials from both a research and practice perspective, gaining additional supervision and considering a range of theoretical tools to analyse the complex data. Theoretical resources were drawn from feminist theory, ecological theory, and theories that could be framed broadly within decolonial

4 scholarship. Beginning with a summary of participatory action research as an overall orientation, I then overview the methods of first year of research, and the results of this pilot project. I then move to the primary project, introducing the setting itself, the methodological approach taken to knowledge generation, data analysis, and presentation of the data. Across these discussions is a commitment to analyses of power and representation. This chapter is designed to offer a clear overview of what was undertaken throughout the three year project, and provide language to locate the project within existing epistemological, ontological, and methodological frameworks.

4I refer to ‘decolonial scholarship’ as the intellectual movement conceptualising ideas that challenge coloniality, forces of oppression, and coercive domination. At times I also refer to ‘postcolonial theory’ in keeping with the terminology particular authors use in their own theorising. I do not use ‘postcolonial’ to imply that Indigenous lands are postcolonial, or that colonisation exists only as a legacy or an ‘aftermath’. I use these terms as imperfect descriptors of these broad fields of study, while acknowledging the subtle and contested differences and uncertainties that exist within postcolonial and decolonial scholarship (see Moreton-Robinson, 2003; Loomba, 2005, p. 12).
Action Research

The term ‘action research’ is generally credited to German-American psychologist Kurt Lewin (1951), who described being able to deepen our understanding of the world’s problems by trying to change them. Since its conception, action research has been reflecting a paradigm shift that reimagines the relationship between theory and practice. This was seen as highly controversial for some time, as it required destabilising positions such as positivism, empiricism, and pragmatism, upon which knowledge production has been built (Oquist, 1978). Implicit in these debates were epistemological and ontological tensions that called into question central notions of validity, credibility, legitimacy, and generalisability. Action research is renowned for a turn in which research is conducted with participants, rather than on, for, or about participants, and destabilising the traditional role of the researcher. Not only is the researcher entirely reimagined from one who observes, to one who directly impacts, they are also no longer the only player to decide what counts as knowledge (Williamson, 2012). The central points of departure for this epistemological shift are that knowledge is deeply embedded in both social context and the embodied experience. This sense of subversion of Western-centric propositional knowledge is echoed in fields such as critical theory, pragmatist critique, feminist theory, and Eastern philosophy.

Given action research is an orientation to inquiry, rather than a specific methodology, its principles are embraced and adapted across a range of inquiry contexts. Across the literature it is represented as multifaceted and pliable, often separated into different purposes, such as technical, practical, and critical (Kemmis, 2009), and later into the seven different approaches to research, which are described by Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014, p. 10-12). In the most recent edition of *The Sage Handbook of Action Research*, Hilary Bradbury (2015) differentiates participatory action research alone into feminist participatory action research, rural participatory action research, and critical participatory action research. Kemmis et al. (2014) overview fields that have adopted action research practices, including activist movements such as the women’s movement, Indigenous land rights, and environmental conversation, as well as professional fields such as education, medicine, nursing, and agriculture. The authors identify two common threads appearing across the expansive range of objectives and practices that utilise action research: 1) the recognition of people’s capacity to participate actively in any and all
stages of the research process, and 2) that the motivation for the research is to make some sort of improvement to these participants’ practices and settings (p. 4). Stephen Kemmis (2009) describes this as ‘practice-changing practice’, referring to the orientation of action research to not only change people’s practice, but their understandings of practice, and the conditions under which they practice. Bradbury (2015, p. 4) conceptualises action researchers as a movement through the metaphor of a ‘family’, where there is shared fundamental understanding and experience, but also alternative paradigms for understanding these experiences that can compete and clash. Within this polyphonic family, I will focus on participatory action research as a broad theoretical framework and ideology relevant to my project.

**Participatory action research.**

Broadly, participatory action research aims to challenge imbalances in distribution of power through cycles of inquiry, action, and reflection (Bradbury, 2015). PAR is historically attached to research with vulnerable, marginalised and oppressed communities, and seeks to work against further processes of marginalisation by treating these communities’ choices, local knowledge, and lived experience as valuable and a priority. PAR is considered inherently emancipatory and political as a methodology, because it requires recognition of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity that are inherent in people’s positioning under systems of power (Bradbury, 2015). PAR is strongly represented in educational action research literature, and in recent years has demonstrated a commitment to identifying and challenging inequities specifically related to gender, race, and class (Kemmis et al., 2014).

Music therapy practitioners, theorists and researchers have harnessed participatory action research as an approach for community and research projects oriented to social action, critical analysis, and emancipation. Stige and McFerran (2016) overviewed 17 music therapy action research studies in the literature, between the years 1997 – 2014. Across these projects, Stige and McFerran (2016) identified a shared motivation among researchers to challenge ‘known’ assumptions and, in some cases, to challenge our own assumptions as professionals who deploy expertise and dominance. Music therapy research has drawn on participatory methodological frameworks particularly when researching with young people who are systemically marginalised or classified as ‘vulnerable’ or ‘at risk’ (see for example Hunt, 2005;
Across these projects there appears to be a congruency between PAR as a methodology and anti-oppressive practice as an orientation, given their shared focus on understanding and shifting systemic inequalities, rather than the ‘personal’ impacts of marginalisation. While PAR aims to include participants in all phases of the research, I noted Bolger’s (2013) finding that although young people may be passionate about research, the kind of laborious and technical processes required for analysing data may present barriers for engagement. Similarly, Stige and McFerran (2016) identify analysis as being potentially the least interesting part of the research for participants. I aimed to be mindful of these, and saw songwriting as an ‘in the moment’ method of both data generation and analysis, which I describe below. Across discussions of PAR, it is evident that the methodology is pliable, based on political and epistemological foundations that value the nuanced needs of individual contexts. Rather than prescribing a rigid methodological formula, PAR provides an approach to decision-making, inquiry, and knowledge generation.

**Action research cycles: Plan, act, observe, reflect.**

Lewin (1951) described the action research process in terms of a reconnaissance mission, followed by an evaluation and return to the site for further action. This practice is referred to as the ‘self-reflective spiral’, wherein researchers/co-researchers collect initial data, reflect and develop a plan, implement the plan to see the effects of the action, and then analyse this data to evaluate whether the desired effect had been achieved (Kemmis et al., 2014). The action research spiral forms the structural framework for my research methodology, which was made up of two broad stages: the ‘pilot project’, and the ‘primary project’ (described in detail below). The pilot project occurred throughout the first year of research. The purpose of this stage was to explore a wide range of young people’s thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about gender through participatory group music workshops. I conducted these pilot workshops across seven different schools in Australia, and also in the United Kingdom during a period in which I travelled to present at international conferences (Scrine, 2015a).

**The Pilot Project: Plan, Act, Observe, Reflect**

The pilot project was the first cycle of inquiry, during which I sought to understand the kinds of issues young people wanted to explore in relation to gender,
and what would emerge when music was used as a medium for exploration. This cycle took place over the first year of the project. Aiming to identify issues most salient to young people, I aimed to open up a space for their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about a topic as vast and complex as gender, through music-based activities that were flexible, participatory, and non-confronting. The importance of gauging and exploring young people’s current attitudes and beliefs related to issues of gender and power not only aligns with principles of participatory research that prioritise communities’ own knowledge and agency (Kemmis et al., 2014), it is also central in primary violence prevention, as demonstrated by literature in the previous chapter (Flood & Pease, 2006, 2009; Harris et al., 2015). From a practice-based perspective, I also sought to understand how music therapy techniques like therapeutic songwriting and music video analysis could be harnessed to explore these issues.

**Plan.**

*Building a rationale for music and data generation.*

I commenced with a literature review on the way young people engage with media and popular culture, and how these shape their attitudes and beliefs about gender (see Scrine, 2016a, 2017a). Departing from the outcomes of this review, I finalised a plan to base the pilot workshops loosely around two main activities: songwriting, and music video analysis. I chose to commence the workshop with group songwriting for a number of reasons. As a practicing music therapist, I am familiar and comfortable using songwriting as a dynamic, flexible, and affective form of engagement, especially when working to create a safe and supportive environment for young people in groups to express their thoughts and feelings. Research into the therapeutic potentials of songwriting illuminates its potential to express and construct meaning about our past, present and future lives (Baker et al., 2017), its emotional potency due to the ways music encodes into memory (Baumgartner, Lutz, Schmidt, & Jäncke, 2006), and its meaningfulness to participants as both a process and a product (Silverman, Baker, & McDonald, 2016). Furthermore, songwriting is a medium that allows for intrapersonal exploration with individuals across a range of cognitive and physical capacities (Baker et al., 2017); which was crucial given my commitment to accessibility and equal participation. Most importantly from a methodological perspective, songwriting also served as a participatory and arts-based form of data generation, not only benefiting the project, but also serving as an ongoing resource for
the young people. Arts-based research is identified as a way of bringing data ‘to life’ (Leavy, 2015), through multiple forms of sensory engagement that provokes participation in powerful ways distinct from traditional forms of data collection (Parsons, Heus, & Moravac, 2013; Viega & Forinash, 2017). Within arts-based research, songwriting has been specifically recommended by researchers such as Beer (2016) and Fairchild (2018) as a collaborative approach that allows participants to distil the essence of their contribution, and often communicates principles of social justice.

Within all this, I was conscious of the potential for the group to reify conditions where only the most confident and able young people could contribute, and endeavoured to identify aspects of the workshops that had the potential to uphold or reinforce dominant narratives about gender, race, sexuality, disability and class. An initial review of the literature on representations of gender and sexualities in music videos revealed a clear trend in which hip-hop and rap are disproportionately represented as particularly misogynistic and homophobic, over and above every other genre (Frisby & Aubrey, 2012). While acknowledging the presence of such narratives in these genres, I was informed by the work of queer theory and youth studies scholars such as Rinaldo Walcott (2013), and Adam Kruse (2016a, 2016b) who make several key points on this matter. Broadly, Walcott and Kruse both highlight the tendency of these genres to be simplistically and reductively categorised based on the problematic narratives that may arise in them. They point out how these narratives exist within a broader misogynistic and homophobic world, which evades our attention by scapegoating specific genres. Finally, they note how such positioning erases the historical and ongoing Black feminist contribution to rap and hip-hop culture and broader discourse. In an effort to avoid such missteps, and in the hope of contributing to literature which challenged these dominant discourses on misogyny in music videos, I made a deliberate choice to include music videos from rock and pop genres, and to avoid focusing on rap and hip-hop.

I selected songs that had featured in the Top 40, given a higher likelihood that the young people would be familiar with them, may have pre-formed opinions about them, and be more willing or interested in engaging in discussion (as described by Miranda, 2013). Furthermore, this component of the workshop increased the likelihood of the young people’s participation, given it offered an alternative form of engagement following songwriting. Following my initial literature review, a clear
theme emerged: although music media plays a complex and profuse role in young people’s ideologies and beliefs about gender and sexuality, there is a distinct lack of research that seeks to understand how young people actually negotiate gendered power dynamics in popular music (Ward, Hansbrough, & Walker, 2005; Renold and Ringrose, 2011). This was an important gap to address from a participatory and political standpoint, centring the premise that young people deserve and have the capacity to contribute their own ideas about how music media shapes their thoughts and beliefs. As an underexplored area within both music therapy research and critical youth studies, music videos offered not only a different medium for participation, but pre-existing, culturally relevant material to foster and support their own critical dialogue.

**Recruitment and engaging school communities.**

While planning the content of the pilot workshops, I began engaging schools. I recruited schools through a wide range of professional and personal networks. This included reaching out to schools my supervisor had worked with through her extensive experience as a researcher in schools across regional Victoria, all the way to making contact with a personal friend’s extended family who worked in a specialist school in London. The seven settings in the pilot project ranged from mainstream high schools to alternative schools for young people who had disengaged in education. Not seeking to target specific demographics, my recruitment aims focused on capturing sufficiently rich data, and highlighting the voices of young people across a range of demographics, rather than attempting to generalise results.

**Act.**

**Introducing the young people.**

The seven group pilot workshops were conducted across a range of government school settings, with young people aged 14 – 17 years of age (see Appendices C, D, and E for consent forms and Plain Language Statements). The groups ranged in size from 5 – 18 participants. Table 3.1 summarises some demographical information about the participating groups to provide context. The schools were all co-educational, and I did not separate students by sex or aim to meet any identity demographics such as gender, sexuality, or economic or cultural background. However, there were several participants who openly described themselves using terms such as “queer”, “gay”, “non-binary”, and “trans”. I have chosen not to include
identity markers such as gender or cultural background in the table, due to the potential for these processes of differentiation and demarcation to centre and normalise dominant groups (as outlined in Jensen, 2011). Overall, the participants were from a range of geographical locations, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, genders, sexual orientations, and class backgrounds.
Table 3.1 Pilot Project Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>How school was recruited</th>
<th>How members were recruited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“School 1”</td>
<td>Outer suburbs of Edinburgh, Scotland</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14 – 15</td>
<td>Through Registered Music Therapist/Researcher contact in the United Kingdom</td>
<td>School music teacher offered the workshop to students who wanted to participate, in replacement of their regular music class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream public school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“School 2”</td>
<td>Inner city London, England</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16 – 18</td>
<td>Through personal contact</td>
<td>Students who usually participate in group spoken word workshops invited to attend in replacement of their regular class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“School 3”</td>
<td>Cambridgeshire, England</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14 – 15</td>
<td>Through Registered Music Therapist working at the school</td>
<td>Students in a music therapy group were invited to attend workshop in replacement of their regular music therapy group session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“School 4”</td>
<td>Near Geelong, Victoria, Australia</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16 – 18</td>
<td>Through a colleague who knew of the class and their reported interest in gender activism</td>
<td>Students from a drama class who were involved in gender activism were invited to participate, in replacement of their regular drama class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream public school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“School 5”</td>
<td>Regional Victoria, Australia</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14 – 17</td>
<td>Through supervisor’s research networks</td>
<td>Students who were enrolled in music across year levels were invited to participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream public school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“School 6”</td>
<td>Outer suburbs of Melbourne, Australia</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15 – 16</td>
<td>Through supervisor’s research networks</td>
<td>All students in year nine were invited to participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream public school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“School 7”</td>
<td>Outer suburbs of Melbourne, Australia</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16 – 17</td>
<td>Through supervisor’s research networks</td>
<td>All year ten music students were invited to participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream public school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The workshop processes.

The pilot workshops aligned with a PAR approach by directly involving the young people as the experts of youth experience, needs, and vision. The songwriting component centred on the notion of the future, and the young people’s idea of a “perfect world” in relation to gender. The future-focused and social change-oriented nature of this question opened up dialogue about their vision for the future, speaking to principles of resistance, coalescence, and agency described in feminist and after-queer scholarship. The songs were written using a process typical of therapeutic songwriting, including group discussion, group brainstorming, negotiating the musical elements, and integrating the lyrics and music, all while attending sensitively to group dynamics.

Because each of the songs were built upon a structure which had a repeating chorus or hook, the process also offered a means of analysis ‘in the moment’, given that the young people had to identify the central message of their song. Outlining this method in detail, Fairchild and McFerran (2018) describe group songwriting as a collaborative methodological strategy for engaging young people in a simultaneous process of data generation and analysis. Building on the action-oriented qualities of songwriting as a methodology in my own research, each of the group workshops included a discussion about what the young people wanted to do with their song. This included consultation with staff I had liaised with at each school, so that once the workshop was over, the young people’s plans could be put into action. For example, one group of young people described wanting their song to be “a school anthem”, so I sent them copies of the chords and lyrics to the song, as well as a recording. Their teacher informed me that they then extended the song and performed it at the next whole school assembly.

As a group, we decided on a popular music video to analyse, based on the themes that arose during the songwriting process. To prepare for the workshops, I had built a collection of popular contemporary music videos, which I brought to each workshop; however I was also open to suggestions from the young people. All seven groups chose to analyse the song ‘Literally I Can’t’ by Play N Skillz, six groups analysed ‘Dear Future Husband’ by Meghan Trainor, and one group in East London analysed a song by a local artist, ‘Healthy’, by Kilo Keemzo.

Overall, empirical data collected from this cycle of action included the lyrics and audio recording of the song written by each group, and the audio recordings of the workshops. This translated to seven songs and over ten hours of audio recording.
Observe.

My first initial step was to transcribe each of the audio files in order to code the words spoken by the young people. However, it was clear from the beginning that understanding the depth and complexity that arose in the workshops meant listening for dynamics that were unsaid, or ‘between the lines’ (Jorgenson, 2011). In order to approach the complex data, I employed a music therapy standpoint analysis technique derived from Lawrence Ferrara’s approach to musical phenomenological analysis (Ferrara 1984). The model, by McFerran and Wigram (2005) is guided by phenomenological principles, emphasising how description is the least distant way of representing a perceived reality. In practice, the model utilises distinct narrative descriptions across multiple occasions of listening, to generate multidimensional and comprehensive descriptions that look at the event from a variety of standpoints (McFerran & Wigram 2005).

With the aim of emphasising reflexivity and providing rich context for this data, I conducted an in-depth analysis, using the audio recordings of the workshops, and the songs written during the workshops. I outlined five distinct standpoints from which to generate narrative description, and listened to the audio recordings five times, with each standpoint in mind (see Appendix K for an example of the analysis):

1. My personal reactions to what I heard
2. The dynamics of engagement between the young people in the room
3. Transcription of discussion related to gender
4. Gendered analysis of interactions in the room
5. Key messages young people want to communicate about their vision for a perfect world in regards to gender (from the songs)

After the five-step in-depth narrative analysis was completed for each of the focus groups, I then looked across the data for tentative emerging ideas, in a process comparable to open coding in grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin 1998, p. 101). I grouped quotes under these ideas, which could then be refined to create an integrated story, connecting categories and their associated context (established through the in-depth narrative analysis). Although this methodology aimed to provide rich context and emphasise the voices of the young people themselves, analysis necessitated a level of critical interpretation from me as the researcher, of which my own subjective lens cannot be separated. In doing so, I was particularly looking for young people’s responses that made reference to interpersonal and
structural delineations of power. My interpretations of key standout themes were formed not only by noting attitudes that were raised repeatedly, or with particular agreement/disagreement from other participants, but also those which particularly impacted me subjectively (examples of which can be identified in Appendix K).

Reflect.

This point in the cycle required reflecting on how the knowledge generated during the workshops should inform the primary project. Within this period, there were micro-spirals of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, as I worked on disseminating my findings thus far, listening for feedback, searching for paths of knowledge to pursue, and reconstructing my ideas. One component of reflection translated into advocacy, for those who work with young people to consider their relationship with music media, and create space for young people to participate in critical analysis. I focused on communicating the findings from the pilot project into music therapy and education discourse (see Scrine, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d, 2017b). Another component lay in identifying ways of addressing the central themes the young people articulated in the songs they wrote (see Appendix L for song lyrics). These themes included the prevention of gender-based violence, breaking down hegemonic masculinity, challenging heteronormativity and the gender binary, and building solidarity between teen girls. Simultaneously, I pursued several undertakings outside of academia, but still related to gender, music, and young people in schools, described in the section below.

What emerged from these workshops was a sense of tension characterised by the young people’s awareness, sense of advocacy, and desire for change related to gender-based oppression, juxtaposed by the use of these same imbalances of power, expectations and scrutiny. Table 3.2 below illustrates the central themes that emerged from the data analysis, and examples of the raw data that related to each theme.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenging heteronormativity and the gender binary</th>
<th>Rebuilding masculinity</th>
<th>Tensions related to women and power</th>
<th>Tensions related to women’s sexuality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>“School 4” song lyrics:</strong></td>
<td><strong>“School 5” song lyrics:</strong></td>
<td>Participant:</td>
<td>Participant:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a perfect world</td>
<td>In a perfect world</td>
<td>(Referring to Dear Future Husband music video)</td>
<td>(Referring to Literally I Can’t music video)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is so much more to be</td>
<td>for boys violence isn’t a way</td>
<td>“I just don’t like the message of the song. Like girls are always the ones who receive the gifts, they never give the guys chocolates. They never get him anything, it’s just about like, ‘Oh treat me like a lady, and I’ll do whatever you want!’”</td>
<td>“They’re dressed preppy but they’ve still got that sense of skankiness.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Than just a guy or a girl</td>
<td>If they could show their emotions and not push people away</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can just be me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You are who you are, Straight, binary, or queer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“School 6” song lyrics:</strong></td>
<td><strong>“School 6” song lyrics:</strong></td>
<td>Participant:</td>
<td>Participant:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’re the only one who can define you</td>
<td>And guys don’t hide their pain and misery</td>
<td>(Referring to Dear Future Husband music video)</td>
<td>(Referring to Literally I Can’t music video)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>People aren’t ashamed of the body they possess</td>
<td>“It’s just about how girls are always doing what men want them to... it basically says girls always want flowers and chocolates, and like, I’ll do anything you want me to.”</td>
<td>“They look slutty, but when it comes to the lyrics... it’s trying to demonstrate that they’re slutty but they’re frigid as well.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insults</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are a thing of the past</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“School 7” song lyrics:</strong></td>
<td><strong>“School 2” song lyrics:</strong></td>
<td>Participant:</td>
<td>Participant:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He or she</td>
<td>Men aren’t actually always there</td>
<td>(Referring to Dear Future Husband music video)</td>
<td>(Referring to Literally I Can’t music video)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You or me</td>
<td>Men being dominant in a relationship</td>
<td>“I just don’t like the song cos in some bits she’ll say like ‘if you want my special loving you have to do this’. And it’s like, well, not really. Like if you want me and my body, then you have to do this and that for me.”</td>
<td>“Yeah like they’re asking for it but then they’re just teasing you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose your own identity</td>
<td>That’s straight bullshit</td>
<td>(Boys call out) – “Slavery!”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“School 3” song lyrics:</strong></td>
<td>Participant:</td>
<td><strong>“School 1” song lyrics:</strong></td>
<td>Participant:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be free for who you want to be</td>
<td>“I wish boys could be more open about their emotions. There’s a lot of domestic violence these days. (others: “Yeah” “Mmm”). I think that if they talked about it more (others: “Yeah!”), they would be, you know, less angry.”</td>
<td>Practically the same, But now so different, When do we lose our innocence? Boys and girls, men and women, Equality is our decision</td>
<td>“The girls are acting and dressing like they can but they’re saying I can’t. But they can, they’re just choosing not to.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is no gender – people are comfy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These themes were grounded in both the knowledge generated by the young people, as well as the knowledge generated during this period of reflection. Relatedly, this period of reflection propelled a second literature review, in order to understand the existing academic discourse related to the themes that arose. I sought to conduct more focused, in-depth group work with young people, in order to identify the power structures that contextualise the potentially conflicting ontologies that arose in the workshops. Concluding this cycle of reflection, I identified a need to conduct a more in-depth cycle of data collection, in order to better understand these issues and tensions, by locating young people more deeply in their specific context.

**Ongoing Inquiry Outside of Academia**

Outside of the academic inquiry and knowledge acquisition involved in the first year of my project described above, I initiated several other paths to further my understanding, develop my skills and expertise, and share my reflections. Thinking, learning and participating outside of the bounds of academia aligned closely with the emphasis that action research design has on activism, and also with the way I personally framed the epistemological value of my research. I joined the Partners in Prevention network, a network of professionals supporting and partnering with services and schools in the state to plan, implement and evaluate Respectful Relationships Education, and I began attending their meetings. I consulted with the prevention officer at the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV), to update her about my project and to learn about other projects that were currently occurring in the state. Out of this network I was introduced to the Project Coordinator of the ‘We Can Do It’ Respectful Relationships in Schools Project, and consulted with her on largest-scale evaluation projects in the Catholic education setting. I undertook several opportunities for professional development, including capacity-building training for the implementation of the Respectful Relationships Education, and training in responding to disclosures of sexual assault.

I was (and remain) a performing artist, and am deeply invested in pursuing the ways gender and power manifest in music-based contexts outside of music therapy. When I commenced this project, an organisation had recently formed to spark and cultivate conversations around women and gender non-conforming artists’ participation in Australian music. I began attending their community meetings, became a volunteer, and began curating live music events that centred women and LGBTQIA+ artists. Over the course of this project, the organisation was incorporated as an official not-for-profit with an established Board of
Directors, on which I remain currently. My duties as a Director of this organisation have run concurrent to this project, including running the organisation and leading advocacy and consultation around issues related to gender in the Australian music industry. The organisation’s efforts over this period include hosting countless live music events, panel discussions, workshops, and an annual conference, establishing a record label, building and distributing a database of women and queer people working in the music industry, and establishing the Taskforce Against Sexual Harassment and Assault in Live Music Venues. This taskforce is now government-funded and currently being implemented in live music venues across the state.

I also began observing workshops run by violence-prevention organisations such as the Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA), and assisting with workshop facilitation. In addition to expanding my knowledge and expertise related to music, gender, and young people, expanding on my professional networks was important in order to call upon once I was ready to commence school recruitment for the primary project. During my observation and facilitation experiences with CASA at the end of the first year of this project, I spent a day at a school in the outer suburbs of Melbourne. I observed and co-facilitated several sessions with 13 – 15 year-old students, on topics related to sexual assault. During this visit, the staff in the wellbeing team emphasised the school community’s eagerness to participate in primary violence prevention initiatives, but mentioned that the school was lacking in resources and capacity. At this point in the project, I was certain that the next cycle of action should take place in a school environment over an extended period of time, and was searching for opportunities to recruit a willing school. I took the coordinator’s details and later contacted her, sharing information about my research in the hope that the school may be interested in partnering with me for the primary project of my research. Some months later, following approval from the Melbourne University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and the Victorian Department of Education (see Appendices F and G), I arrived at the school to commence the primary project.

**The Primary Project**

*Presentation of data: Telling data stories.*

I will introduce the primary project using an approach developed by Patti Lather (1991) to “write science differently” (p. 123), by telling ‘data stories’, which construct socially meaningful narratives based on data. Data stories function to demonstrate, perform, condense, evoke, and exemplify a theoretical argument, “rather than to collapse it into an
empirical instance where data function as a ‘certificate of presence’, a buttressing facticity” (p. 150). Lather describes the approach as postpositivist praxis (p. 51), drawing on feminist, critical, Freirean ‘empowering’ and participatory research paradigms which are premised upon a transformative agenda. Across these paradigms is a recognition that there is no single ‘best way’ to organise and communicate data.

In Amy Best’s (2007) text, Representing Youth: Methodological Issues in Critical Youth Studies, Susan Driver (2007) describes the relevance of postpositive praxis within performative and participatory frameworks. Such praxis constructs research in terms of the multiplicities of desire and power, which must be interrogated through “democratic inclusion”, rather than “inscribed as a single authorial truth” (p. 313). Critical youth authors such as Driver (2007) and Julianne Moss (2002) urge researchers to consider representing young people through narrative, as a form that speaks to the multiple, contradictory realities of life. Driver proposes that by telling data stories, researchers may “disturb and alter people’s consciousness and provoke actions” (p. 314).

Laurel Richardson (1990) located this device firmly within sociology, arguing how in fact all social sciences depend on narrative. Richardson contends the tendency for other devices to be masked by a “scientific frame” is in fact representative of a metanarrative contrary to social constructionism (p. 116). As Richardson argues, “Narrative is both a mode of reasoning and a mode of representation” (p. 118). I draw on this narrative approach to data presentation throughout the rest of the dissertation, not only in the spirit of bringing the project to life, but also as a means of acknowledging the “inevitable interpretive weight” of my researcher presence (Lather, 2017, p. 57). As Foley (2002) summarises, “From this perspective, the author is a living, contradictory, vulnerable, evolving multiple self, who speaks in a partial, subjective, culture-bound voice” (p. 474). Such an approach is firmly situated within the ‘narrative turn’ in qualitative enquiry which seeks to understand human action by expanding the conventional aims and reductionist tendencies of positivist science (see for example Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Chase, 2005). Arguments for and against the use of narrative reflect broader debates about voice and epistemology within the philosophies of science, and include calls for an “overturning of the hegemony of presence, of voice, in qualitative inquiry” (St Pierre, 2008, p. 332).

St Pierre (2008) makes this call to action while engaging in a rigorous critique of notions of voice and subjectivities within the narrative turn. While St Pierre questions “the postpositivist practice of coding data and calling that work analysis” (p. 328), she also warns against researchers using data stories to ‘replace’ analysis, theory, and reflexivity. Within her
argument, St Pierre points out the discursive nature of experience, or ‘what happens’, and narrative researchers’ tendency to suspend theory following the literature review, to then superficially describe the events of the research (p. 326-327). St Pierre’s robust critique was useful in considering how to approach my use of data stories meaningfully, in an effort to introduce my own voice and organise experiences into “temporally meaningful episodes” (Polinghorne, 1988, p. 1 as cited in Richardson, 1990, p. 118). With this in mind, the data stories are not an attempt to evidence ‘what happened’, as though this was free from my production, nor to divide participants’ voices from my interpretation. Rather, the data stories often centre my own subjective experiences, in an effort make them visible for the reader. The data stories act as a springboard from which a range of other data was presented, as I explain below after the first data story, which introduces the research setting.

**South East College**

Data Story

> *It is May 2016, my second day at ‘South East College’, the government high school where I’ll spend the rest of the year. When I Googled the school, the first result that appeared was about a knife incident between students. Located some distance out of the city, the suburb is bordered by highways, housing estates, and billboards for housing estates soon-to-be-developed, as Melbourne’s urban boundaries inch further every day. While planning my route to the school, I notice that there are no train stations within walking distance to the school. The tram lines finish four suburbs away, where the houses are worth four times as much. As I pull up in my car today, the same thing catches my attention as it did yesterday: the Australian flag and the Aboriginal flag, hanging side by side at the front entrance. I walk up to the glass doors and notice something new today, a ‘Safe Schools’ rainbow sticker on the glass.*

> I’m in the ‘hang out’ period, and will spend the day wandering, reading, listening, and watching, and meeting staff and students. I have already had long conversations with Dani about her experience of the school. Dani is a social worker, the school’s Wellbeing

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5 The Safe Schools Coalition Australia was a program that worked with schools to create safer, more inclusive environments for same sex attracted, intersex, and gender diverse students, staff, and families. The program’s government funding was ceased in 2016.
Coordinator, and my main point of contact at the school, alongside the other school counsellors, two disability officers, a speech pathologist, and a school nurse.

Dani tells me the school has 1200 students, aged 12-18, from a mix of cultural backgrounds. Many of the students are bilingual, and the largest cultural groups are Pacific Islander, Afghan, Persian, Iraqi, and Northern African communities. Anglo/European students do not make up the majority of the student body, though the staff cohort is predominantly White, and the entire school leadership team is White.

Other descriptive information the staff in the Wellbeing Office provide to me is that many of the young people attending the school have been exposed to family violence, that there is a high incidence of inter-generational unemployment and poverty, and that there are widespread issues of substance abuse in the community. Many students aren’t living with their parents due to intervention from Child Protection. ‘And gangs’, Dani tells me. ‘Anyone can be groomed into a gang’.

The ‘Safe School’ sticker on the door has emboldened me to ask more questions. ‘Is there a queer collective in the school?’, ‘How about a feminist collective?’. I am told there are neither. Although staff all agree that the school takes an inclusive attitude to gender and sexual diversity among students, they also note that very few students openly identify as LGBTQIA+. A staff member tells me, ‘As you can see, we have a very multicultural student population here. So that sort of stuff is not very well accepted amongst the families. But here at school it’s a different story, we are VERY tolerant!’.

The Hangout Period

Participatory Action Research shifts away from an objectivist stance where practices are located in abstract time and space, to an emphasis on practices as deeply bound to specific context, as embodied and located in people’s biographies and shared local histories. ‘In what people do and how what they do is enmeshed with the particularities of the local sites – the places – where they live and work and interact’ (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 77). In her participatory action music therapy research project with marginalised young people, Lucy Bolger (2013) outlined the ‘hangout period’ (p. 81), a significant component of any collaborative research process. The hangout period speaks to the importance of spending physical and social time in a community as a part of the project’s setup.
As an outsider entering South East College, my initial goal was to immerse myself in this period; building relationships, seeking the staff and students’ local knowledge and perspectives, and developing my role as a researcher who was contextually bound to this community. My ‘hangout period’ began in May, one month prior to the mid-year school holiday break, during which I spent two to three days per week at South East College. This was a mutual ‘getting to know you’ period, understanding the school as an ‘intersubjective space’, a term used by Kemmis et al. (2014, p. 77) in participatory action research to refer to the ways we encounter one another in semantic space, physical space-time, and social space.

The data story above speaks to some of the actions that took place upon entry to the school as a researcher, as well as the issues that began to emerge during this period. During the hangout period, I sought to locate the school in social, political, historical, and cultural context by meeting with teaching and leadership staff, attending school assemblies, observing classes, and attending staff meetings. Simultaneously, I sought to introduce and locate myself to the school community, which I did through establishing my presence in the Wellbeing Office, interacting with the staff and students where appropriate during classes I observed, and presenting to the staff body with an introduction to myself and the research project. These processes were located across a spectrum of formality, from scheduled presentations, meetings and interviews, to conversations in hallways, the schoolyard or staff room, to spontaneous participation in classes and meetings judged using my discretion and in consultation with staff.

What I added to the goals of the hangout period as conceived by Bolger (2013) was an attempt to recognise notions of difference, access, and the power relations that demarcated these. For example, recognising although I am in my twenties and felt as though I related to the teenage students easily and comfortably, I had no direct access to a ‘teenage culture’ beyond the one I have lived and constructed myself (for an explanation of this see Best, 2007). As a White person in a setting with young people from a range of cultural backgrounds, I also noted my own strategies of Whiteness emerging during the hangout period; a desire to ‘distance’ myself from Whiteness (as described by Case & Hemmings, 2005), as well as ‘rushing to prove myself’ as a ‘good White person’ (as described by DiAngelo, 2012a, p. 203). I endeavoured to recognise and challenge these tendencies, as they became central to my analyses of power and access. As an adult in an institution that draws clear divisions across many axes including age, I noticed the access I was continually granted. Access to status, teacher’s time, an expectation of the students’ respect, access to
move freely around the grounds, to make my own schedule, and above all, to assert authority over the young people.

Within an emergent research design, the hangout period was crucial to the setup because it prepared me to refine the focus and plan for my research. Because recruitment had emerged from my engagement with the school as an observer/workshop facilitator with an external organisation, I already had some knowledge of the community upon arrival, which was drawn from my own embodied experience observing and interacting with students at the school through the CASA workshops. During the hangout period, it became evident that there were differing opinions related to gender-based violence in the school, and that I may have to adjust my expectations and approach.

**An Empty Sign-Up Sheet**

Data Story

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*I am a few weeks into my time at the school, and am growing increasingly confused and unsure of how to proceed. I thought the school was eager to have me here, and eager to incorporate the Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) curriculum which is soon to be mandated across all government schools. But none of the teachers I’ve asked about RRE seem to know what I’m referring to, except for one or two who tell me, “Yeah I think that’s what we brought in a few years ago”.

One afternoon, I present to around 50 staff members, sharing information about myself, music therapy, and the purpose of the research in relation to the prevention of gender-based violence. My nerves take over as I look out at what appear to be rows upon rows of bored, disinterested, and even hostile expressions. I finish the presentation by offering some ideas of how I could collaborate with their class groups, work with their plans for the term, or create something new. I hand out a sheet for any teachers interested to add their names and contact details to.

I sit back down and try to look relaxed. The sheet is returned to me, empty, and I try to swallow my disappointment.*
One day in the Wellbeing Office, I find a flyer for a city council public seminar about Respectful Relationships. It is on the adolescent nurse’s desk, with big capitalised letters reading:

“CONCERNED ABOUT RADICAL GENDER THEORY BEING TAUGHT IN OUR SCHOOLS? Attend this meeting to discuss the Respectful Relationships program and what it will do to our kids and classrooms.”

I meet with the principal to discuss my project. He doesn’t know about the RRE curriculum, but I am encouraged when he tells me that while the school struggles for resources, its ideologies are “very progressive”. He adds that South East College is a Safe School.¹

I continue to have conversations with staff about attitudes towards gender and sexuality in the school. Tim, a Physical Education teacher and the Year Seven Coordinator tells me, “Boys, girls, nothing’s off limits”. Contrastingly, the Year Eight Coordinator, Kamna says, “I don’t think we’re quite there yet... it’s not like you’re just going to be seeing people be super open about their sexuality here. Or their gender”. I ask about the school’s involvement with the Safe Schools Coalition. She tells me, “Yeah, all the staff did a workshop with them once”.

When I raise issues related to gender, power, or violence, the wellbeing and teaching staff defer to the “cultural” aspect of these issues. They inform me of the “cultural problems” of fighting and violence that arise amongst the boys. I observe tensions between staff over conflicting beliefs of how issues with violence should be addressed in the school, and I perceive a sense of scepticism or disinterest from some key staff members. One thing they agree on is how much support these students need. Responding to these issues, I offer my services as a music therapist available to work with any of the students.

Outcomes of the hangout period.

It became clear during the hangout period that I would have to adjust the participatory framework from which I was approaching the project, as it may not suit the needs and capacities of the context. For example, learning that the school had no history of student-led

¹ A term to refer to a school’s involvement with the Safe Schools Coalition Australia.
collectives and that lunchtime events had notoriously poor attendance rates amongst students, I suspected my hopes to establish a collective might waste time and energy.

In every interview with staff, they referred to the school and the local suburb being under-resourced in terms of support programs for young people who were struggling socially, emotionally, and behaviourally. In consultation with my research supervisor and the Wellbeing staff, I decided that in order to commence working with students in ways that were mutually beneficial to my project and the school community’s needs, I would frame my project around primary violence prevention, and the opportunity to provide the school with a free music therapy service. As both a researcher and an accredited Allied Health professional with expertise in working to support adolescent health and wellbeing, I proposed that music therapy group sessions could also provide the school with additional support in beginning to address some of the key aims of primary violence prevention.

The Wellbeing and Year Level Coordinator staff agreed on several groups of young people who could benefit from participating in group music therapy sessions that centred on the themes related to ‘respectful relationships’. They agreed this was in line with the school’s values, and that they would support me in initiating these groups. I recognised here that the young people were not electing to be co-designers of the research, rather they were invited to participate in the project because they were ‘referred’ to a service. Although I made it clear to these young people that their participation in the program was optional, it was evident that the process did not align with my initial intentions for collaborative research design.

**Incorporating a Critical Ethnographic Lens**

Because PAR framed my overall orientation to the project, my initial aspiration was that the research should be a shared responsibility, between myself and the participants. However, a key question in PAR is whether and the extent to which the self-interests of outsiders coincide or conflict with the self-interests of the other participants: “This is a question to be asked by and of all outside researchers and consultants working with participant researchers” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 10). The degree to which collaboration occurs within action research with young people is often influenced by the hierarchical context of the schools in which it occurs (noted above), as well as the limited interest of many young people in making a sustained intellectual contribution to the generation of knowledge (McFerran & Hunt, 2008; Bolger, 2015).

Young people’s desire to participate in ongoing analysis is largely action-based, and musical participation is often more engaging than the kind of cognitive ‘playing with data’
that is the basis of iterative, interpretive, and reflexive research approaches. To that end, the young people’s willingness to contribute their perspectives through interviews, in addition to their active involvement in the project, is significant. Many ideas that shaped components of the analysis were informed by their perspectives as gathered during collaborative music-making within the project, and it was my intention to reflexively incorporate that information into any additional conclusions that we generated. Although I made sincere attempts to incorporate the needs and desires of the young participants as collaborators, the context did not allow for the level of participation and decision making that I had initially hoped for.

However, the benefit of PAR as a guiding framework for the project was its pliability, its ontological congruence with a wide range of critical, feminist, decolonial and activist methodologies, and the space it offered for these frameworks to emerge as required. Within the constraints of the education setting, my own experiences of the intersubjective space became increasingly important, and I began to look for a methodological framework that would allow me to shift back and forth between notions of participation and observation. As a researcher spending time in a location interacting with others in that prescribed space, I began to understand my time at South East College through an ethnographic lens, collecting material through which to interpret and represent these stories. I reflected on key literature that had informed the project thus far, and noted that many of these theorists and researchers referred to critical ethnographic methodologies when describing how they framed their data collection. These include Renold and Ringrose’s (2013) critical ethnography exploring gender and sexualities with young people in schools, and attempt to blur generational and sexual binaries in their data. Similarly, Taft (2007) uses the ethnographic notion of insider-outsider status in antiracist research with teenage girls, exploring how the intersectional feminist lens can be applied to counteract reproductions of researchers as the adult authority. Soyini Madison (2011) opens her text on critical ethnography with a story that symbolises the complexity and contentiousness inherent in attempting to represent the lives and stories of real people who can be collectively termed the ‘Other’. She writes how these complexities arise, “again and again as I encounter ethnographic and qualitative projects and as I meet artists, researchers, students, and activists engaging the world and meanings of Others” (p. 4).

Madison (2011) distinguishes ‘critical ethnography’ from conventional ‘ethnography’ through its ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness within a particular lived domain, attention paid to power differentials, and explicit orientation to justice (p. 5). The critical ethnographer critiques the notion of subjectivity and emphasises a concern for positionality, including our biases, privilege, and power. Critical ethnography poses an
opposition to neoliberal policies, through its decided recognition of the ways we are always explicitly or implicitly endorsing particular viewpoints within research, and its advocation for participants to ‘speak back’ through research (Lather, 1995). In a chapter outlining the ways PAR has become eclipsed by the persistence of neoliberalism, Steven Jordan (2009) argues that critical ethnographic methods are in fact integral to incorporate in order to reclaim PAR from neoliberal discourse.

As a methodology, critical ethnography is firmly grounded in the capacity of narrative for bringing data to life. Smyth and McInerney (2013) describe narrative in critical ethnography as, “telling stories from the vantage point of those who are the least well-positioned to speak back” (p. 17). Within this, I remain mindful of the problematics inherent in the practice of accessing and ‘telling’ others’ stories, especially when these pertain to young people’s narratives that are so commonly loaded with dominant discourses of disadvantage (see for example Agyeman, 2008). However, given that the heart of critical ethnography lies in social critique, I noted the congruencies of this approach with the ways I had positioned myself in regards to power and agency. Smyth and McInerney (2013) outline the importance of critical ethnography when researching with young people who are oppressed, because it is “avowedly expansive rather than domesticated” (p. 2). Here, they are referring to the central tenets of the approach in framing and explaining issues using a broader social lens, in challenging deficit thinking, and in resisting ‘benevolent’ approaches that seek to protect young people, and inevitably patronise them (p. 17).

Methodologically, this is clearly distinguishable from PAR, because the ethnographer works to represent their participants’ reality, as opposed to the participatory action researcher whose participants have co-designed and co-constructed the research project themselves. However, I identified that a critical ethnographic lens was not a replacement for the PAR framework, but rather a new tool would equip me to generate knowledge alongside and separate to the participants, within the social and political constraints of the school setting, while holding me accountable to my own positionality.

**Introducing the Participating Groups**

Over nine months at South East College, I facilitated and co-facilitated numerous group and individual sessions. Participants were given Plain Language Statements and signed consent forms at the commencement of the group, and again upon being interviewed (see Appendices H, I and J). Table 3.3 below provides some detail about the four groups whose participation is reported on over the following findings chapters. Not every member of every
group was interviewed. The following chapters introduces the individual participants
themselves, using data stories and interview data to provide more context.
### Table 3.3 Participants in the Primary Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group name</th>
<th>Participants and program information</th>
<th>Goals related to gender and power</th>
<th>Music therapy application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ‘Boys Tune In’ year 7s | - 8 students in year seven  
- Aged between 12 – 14  
- Referred by teaching and wellbeing staff because of issues with anger, aggression, and violence at school  
- Total of 8 sessions  
- Sessions occurred during class time | Exploring masculinity; finding creative ways to document and express the change they sought:  
- Exploring their experiences of masculinity and what it means to “be a man”  
- Examining attitudes related to gender roles, relationships, and emotional expression  
- Articulating their vision for change | Existing group music therapy techniques:  
- Songwriting  
- Improvisation  
- Lyric analysis  
- Group drumming  

Emerging music therapy techniques developed for the program:  
- Insight-Oriented Narrative Songwriting  
- Belief Beats (described in Chapter Seven) |
| ‘Boys Tune In’ year 8s | - 7 students in year eight  
- Aged between 13 – 14  
- Referred by teaching and wellbeing staff because of issues with anger, aggression, and violence at school  
- Total of 6 sessions  
- Sessions occurred during class time | | |
| ‘Hear Girls’         | - 6 students in year eight  
- Aged between 13 – 14  
- Referred by teaching and wellbeing staff who sought a restorative justice approach to resolving ongoing conflict between this particular group of girls  
- Total of 8 sessions  
- 4 official sessions which occurred during class time  
- 4 voluntary sessions which occurred during lunch time | Consciousness-raising:  
- Examining conflict and relationships between girls in relation to patriarchy  
- Exploring ‘girl on girl hate’ as a function of internalised misogyny  
- Exploring experiences of being socialised as girls in the context of school: expectations, agency, and expression  
- Articulating their vision for change | Existing group music therapy techniques:  
- Songwriting  
- Improvisation  
- Music video analysis  
- Lyric analysis  
- Group drumming  
- Band formation |
| Certificate Program  | - 15 students aged 16 – 19 in a specialised non-academic program  
- Young people with a range of diverse cognitive, behavioural, and social needs  
- The class had been trialling ways of using music as a tool for engagement and learning | Exploring wellbeing and connectedness with a social action lens:  
- Exploring identity  
- Exploring social justice  
- Articulating their vision for change | Existing group music therapy techniques:  
- Songwriting  
- Improvisation  
- Song-sharing (social action focus) |

7 These were the collective titles the young people elected to be identified by, throughout the program and in the research.
Knowledge Generation

Knowledge generation throughout the project was emergent and multifaceted, from empirical material that documented the learnings and happenings during the project, to material that I created to represent embodied knowing. In their extensive work articulating the practice of researching with rather than on people, Heron and Reason (2007) have developed a progressive epistemology in accounting for our numerous ‘ways of knowing’, which I use to delineate the ways knowledge was generated through the project. The model refers to ‘experiential knowing’ as knowing that occurs through our face-to-face encounters with one another, places, and things. It then accounts for ‘presentational knowing’, which describes expressive and creative forms of imagery such as music, stories, and art. ‘Propositional knowing’ refers to the ideas and theories that are expressed as informative statements – the basis of traditional Western academic work. Finally, Heron and Reason describe ‘practical knowing’ as the application of knowledge, the ‘how to’ knowledge which is tacitly and demonstrated through a skill or competence (Heron and Reason, 2007, p. 145).

Bolger (2013) drew on this epistemology in describing the different types of knowledge that were encompassed in the overall learnings of her research project, offering a framework for collating and presenting the methods of knowledge generation with young people in critical, action-based music therapy research. Informed by this, Table 3.4 below summarises the ‘ways of knowing’ in this project, and the corresponding methods and types of empirical material generated over the course of the primary project at South East College.

| - The students and their teacher had an interest in music in the classroom |
| - Total of 10 sessions which occurred during class time |
### Table 3.4 Knowledge Generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of generating knowledge</th>
<th>Type of empirical material generated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Experiential knowledge**    | - The ongoing project  
                                | - Group discussion  
                                | - Session notes  
                                | - Reflective vignettes  
                                | - Young people’s brainstorming material  
                                | - Visual artefacts from sessions  
                                | - Audio recordings of sessions  
                                | - Personal audio journaling |
| **Presentational knowledge**  | - Songwriting  
                                | - Recordings of songs  
                                | - Song lyrics  
                                | - Visual artefacts from sessions  
                                | - Photographs of brainstorming processes |
| **Propositional knowledge**   | - Formal interviews  
                                | - Incidental discussions  
                                | - Audio recordings of interviews  
                                | - Interview transcriptions  
                                | - Personal audio journaling |
| **Practical knowledge**       | - Music skill capacity building  
                                | - Critical analysis skill building  
                                | - Audio recordings of interviews  
                                | - Interview transcriptions |

**Experiential knowing.**

Experiential knowing was generated by the participants who took part in the groups, as well as my own experiential knowledge generated through spending three to five days per week in the school. Time was spent not only running the music therapy group sessions, but meeting students, taking part in staff meetings and classes, sitting with young people during lunch times, and asking questions in order to understand the context, needs, and expectations of the school community. In order to represent this type of knowing, I attempted to document what happened across the project in multiple ways. Throughout the sessions, many visual artefacts were generated, including:

- Poster paper of group guidelines and group brainstorming
- Visual imagery and artwork made by the young people
- Whiteboard notes, photos of whiteboard notes

To capture my own experiences, I created audio journal recordings of myself on my way home from school, and wrote ongoing session notes. I used standard headings to document each of the sessions, and fed back to the Wellbeing staff and Year Level Coordinators. My session notes included: who was present; what I observed about their
behaviour; what we did in the session; an analysis of their musical engagement; my impression; and my plan for the following week.

**Presentational knowing.**

Presentational knowing meant identifying what had been learned through experiential knowing, and representing these learnings through presentation. Primarily, these forms of knowing were represented by the songs written during sessions, recordings of these songs, the plans I wrote for sessions, and other visual artefacts. Songwriting was a component of all groups; used to articulate, explore and communicate the young people's thoughts and experiences around the topics we identified as important. These songs created multiple forms of empirical material, including audio recordings of the songwriting process, photos of the brainstorming material, the song lyrics, and audio recordings of the song.

**Propositional knowing.**

Propositional knowing refers to the way we intellectually understand what was learned throughout the research, generated through formal and informal discussion and reflection with the participants. The main source of formal reflection was through one-on-one audio recorded interviews with the young people and the staff. I interviewed five staff during the hangout period, and throughout the project, I noted the option for the young people to participate in interviews at the end. I conducted interviews with sixteen of the young people at the conclusion of the project. The table below documents these.

**Table 3.5 Interview Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start of project</th>
<th>End of project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff (5)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(researcher selected pseudonym)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Dani (School Counsellor/Wellbeing Coordinator)</td>
<td>- Dani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Kamna (Year Eight Coordinator)</td>
<td>- Kamna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Tim (Year Seven Coordinator)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Linda (Year Seven Coordinator)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Jan (Certificate Program Teacher)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>None</strong></td>
<td><strong>Staff (2)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(student-selected pseudonym)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Dani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Kamna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Hear Girls’ group (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(year eight girls)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Moana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Aisha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Amelia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Ivy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Katherine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Boys Tune In’ group (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(year seven boys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Paul</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Luka</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Mahmoud</td>
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<td>- Vu</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Bobuq</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Josh</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The interviews were in-depth and unstructured; intended as open conversations that emphasised collaborative meaning-making through a feminist approach to care, inquiry, and reducing the hierarchy between researcher and participant (Hesse-Biber & Brooks, 2011). By this point in the project I had developed a comfortable and familiar relationship with many of the young people, which I anticipated would strengthen the potential for open reflection on the process. As the interviewer, I could also draw on my own experience and memories of what had happened during groups and use these as a resource to initiate discussion. Although interviews were unstructured, I had several guide questions that I asked each of the young people which provided a basic framework (see Appendix M for guiding questions). Outside of formalised, recorded interviews, group discussions and one-on-one conversations were had spontaneously throughout the project, in the school yard, in my office, as well as before, during and after group sessions.

**Practical knowing.**

Practical knowing was most easily identifiable through the development of music skills. This took multiple shapes across the groups. For example, the year seven boys group were all passionate about rap, which we practiced throughout the project, writing different raps, learning how to plug in microphones using the PA system, and how to construct beats on GarageBand. For our final session, the boys requested we have a rap battle. As well as music skills, the young people also developed practical knowledge in critically analysing issues related to gender and sexuality, as this was something I continually modelled throughout sessions. For example, when a young person first used a gendered, derogatory slur to refer to a woman, I explained why I found this challenging, questioned how it related to broader existing power imbalances, and how they could identify these in their own lives. By the end of the project, I noticed that when similar language was used, or other problematic language was used, this would regularly be pointed out by one of the young people. Because practical knowledge refers to the resources and capacities developed by the participants, in this sense,
they themselves are the source of empirical material for this practical knowing. I attempted to explore their experience of developing practical knowledge in the interviews, of which the audio and transcripts are the empirical material.

**Data Analysis and Theoretical Resources**

Feminist scholarship has developed standpoint theory in an effort to challenge patriarchal paradigms: by locating knowledge as never impartial and always socially situated; locating marginalised groups’ positioning as sites of epistemic privilege; and in turn, seeing those who are socially and politically oppressed as the most important starting points for epistemic questions (Smith, 1974; Hill Collins, 1986; Haraway, 1988). These premises formed the implicit foundation from which I collected data, continually seeking to recognise subjectivity, and acknowledge the validity of experiential knowledge. This foundation remained central to data analysis, in rejecting the patriarchal notion that one’s morals and values can be separated from the pursuit of knowledge construction. I conducted data analysis departing from the premise that I was searching for and identifying shared knowledge, values, ideas, and more, and that my own positioning, political interests, and moral values played a determinate role in doing so (Hesse-Biber & Brooks, 2011). There were several phases of data analysis that occurred beyond the duration of my time at South East College. These were roughly divided into two broad stages: the thematic interview data analysis, and the construction of data stories, which I describe in detail below.

I draw on several key theoretical resources to critically examine the data stories presented across the following four chapters. In Chapter Four, I outline the key complexities that emerged during the project, drawing on Critical Race Theory and feminist theory in order to explicate my understandings of how structural violence occurred in a space that aimed to prevent interpersonal violence. My discussion in Chapter Five uses decolonial theory to examine the ways the participants understood and represented one another. Within this chapter, I delved further into the themes of blame and individualisation that arose, using specific concepts related to neoliberalism and deficit discourse. The next chapter summarises the affordances of music that emerged as important for young people exploring gender and power, drawing on ecological theory that centres musical personhood and the ways musicking is embedded in context. Chapter Seven builds on these theories, and incorporates decolonial and anti-oppressive frameworks to reconceptualise key issues related to trauma and young people’s resistance against structural violence. These theoretical concepts are drawn from a range of research and practice-based paradigms, but share key tenets of
attending to context and analysing power differentials, which also align with the goals of the broader methodological frameworks.

**Initial thematic interview data analysis.**

Prior to constructing the data stories which eventually scaffolded my findings chapters, I commenced a more traditional thematic approach to analysing interview data. Overwhelmed with roughly 30 hours of interview audio recordings, I approached the interview data with a series of questions. For example, I commenced by questioning how the young people understood/conceptualised my role at the school. As this had been one of my guiding questions for interviews, I navigated through each piece of audio footage and transcribed the young people’s entire responses to the question, “How would you describe my role at the school?”.

I then immersed myself further in the audio recordings with a focus on attentive listening, as noted in the literature on feminist interviewing (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2007, p. 132). I did so with the intention of hearing the unsaid or ‘between the lines’ (Jorgenson, 2011) data that were informed by the silences, the young person’s tone of voice, and the type of language they used to express their reality. I then used both coding and categorising of the data in a way that is common in qualitative research generally, and was particularly influenced by the in-vivo coding procedures described in Corbin and Strauss (2008), where I attempted to distil what the young people had said, whilst remaining close to their own choices of words and expressions.

I then generated a critical theoretical narrative that combined a number of key concepts I found striking in the data, aiming to highlight the stories and ‘counter-stories’. Counter-storytelling is a tool used in Critical Race Theory, as an analytical framework for critical education research, aiming to challenge dominant ideologies of objectivity, meritocracy, and equal opportunity (see Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Attempting to recognise my own assumptions about what was important in the data involved dialogically questioning interpretations that had been made in the previous step. I did this by returning to the empirical material repeatedly, in order to remember the context of various statements that had been made by the young people, and consulting my research supervisor to ensure that I had not constructed entirely new meanings for their words. I reflected constantly and critically on power and the layers of assumption implicit in my own positioning, asking questions such as:

- “Is this interpretation congruent with how the young people acted during the project?”
“Is it likely that they meant this, based on what happened during the project?”

“Who is empowered by this interpretation and who is disempowered by it?”

“To what end am I seeking to establish and reinforce my own value in the lives of these, and future, participants in music therapy projects?”

Through these questions and more, I sought to recognise the dominant ideology and avoid complicity with the ‘master narrative’ (Montecinos, 1995), a term also used in Critical Race Theory and education contexts to describe the monovocal stories told about students of colour. Similarly, I was also intensely conscious of the multitudinous challenges faced by teachers in the school who, throughout interviews, were often spoken about unfavourably by students. My reflections on these concepts led to further interrogation of ideas that were emerging, and challenged me to identify other possible information in the raw data that complemented or contradicted my initial interpretation, and adjusting the critical theoretical narrative accordingly. In the final stage of interview analysis, I selected salient themes that had shaped the theoretical narratives in response to the initial question I had asked of the data.

**Beyond “the emergence of themes” and into stories.**

Across a range of critical ethnography literature, scholars advocate for researchers to go beyond coding and thematic analysis, generally challenging the illusion of objectivity inherent in the miraculous “emergence of themes” (St Pierre, 2008, p. 328). Richardson (1990) argues that “Narrative is both a mode of reasoning and a mode of representation” (p. 118), while Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) describes telling stories as a “method of documentation, analysis, and narrative development” (p. 3). Those who adopt narrative methods outline their explanatory powers, but also how they are a means through which researchers actually come to know what the story is, with complexity, voice, and authenticity. The final stages of data analysis which inevitably formed the following four chapters, took place over several months. I began writing data stories that shifted away from neat categories and themes that had ‘miraculously emerged’, and into more emotionally open, subjective, and embodied notions of salience.

My construction of data stories was a way of representing what had emerged through the interviews and the events that took place, and could be described as a creative form of ‘abduction’ (see Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Gonzalez and Haselager (2005) characterise abduction as a form of inference that “does not provide absolute guarantees about its
correctness: abduction is a fallible, but extremely useful form of reasoning guiding the mind in its attempt to free itself from doubt” (Gonzalez & Haselager, 2005, p. 5). I endeavoured to write reflexively, informed by Lather’s (1986) definition of reflexivity as an awareness of one’s own filters through which they are working and shaping their narrative apparatuses. However, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) has pointed out, “making positions transparent does not make them unproblematic” (p. 6); a reminder that reflexivity is not a form of ‘neutralising’ one’s voice. In seeking to acknowledge my own positioning, I also remained conscious of Pillow’s (2003) warning against reflexivity that becomes more focused on announcing and interrogating the author’s own story. Here, Pillow describes the risk of a researcher’s preoccupation, or even obsession, with personal positioning, as a means of seeking validity. Instead, Pillow (2003) proposes a reflexivity of discomfort, articulating a reflexivity that strives towards rigorous self-awareness and reflection, while avoiding “self-indulgent tellings” (p. 192). Aligning with this stance, I wrote data stories that were open ended, aimed to make myself visible, and avoided attempts to seek a “comfortable, transcendent end-point” (Pillow, 2003, p. 193). Such a position aligns with critical ethnographic epistemologies, recognising that this is in no way the ‘right’ or ‘perfect’ means of constructing knowledge; it is one form of acknowledging its subjectivities. On this, Coffey and Atkinson (1996) write,

Indeed, one of the strengths of thinking about our data as narrative is that this opens up the possibility for a variety of analytic strategies. Such approaches also enable us to think beyond our data to the ways in which accounts and stories are socially and culturally managed and constructed. That is, the analysis of narratives can provide a critical way of examining not only key actors and events, but also cultural conventions and social norms. (p. 80)

To do so, I set about immersing myself in the data once more, listening to interview audio, recordings of sessions, and the songs the young people wrote, and surrounding myself with visual artefacts. Stimulated by these, I constructed multiple mind maps in an attempt to visually map out the stories in short periods of time.
Figure 3.1 Mind Mapping the Role of Music

Figure 3.2 Mind Mapping the Role of Music Therapy
I then began writing data stories, experimenting with style, voice, and ways of incorporating what had emerged from the interview data analysis. Some data stories were highly crafted syntheses of a wide range of key points I would then go on to make, and explain by drawing on theory. Other data stories worked in the opposite direction, simply retelling a moment I felt needed to be explored, which then invoked a more analytical ‘unpacking’ of the data story. Constructing the data stories provided a complementary and alternative approach to first stage’s coding and categorising, which Coffey and Atkinson (1996) characterise as a ‘culture of fragmentation’. This was also in recognition that there was no ‘best’ way to analyse the events of the primary project.

Each new theme or set of ideas throughout the following four findings chapters are represented by a data story denoting a range of textual productions, which I then unpack below the data story. By separating these data stories from my other interpretations, I was not seeking to divide or disembodied the knowledge constructed, as they are all representations of my own experience. However, I do attempt to incorporate and privilege the words spoken by the participants throughout the data stories, in an effort to centre their voices.

Conclusion

As a broad orientation to inquiry, participatory action research framed my approach to decision-making and knowledge generation, and was the foundation from which I launched into the project. Conducting a series of participatory workshops across seven different school settings during this period, I directly engaged young people as the experts who could best communicate the issues most important to them. This cycle of action demonstrated not only young people’s awareness of and orientation towards issues such as gender diversity, gender-based violence and toxic masculinity, but also an example of the possibilities in music to generate discussion and communicate their ideas. The following cycle of reflection allowed for contemplation on the tensions that also arose in the data from the pilot workshops; this in turn enabled preparation for the primary project.

Seeking to conduct further exploration into these issues with young people, and with an aim to go deeper into the ways they might emerge in one single context, I established the research project at ‘South East College’. While I endeavoured to involve the participants in processes of the research, PAR also requires an orientation to the needs and existing culture of any given community. During the hangout period at South East College it became clear that the most appropriate way to create a mutually beneficial experience would be to offer my services as a music therapist running structured group programs. Rather than expecting the
school community to be passionate or able to co-construct the research, especially in a setting with no history of student-led collectives, instead I conducted several music therapy groups with young people across the school. Given how I sought to represent the project and the young people’s experiences in music therapy, I adjusted the methodological framework of the primary project as a critical ethnography. Although the participants were not co-designing projects as actively as they might in PAR, critical ethnography continued to hold me accountable to my own positionality, as an advocate generating knowledge alongside and separate to the young people.

Out of these groups, the ‘Hear Girls’ and the ‘Boys Tune In’ groups consisted of young people who had been identified by staff as having issues with violence, and who might be interested in exploring these in music. It was with these groups that I took the most overtly gendered lens, exploring gender roles, expectations, and discourses, and how these related to the issues the young people were having at school. In order to explicate the knowledge generated across the entire project, I drew on Heron and Reason’s (2007) ‘ways of knowing’, and outlined experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical forms of knowledge. Data generated across these forms included interviews, which I conducted with five staff and sixteen young people, as well as audio recordings of sessions, brainstorming materials and visual artefacts, songs written with the groups, observational notes, photographs, and more.

Following data collection and an initial process of thematic analysis of interview data, I then introduced data stories as a methodological tool for further analysis and representation of the data. Rather than expecting a methodological tool to communicate neat categories, validate a truth or demonstrate objectivity, I used data stories to go beyond coding or the miraculous “emergence of themes” (St Pierre, 2008, p. 328). These narratives allowed me to perform, condense and exemplify an argument that emerged from the data as an emotionally open and subjective expression. The following four chapters contain these open-ended, sometimes uncomfortable, and always imperfect representations of ‘what happened’, each followed by rigorous critical analysis that draws on a range of theoretical concepts to present the key findings of the research.
Chapter Four
Complex Violences

Background

Primary violence prevention such as Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) seek to transform a culture of acceptability related to gender-based violence, by addressing the social climate that shapes students’ and staff experiences in schools. Although South East College had not yet adopted RRE, the staff at South East College often referred to the school’s progressive ideals, some spoke of their support for the RRE’s ‘gender lens’, and my project there was embraced (by most) as an introduction to some of the ideas that are contained in the curriculum. The project revealed important findings about the conditions that music can create to engage young people in exploring issues of gender and power, which are central to the RRE curriculum. However in centring notions of context and focusing on power differentials, the departure point for my findings lay in addressing the complicated context of violence and power within the school itself.

Within this context, what began to emerge were a range and complexity of forms of violence that are rarely seen, legitimised, addressed, or understood by the system under which they occur. On a micro level, I aim to unpack these complexities in order to lay the foundations from which to present further findings in this project. Aspects of these complexities brought into question how music therapy was enabled and constrained as an approach for exploring gender with young people in school, through the ways particular young people were seen as (un)suitable for the program. More broadly, I present these complexities to demonstrate the deeply complicated landscape of Australian schooling as an institution. The chapter outlines a central complication that occurred in the project: in attempting to address specific forms of violence, other forms of violence that were less easily understood and attended to by the institution, were reinforced.

To articulate these complex forms of violence, I present several significant moments that took place through three data stories, and embed these with interview data and my own observations. These three data stories each illuminate something about how violence was enacted and attended to within the school institution. The first data story presents an example of the ways girls’ stories and identities are regulated and policed in schools, illustrated by a troubling event that occurred in relation to the girls group. This section includes two rich excerpts of interview data with staff, which contextualise the purpose of the group and how
the girls were positioned in the school in relation to violence. Next, I use an example of a microagression that occurred in a staff meeting to unpack the implicit violence in the ways the boys in the project were described as ‘unsuitable’ for music therapy, despite being identified as in need of social and emotional support. Finally, I highlight the complexities inherent in choosing to address one form of violence with young people, when their identities and experience implicate them across complex and multiple forms of violence, oppression, and power. Overarchingly, the data stories exemplify how young people’s raced, gendered, and classed identities can position them in relation to violence, and the ways particular types of violence can be identified institutionally, while others go unseen.

**Teen Girls: Violence as “Drama”**

**Data Story**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>11am</th>
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<td>The girls arrive at our third session on time and eager to start, requesting that we begin the session with ‘story time’. Excited by their engagement and enthusiasm, and intrigued by what they wanted to share, I tell them, “Of course! The floor is yours!” Moana begins to speak, telling the group about something that happened to her recently:</td>
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“I was with Harry and Dom in the park down the road and they were trying to get me to go on the swing. I didn’t want to. I knew that they were just wanting me on the swing so they could feel me up or something – Harry always does that kind of stuff. Anyway I told them I didn’t want to a few times but they were just laughing and stuff and I felt like a dickhead so I just got on.” |

I feel the energy in the room intensify. I can see that Moana wants to share this story, and it looks like some of the girls know the ending already. Although I want Moana to feel safe and comfortable to speak about this, I’m battling another voice inside me. An alarm is going off in my head. “UH OH. Dangerous territory. Are you sure you want to open this can of worms?” Moana continues. |

She describes in detail how she was sexually assaulted by Harry in front of Dom, and the complex feelings of embarrassment and anger that have ensued since.
The other girls begin jumping in, complaining about Harry, his friends, and many others in their year.

“Yeah it’s like they’re obsessed with butt photos, sometimes I just never turn my back on that group of guys cos I know they’re gonna take a pic!”

“So why don’t you just smack the phone out of their hand then?!”

“I’m just going to start carrying a blade with me”, Amelia suggests. “Like serious, I’ll straight up defend myself”.

We are hanging on each other’s words, most of the girls now openly sharing stories of their experiences in the school.

1:30pm

A group of three girls in year eight present themselves at my office asking to speak to me about “what’s happening in the girls group”. I’m curious and optimistic, wondering if perhaps they want to join the group.

As soon as I lead them into my office, the three students begin to speak over the top of each other,

“Everyone knows what you’re talking about in the group”

“Yeah and we just thought we should let you know”

“Yeah, don’t you think it’s a bit unfair?”

“Harry is NOT a rapist, Miss. Moana is a liar!”

“Yeah and she’s giving him such a bad name, it’s so sad!”

“It’s pretty unfair don’t you think?”

“Yeah so we thought we should let you know... so that you understand what your group is doing to someone’s reputation. Everyone’s talking about it.”

2pm

I am unsure what to do next. I’m concerned that the story is blowing up around the school, and I’m frustrated by Moana’s peers’ responses. I feel torn about speaking to the staff about it, but know it will get back to one of them soon. I convince myself the right move is to tell Dani. She is, after all, my supervisor at the school, and the Wellbeing Coordinator. I knock on her door nervously, and sit down to talk it through. Once I’ve finished, she throws her hands up in exasperation,
“Argh! More drama with these girls!” She sighs, and continues,
“Look, boys at this age are just the worst aren’t they? They don’t know what to do with their hormones. And like I’ve said, SOMEHOW these girls are the ones who ALWAYS seem to find themselves in the middle of it all! They certainly know how to cause a stir, let’s put it that way.”

**Monday, the following week**

I sit down with the Year Eight Coordinator Kamna, in her office, to debrief what has happened since last week. She seems deflated.

“Look, our hope was that this group would put an end to some of the drama with these girls. But yeah, it just seems to have created more of it”.

Waves begin to crash and roar through my mind, but I remain silent. Kamna continues,
“We think it would be best if you finished up the girls group, after the four sessions.”

‘Problem girls’ and relational violence

The events related to Moana’s disclosure in the group exemplified narratives of intense regulation and scrutiny that girls’ agency is subjected to in school spaces. Through this data story, I propose the consequences of Moana sharing her own experience of violence and violation can be viewed as a type of violence itself. This was a violence that not only rested on familiar, painful gendered discourses of blame and suspicion, but one that was also directed back at her by the school system that should have protected her. In order to understand these events, I first take several steps back from the events in the data story itself, to examine how the girls were positioned by the school, and how their positioning is reflective of broader sociocultural narratives. During her interview, I asked Moana how she would like to be described in the research, and she told me that she was “almost 14”. She described, “I’ve lived in a little town near [town name], which was a terrible place… I’ve kind of been in a lot of different places”. She told me, “Now that I’ve experienced so many things at this school, I know what to do and what not to do, and how to find good friends”.

During the ‘hangout period’, some time before starting the girls group, I sat down with the Year Eight Coordinator Kamna, and the Wellbeing Coordinator Dani, for one-on-one
interviews. When I asked Kamna how she would describe the girls she and Dani had identified for me to work with, she said the following:

**Kamna:** There’s a group that we had some sessions with earlier in the year because basically there was a lot of gossiping and bitching going on, and quite a bit of rumour spreading. And some of those girls were quite physically aggressive towards each other at times, but not really. I wouldn’t be any kind of expert on trying to read too much into it, but I suppose that’s sort of falling into that sort of stereotype of, “Ok we’re going to be sorting this out with our words”, that are going to be really really malicious, and you know, pretty harmful.

There’s just a lot of bitchiness I suppose. But I’d hate to say they’re all falling into this one generalisation. But I mean that’s what’s kind of presented itself. But yeah we did actually have some physical aggression with that group as well. And yeah, we’ve had some boys get involved in those situations.

… Much of what they’re doing is tied up in them trying to create a persona for themselves. So I think a lot of those girls who I’d describe as the ‘cool girls’, that’s the expectation, and I guess they’re also the girls who are pretty advanced in terms of their interactions with boys. So it’s a pretty common scenario, I suppose.

When I asked the Wellbeing Coordinator Dani what she hoped a music therapy group with the girls could achieve, she also spoke about the ways the girls were relating to each other:

**Dani:** In the way that they manage themselves and their behaviours, and the way that they respond to others. And integrate themselves into situations that actually play no relevance to them at all! It’s also looking at the impact that their gossiping, spreading of rumours, social media posts, the ramifications that’s having on others. Because we’re seeing that it’s leading to some violent altercations. You know, allowing them to see each other in a healthier way, that it’s ok that she does that, you might not agree with that, but why do you get to put her down? Or say malicious things about her? Because I think if we reversed the role, oh they’d hate it!

So, building on their empathy would really be amazing… Just looking after each other, being kinder to each other would be nice. What I saw when we did that somewhat
informal restorative [justice session], was that they were more than happy to throw each other under the bus, if it made them look good…

Elly: Is that something you observe to be common?

Dani: Oh absolutely. Absolutely. But I put myself in their shoes. Oh Gosh I loved getting involved in stuff that was none of my business, even into some of my adult years! “Oh I’m going to get up in that!” Cos it’s exciting, it’s fun, it’s going to create drama! They don’t like it when things are steady and comfortable, because a lot of them, their lives are so chaotic, that that’s what they understand. So it’s giving them a perspective that this is actually really healthy. It’s ok when things go like that every now and again, but not consistently. When they’re used to chaos and crisis, we see that here. And they often don’t want that, but how the heck do they manage normal life? It’s so foreign.

Dani and Kamna’s focus on the girls’ relational issues, characterised as “gossiping”, “rumour spreading” and more, is reflective of broader narratives about teen girls’ violences, which have been a key site of public and private debate in the 21st century. In the bullying literature, these issues are most commonly referred to as ‘indirect aggression’ or ‘relational aggression’, and have focused intensely on girls’ interpersonal relationships within school peer groups (Jennifer, 2013). Youth studies scholar and feminist activist Lyn Mikel Brown (2004) reflected on the gendered dimensions of social power structures, noting how, “Until fairly recently, bullying and aggression have been seen as boys’ issues” (p. 13). Brown’s (2004) exploration of relational conflict between girls signified a turn in the literature, to the socio-political dynamics underpinning interpersonal violence between teenage girls, and the gendered, sexualised discourse of indirect aggression. Where previously, girls’ interpersonal violence was ignored, it is now subject to increasing criminalisation and pathologisation (Brown et al., 2007).

In challenging the postfeminist sensibility operating in Western schools, Jessica Ringrose (2013) has drawn links between an established narrative of girls’ success and power, and expectations of them as mean, aggressive, and acting out. Ringrose explains how, with more narratives that construct girls as powerful rather than vulnerable victims, public anxieties have shifted to focused on girls’ relational aggression. Ringrose refers to a sensationalist mediascape, growing psychological developmental discourse, and therapeutic and educational intervention as the key drivers of this shift (p. 29). She suggests that by
naturalising these gendered patterns of aggression, we construct a notion that girls are “pathologically repressive and mean”, and further reinforce the narrative of boys as “always physically violent” (p. 37). Importantly, these discourses are bound up in racialised and classed ideals of femininity that shape the way we view ‘meanness’, deviance, and acting out.

For example, White, middle class representations of feminine aggression construct the notion of the ‘mean girl’. She is indirect, pathological, and responded to with psycho-educational intervention that seeks to undo these perceived ‘normal’, ‘natural’ ways that girls relate to each other (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005). ‘Violent girls’ however, are a more dangerous phenomenon, referred to with alarmism and panic, and often reported to be “on the rise” (Ringrose, 2013, p. 38). Relatedly, Lloyd (2005) uses the term ‘problem girls’ to refer to those who act out and disrupt expected ‘feminine’ ways of negotiating conflict, such as being physically violent, rather than indirectly bitchy or deceitful. During her interview, Kamna twice makes a point of noting that during the girls’ conflict, there had been instances of physical aggression; perhaps seeking to highlight that their relational issues were not only the regular forms of violence that we come to expect between teen girls, but a more worrying form as well.

Dani’s representation points to these ‘problem girls pathologies’, seeking to find a “healthy approach” to relating to each other, as alternatives to their “violent altercations” and “maliciousness”. While Dani’s comments about the dangerous impacts and ramifications of their behaviour speaks to broader panics about girls’ declining sense of morality (Ringrose, 2016), Kamna appeared more hesitant to overtly code their behaviour – at several points stating her reluctance to generalise about these issues. Certainly, across both of their interview excerpts, it is clear that both Kamna and Dani believe in the capacity of these girls to behave with integrity and kindness. And across both of their explanations of the issues playing out between the girls, Kamna and Dani point to broader sociocultural forces, rather than essentialising the girls’ character. Dani refers to the girls’ chaotic home lives, while Kamna references notions of power, status, and social stratification, which are reflected in the literature as an explanation for girls’ use of indirect aggression (see Currie, Kelly & Pomerantz, 2007; Jennifer, 2013).

Dani and Kamna’s descriptions speak to the unspoken ‘rules’ that police and delineate expectations of teen femininity, and as women themselves, their words implicitly echo their own experiences of performing ‘teen girl’. Within this, we hear Dani referencing how she took pleasure in “creating drama” during her own adolescence. Across both of their
explanations, the staff appear to be navigating an internal struggle: avoiding stereotypic narratives that blame girls, and searching for language to describe the problematic behaviours in question. What played out during the girls group and how the staff responded to these events drew out the ways girls’ agency is treated when they transgress these unspoken ‘rules’.

**Safe spaces and the significance of ‘Story Time’**

Having examined the ways the girls were positioned by staff in the school and how this is reflective of broader narratives around teen girls’ relational aggression, I now turn to the group itself. In particular, to the notion of ‘story time’ in the context of these dominant narratives that police and regulate teen girls in school. From our first session, I attempted to make it clear to the girls that the group was a place where they were free to raise any thoughts, ideas, experiences and feelings they wanted to share. Establishing a ‘safe space’ was important from a therapeutic and research perspective, but it was also political, as an effort to “take girls’ political subjectivities seriously” (Ringrose & Renold, 2016, p. 104), and overcome forces that trivialise or detach teen girlhood from social action (Taft, 2010). Brown (2016) characterises the necessary conditions of a safe space as those that are accessible, where girls can be loud and uninhibited, and where “adults make room for girls to be themselves” (p. 167).

The girls appeared to welcome this opportunity, communicating their enthusiasm with animated discussion and recounting of stories. It was loud and chaotic, and rather than trying to contain or police their expressions, I asked myself the questions Brown (2016) poses of those aiming to create safe feminist hip-hop space, “Why do you need them to be quiet? Why in a free space does their volume need to be at a certain place in order for you to engage with them?” (p. 168). Perhaps as a result of this sense of freedom and safety, the girls requested we establish ‘story time’, as a way to open our sessions. Story time was an invitation to the girls to share a story, song, poem, website, or something else that they felt related to the group. Not only did story time establish a sense of routine and consistency that Brown (2016, p. 167) recommends for teen feminist spaces, it was also a distinct window that legitimised and encouraged ‘teen girl discourse’. This was particularly important in light of the ‘problem girl’ discourses that pathologise girls’ relationality, code their conversations as bitching, gossiping, or rumour spreading, and trivialise their interactions. In this context, it was unsurprising that the participants appeared to relish the opportunity for verbal processing that was not outcome-driven, or related to their school curriculum.
Story time was tied not only to the radical potential for relationality, but also to the safety of the space, however volatile or tenuous this safety was or became. “I feel like it was kind of a safe space”, group member Amelia declared, when I asked her to describe her experience of the group during an individual interview. “But then I feel like it’s not… what we said in there, it was kind of safe, but it wasn’t safe”. When I asked her if there was anything that made the space feel safer, she responded, “Like, we were all THERE. And we all had the same problems”. As well as speaking to the significance of a space where the girls could relate based on their experiences, Amelia’s comments raise the complexity of conducting feminist work in the context of school systems in which the gender binary is deeply entrenched. When I enquired further about these problems, she reasoned, “It’d be different if it was girls and boys. I feel like girls understand each other”. Her comments are reflective of the seemingly inescapable social conditions that treat gender as a rigid and oppositional dichotomy.

**Girls’ stories: Schooling realities.**

The girls’ descriptions of the group as an autonomous and separate place where they could talk about their ‘problems’ spoke to the ways in which the simple act of opening up discourse on embodied experiences of girlhood is meaningful, and again, radical. This supports bodies of research on the significance of political, feminist, and activist spaces for girls, in which safety is a key site of discussion (see Taft, 2010; Brown, R. N., 2013; Brown, 2016; Retallack et al., 2016). For these girls, evidenced most painfully in Moana’s story, safety at school was not a given. During our final session, the girls annotated a gendered map of the school based on their experiences, an activity suggested in the Respectful Relationships Education curriculum (Ollis, 2018, p. 26):
The girls’ detailing of “risky zones” denoted the many areas in the school in which the girls felt their safety was under threat. The girls’ discussion following Moana’s disclosure in the data story was reflective of these realities, as they responded with their own everyday encounters with sexualised harassment, violence, and how they navigate their bodily autonomy at school. Their annotation of the “boys’ zones” depicts the boys’ domination of the large open spaces and the physical activity space in the school grounds, while the “girls’ zones” line the outskirts and peripheries, and fill the doorways. So many of the issues raised in the group spoke to the premise of the project itself, the gendered underpinnings of Respectful Relationships Education, and the realities surrounding gender and power in schools overviewed in Chapter Two. The girls’ enthusiasm to participate in a space of
resistance, as well as Moana’s willingness to share her experience of violence during ‘story time’ brings to light the importance of these spaces in supporting young people to feel comfortable to open up about their experiences of violence.

**Girls’ stories: Regulation and release.**

The story demonstrates the complexities and barriers that lie not in young people’s interest or eagerness to engage in critical analysis of gender-based violence. Rather, they lie in the consequences when they do so, within institutional contexts that are not socially, materially, or politically equipped to support them. In unpacking these problematics, I turned to reflect on my own responses during Moana’s ‘story time’, when it became clear to me that Moana’s story time was headed towards ‘dangerous territory’. I recall my sense of alarm, that whatever she was about to say could ‘open a can of worms’ (which indeed it did). I recall my impulses to respond to Moana’s impending disclosure: to stop her speaking; to have her speak to me first as the adult, professional in the room; my hope that she would avoid delicate or graphic details. I see my own affective experience through the lens of what Renold and Ringrose (2013) describe as a “disciplining force” (p. 252), which I imagine is likely common for those working in school settings. Indeed, when examining what followed with Dani and Kamna, it is possible to locate each of our responses within the broader gendered framework that positions girls’ sexualities as “schizoid subjectivities” (Renold & Ringrose, 2011). This framework explains our desires to manage the ‘danger’ that we see as somehow inherent in girls’ sexualities, seeking to preserve and maintain girls’ sexual ‘innocence’, and punish those who reveal themselves to be agentic or ‘knowing’ (Renold & Ringrose, 2011).

As she shared the story, and I ignored my own impulses to regulate Moana’s choice to speak, I sensed the build-up of energy as we hung on her words, in silence (which was highly unusual). Once she had finished, it felt as though the energy had been discharged into each of us in the group, as we began responding, with empathy, disgust, outrage, and exasperation. In her feminist texts, Sara Ahmed (2014; 2017) writes about girls as ‘wilful subjects’ who, when they speak out, release a “pressure valve” that connects them to each other, when “a drip drip becomes a flood” (2017, p. 30). In our group discussion, it was as though Moana’s disclosure during story time released the valve, as the girls began to connect their own interpersonal personal experiences to structural forces of violence. As Amelia later reflected in her interview, “we all had the same problems”.
The importance of survivors to feel safe to voice experiences of gender-based violence, and for their experiences to be believed, has been well established by feminist movements. Feminist consciousness-raising efforts were built on the emancipatory and unifying potential that lies in connecting the threads of shared experience (Sarachild, 1975). Tarana Burke established the ‘#MeToo’ movement in 2006 as a means of building solidarity between survivors of sexual assault in under-resourced Black communities (Garcia, October 20, 2017). And yet in the school environment, the notion that these spills should be welcomed or encouraged is indeed radical. The sense of release, and number of stories that flooded the group that day was perhaps a preview into what would occur one year later, when the #MeToo movement flooded public and private discourse through digitally-mediated networks.

**Understanding the responses to Moana’s disclosure.**

The first stage of unfolding saw Moana’s class peers seeking to protect Harry, position him as the victim, and warn me of the group’s transgression. Accusing Moana of lying about or exaggerating her experience spoke to deeply entrenched narratives of doubt, scrutiny, and suspicion for victims of sexual violence, which are reflected across media, pop culture, and justice contexts (see for example Tolman, 2005; Ringrose & Renold, 2012; Armstrong et al., 2014). Simultaneously, their visit could also be interpreted as their critique of the group’s fallibility, perhaps grounded in suspicion, protest or derision for the agency, autonomy or radical pretence that they perceived the girls to be sharing in the group.

The repudiation of feminism amongst young women has been examined in the literature over the last decade, particularly the ways in which sexuality and heteronormativity administrates teen girls’ responses to feminism (see for example, Scharff, 2010), as well as how contemporary postfeminist and neoliberal contexts such as schools create conditions where girls gain power by siding with boys (see for example, Gill & Scharff, 2011). Within such a context, Moana’s peers’ responses to the news that she had disclosed her experience within the group and seemingly tarnished Harry’s name, were not uncharacteristic. Furthermore, I want to avoid portraying these events as evidencing something about the ways girls inherently relate to each other. Rather, the events illuminated the complex conditions under which girls are continually negotiating their relational exchanges, and the chasms that can so easily appear when they are presented with an opportunity to prove themselves an ally for their male peers (as described by Ringrose & Renold, 2016).
At no point during my discussions with Dani or Kamna did they enquire about the
details of what Moana had shared, her wellbeing, or how she wanted the matter to proceed.
The first point of significance in how the event unfolded was the immediacy of Moana’s
disclosure being labelled as ‘teen girl drama’. Such a response can be understood in light of
the problem girls’ subjectivities explored above: these were the “kinds of girls” who were
regularly embroiled in dramatic sagas, as Dani and Kamna had indeed warned me of in their
initial interviews.

As Kamna had stated, “much of what they’re doing is tied up in them trying to create a
persona for themselves… I guess they’re also the girls who are pretty advanced in terms of
their interactions with boys.” In this context, Moana could not easily be positioned as a
victim, especially if she was already perceived to be sexually active. If this was the case,
“almost 14” year-old Moana had already transgressed expectations of innocence, and was
therefore a savvy and agentic navigator of her sexuality. This sense of agency and
knowingness can be seen in Dani’s response, when she informed me of how the girls “know
how to cause a stir”.

Underlying this unfolding were the inherent racialised and classed discourses, upon
which notions of innocence, injury, and victimhood are hinged. As Rahimi and Liston (2011)
state, “the way sexual harassment is perceived and treated is varied and is largely based on
racial and class stereotypes” (p. 799). Within the staff response, it was very clear that
Moana’s innocence or victimhood was never assumed or valued. The possibility that Moana
had been a victim of sexual assault by a fellow student was either a) totally absent, b)
scrutinised and disregarded, or c) considered less important than containing the “drama” that
had ensued with her story becoming public knowledge in the school.

The erasure of Moana’s experience, and subsequent characterisation of the incident as
‘drama to be handled’ brings into question the need to contain girls in the school
environment, especially when they are positioned as ‘problem girls’. And also, the type of
violence that is deemed genuine, necessary and worthy of confrontation. When describing the
need for the girls to be part of the group, the staff referred to their desire to address the
culture of relational violence between the girls. However, what unfolded through Moana’s
story time was the enactment of a range of deeply familiar, stereotypic responses to
sexualised violence. In the very space they were sent to “build empathy”, the girls each
learned what can happen when they disclose, retaliate against, and connect the threads of
their experiences. As the facilitator in power in the group, what I had sensed in the moment
as “dangerous territory”, was indeed just that. Reflecting on the way Moana’s experience of
violence had been questioned, scrutinised, and dismissed from a social and institutional perspective, I wondered whether I should have in fact listened to my impulse to shut the moment down. And in this sense, I began to recognise the potential motivations for those in positions of power in schools to contain, regulate, and control such moments as they occur.

“Boys Like These”

Data Story

I am attending my first inter-disciplinary meeting with the school social workers, Dani and Triana, and the Year Seven Coordinators, Tim and Linda. I introduce myself to Tim and Linda, explaining that I’m a music therapist and will be at the school for the rest of the year, running groups with young people to explore the gendered underpinnings of violence.

Together, the staff run through a list of boys in year seven who they are hoping to support with an anger management program. They explain that these boys regularly get into fights with each other, often have angry outbursts in class that are incredibly difficult for their teachers to manage, have destroyed school property, and more. Interrupting the conversation, Tim clears his throat and looks directly to me,

“But look. I think you’re going to find that boys like these aren’t going to respond to something like music”.

A tense exchange begins, between Dani and Tim. Tim explains that he thinks the boys will benefit more from a Karate program, which they have used in the past for the boys “who need anger management”. He tells the staff at the table, “It’s just going to be far more effective, without a doubt”. Dani fires back, “Well that Karate program costs thousands of dollars, and if you recall, we have literally nothing left in the budget”.

Tim sighs. “Right... Well you’ll see. Most of these boys have some serious stuff going on. I just don’t think they’re the type to benefit from something like music”.

Who are “boys like these”?

The eight boys to which the teachers referred were from a mix of Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern and South Asian migrant backgrounds, one was Indigenous, and one was
Anglo-European. A starting point for any contextually-driven exploration of Australian schools is an acknowledgment of Australia’s social, political and institutional investment in maintaining a White Australia, and a recognition that Indigenous sovereignty is at the heart of any efforts to interrupt racial inequality (see for example Moreton-Robinson, 2003, 2004; Wolfe, 2006; Watson, 2007). Contextualised by the racialised underpinnings of the Australian school system (Vass, 2014, 2018), I sought to examine the Year Level Coordinator’s statement about “boys like these” as a micro form of violence that reinforced the normative power of Whiteness (Castagno, 2014; Walton, 2018), and marginalisation of ‘minoritised’ students (Walton et al., 2014). This data story serves to illustrate the discourses that shape the way ‘risky’ boys are represented and positioned in schools, and how their acts of violence are attended to institutionally. Critical education researcher Jacky Lumby (2012) draws our attention to schools as “a structural aspect of a risky environment” (p. 261). Lumby explains how schools act to persistently present students with the perilous impacts of their non-compliance, at risk of failing, of dropping out, of incarceration (p 263). This was relevant because this group of boys in particular were represented as the most ‘risky’ in the school: as Tim told us, they had “some serious stuff going on”. Their presence at the school was characterised by disengagement, disability, behavioural issues, and more. Interested in the power dynamics bound up in their representation as teen boys at risk, I turned to staff interview data to begin to understand their positioning in the school.

**Boys like these have “Buckley’s chance”**.

During an initial interview that took place after the meeting described in the data story, Year Seven Coordinator Tim explained that he felt that violence was normalised amongst this particular group of boys. He described how he thought they “always [felt] a pressure to try and emulate their dad or uncle”. He also referred to pressures generated by the cultures of the boys’ rugby clubs, where “… they’re always, always, expected to do something they don’t want to do, and it ends up being an act of violence or something that could physically hurt them”. Indeed, sports contexts are known to be highly gendered spaces which provide the institutional foundations for the construction of masculinity (see Connell, 2008). Meanwhile, Year Eight Coordinator Kamna looked to the complex and multidimensional aspects of constructing identity as a young person in the school community: “I just think there’s so many issues at play and it’s so hard for one individual kid to figure out where they fit in this whole thing”. From a wellbeing perspective, Dani referred to the level of childhood trauma that many of the young people had experienced, painting a bleak landscape, “We’ve got
Buckley’s chance of doing anything because they need intensive therapy, and we can’t even get onto the families to get consent for them to see the psychologist”.

Across each of these responses, I noted a sense of urgency and precarity reflected in choices of descriptive language, hyperbolic emphases, and crisis-driven tone. Such descriptions of “boys like these” constructed an idea that they were incompatible with the school environment, reflecting the ‘school to prison pipeline’ narrative that positions young people’s ‘risky’ trajectories (Lumby, 2012; Mallet, 2017). A common link across the staff’s descriptions was a sense of hopelessness, that these year seven and eight boys specifically could not access the resources, opportunities, and support, which the staff explained were more available in the later high school years. Tim summarised, “Our year sevens are sort of stuck in the middle… they’re in the wilderness for a year and a half to two years and sometimes that’s a lifetime”. Tim continued, “Two years is like… they’ve been expelled by then you know, they can’t function for that long.” Kamna echoed this sentiment, with phrases such as “They probably shouldn’t be here”, and “They’re not going to make it”. I began to notice how, while these representations did point to the presence of systemic failures, they also relied on a narrative which inevitably positioned ‘these boys’ as the problem.

“Boys like these” and culture.

In seeking to elaborate on this picture, I wanted to further understand how the boys’ racialised identities shaped the ways they were represented in terms of violence and risk. Across the five staff interviews, the terms “culture” or “cultural issues” were used often. Cowlishaw (2004) describes this term as a “progressive, malleable and politically neutral” (p. 59) replacement for race-centred language which is seen as “regressive, fixed and racist” (p. 59). Similarly, Walton (2018) locates the focus on ‘culture’ in schools as a de-racialising practice, allowing discussions to move further away from critical discussions of racism and Whiteness (p. 60). The use of this term as a form of Othering will be further explored in the following chapter; here I focus on its function for the staff to explain why these boys struggled with anger and violence. Tim told me,

Well that group of boys, you’ll see that culturally that’s very acceptable to hit. So when they do something wrong at home they get hit, so when someone does something to them at school they feel like they have to hit them.
When asking Kamna about violence and aggression in the school, she echoed Tim’s statement, “…that’s again often cultural for quite a few of the boys, so that’s what they’ve learnt, that might have been how they’ve seen their fathers and older brothers dealing with things. And there is that expectation.” During these interviews, the idea of ‘acting tough’ was often raised in relation to the boys, and when it was, I enquired about how they felt this may relate to expectations of masculinity. But again, their responses appeared to detach gender, and focus only on culture. Tim told me, “Well a lot of the issues that’ll be seen in the boys you’ll talk to, it’s just the cultural pressures, to be a big tough person.” Kamna reasoned, “Yeah, and I’d say it’s sort of tied up in their cultural background as well”. Linda summarised the way she distinguished gender from culture succinctly, “I don’t think it’s quite so gender based. But yeah, cultural.”

The implications of linking “culture” (only as it pertains to those cultures that are not White) with violence and aggression, speaks to a prevailing meta-narrative informing our perceptions of dominant White culture in Australia as ‘more progressive’ (McDonald, 2016; Ward, 2017). Implicit in the way these ‘violent and risky boys’ were represented was a subtle suggestion: that exploring masculinity and violence was most important for those students who were not White. In this sense, the statement about “boys like these” can be understood as a racial microaggression (Sue, 2010): a short, subtle and seemingly innocuous practice of centring, affirming Whiteness in the context of schooling. In the Australian schooling context, Vass (2018) describes this as “White microaffirmations” (p. 74), drawing on Sleeter’s (1994) ideas about ‘White racial bonding’. As White staff members discussing these racialised boys’ suitability for the group, Tim and I were actively engaged in a race making (or bonding) exchange, as he implied that “boys like these” were in some way incompatible; perhaps too angry, or too difficult to engage in “something like music”. In this sense, it is possible that Tim was even seeking to protect me from the chaotic scenes that he predicted might ensue if the boys were to participate, which would align with White women’s broader subjective positioning as fragile, innocent, and well-meaning (see Frankenberg, 1993).

From an institutional perspective, the school is constructed as a safe, civilised and congenial space, built as a place of learning (as described by Vass, 2014). Such attitudes are crucial to consider when unpacking how violent and risky boys are represented in this system, because they offer us an understanding of the complex ways that those who genuinely seek to support young people can do so by taking up positions that Other them, which is the focus of the following chapter. For “boys like these”, the staff described the school as an impossible place to be – a place they “are stuck”, a place in which they “can’t
function”, where they find themselves in “the wilderness”. I propose that while the ways the staff positioned and represented the boys revealed their genuine desire to support them, and their concern for their capacity to function and survive at school, they also reveal a complex violence that is relevant to consider in primary violence prevention.

Violent, aggressive boys who have got “some serious stuff going on”, are recognised as posing a threat to themselves and others on a personal level; their behaviour cannot be adequately contained within the walls of a school. On an institutional level, these boys also pose a threat to a school’s identity as a civilised place, a place of learning, and a place where their response to “cultural pressures” (that they learn at home) is an affront to our own progressive system. In turn, this raises a tension around notions of personal safety and institutional safety. Vass (2018) summarises how such representations affirm the axis of race power, marking students “as anti-authoritarian, anti-schooling and a challenge to White hegemony that needs to be constrained and/or assimilated” (p. 74). In representing the boys as unable to survive the school system in ways that rely on assimilation, there is an implication that it is the Australian school system that cannot survive them.

Unpacking “something like music”.

Tim’s initial response to the prospect of the boys participating in a music therapy group signalled an undercurrent of assumptions not only about these boys, but also about music and how young people engage with it in school. From my clinical perspective, this also signalled our opposing belief systems. I proposed to create conditions in which the boys could express themselves, explore the gendered constructs that impacted their lives, and connect meaningfully with each other. However, Tim appeared to approach the idea through a more mechanistic binary, in that music was an intervention that could either work, or fail to work.

The next tension this presented was the implicit idea that music is a singular, fixed ‘thing’. This presented an immediate conflict between us, given the ways I locate music as a social practice, an expressive action, and a multifarious construct which must be understood as deeply connected to the context it occurs within (as described by Small, 1998). Relatedly, I also locate musical communication as a natural and inherent part of human development (as described by Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009), and an activity that all are capable of participating in, rather than reserved for those with refined technical skills (as described by Stige & Aarø, 2011). I delve into the function of music in the school related to these notions in Chapter Six. Although during the meeting I did not enquire what Tim meant by his assertion that these weren’t “the type to benefit from something like music”, I hypothesised
based on the dominant narratives about music that pervade contemporary high school contexts.

It is possible that Tim believed music was only suitable for those who were interested in structured instrumental lessons. Perhaps he positioned music as superfluous or tangential to the core purposes of schooling, which would be congruent with dominant narratives about the function of music education in the contemporary, neoliberal school system (see Hess, 2013). Crooke (2019) describes the three distinct (and often separate) benefits music is thought to bring to students’ lives: “a) extrinsic benefits related to academic and cognitive development, b) extrinsic benefits related to psychosocial wellbeing, and c) intrinsic benefits related to aesthetics and musical competency” (p. 22). But contextualised by the risk discourses that position these boys, it is possible that Tim was unable to imagine the boys benefiting from such aspects, because he did not see them as having the necessary functional or cultural literacy to participate. Assuming music required particular skills that he did not believe the boys held, Tim may have been reluctant to encourage them to participate, perhaps assuming it would only reinforce the deficit narratives that characterised their positioning at school.

It is also possible that Tim implicitly recognised the dominance of the Western classical music cannon as a centralising function of music in schools (see Hess, 2015), and was not optimistic that their engagement would be in any way enriching or affirming of their own musical identities (see Ruud, 1997). Indeed, the dominant paradigm in music education has been demonstrated to preserve hegemonic gender constructs (as described by Gould, 2007), and coloniality (as described by Hess, 2015). But in light of the racialised context I have established thus far, in which Tim saw these boys as subject to particular “cultural pressures”, I contend that his prediction that they were not the “type” to “respond” or “benefit” from music was also a raced, gendered, and classed microaggression related to their capacity and compatibility with music as a form of art. This revealed a very particular tension, because during his later interview, he condemned the pressures these boys faced to perform a type of tough, unafflicted masculinity on the rugby field. Tim specifically denounced the ways the boys’ sports clubs, fathers, and uncles policed and regulated this form of masculinity, pressuring these boys into being hardened young men. And yet, implicit in his statement about “something like music”, is perhaps the idea that music is too soft. At the same time that he critiqued and distanced himself from the regulation of masculinity, Tim constructed his own set of (particularly racialised and classed) boundaries for the boys.
Tim and Linda’s insistence on a karate program further communicated to me their preference for “boys like these” to engage in more typically masculinised activities, where they could ‘channel their rage’: anger management. The notion that boys are ‘naturally’ more physical, violent and aggressive is normalised socioculturally, embedded in ideas of gender essentialism and hegemonic masculinity (see for example Connell, 1987, 2005; Robinson, 2005). Given that notions of anger and violence are often at the forefront of discussions of boys ‘at risk’, I was more interested in the complexities the conversation raised, about *how* the school deemed it appropriate to manage issues around violence and anger. Specifically, I wondered, whose anger is valid? And in which spaces is anger acceptable?

Broadly, this was an example of the ways young people are institutionally positioned by their psycho-emotional responses to the circumstances they exist within. In this case, by pinpointing anger and violence as an issue to be subdued, solved, or at least intervened with, the boys were pathologised and constructed as in need of our help. In turn, we as the professionals in power could focus our attention on the best way to address the issues we had constructed as the problem. In the settler-colonial context, Moreton-Robinson (2009) has outlined the role pathologisation plays in White domination in the name of virtue. Gilbey and McCormack (2018) outline this ‘trick’ of pathologisation:

Through sleight of hand, like a master magician, they say, ‘Look over here’, as the deception happens while your eyes are averted. This is exactly what they were doing by ‘pathologising’ and problematising individual communities and people. This is the cloak of invisibility, because almost anything can be justified in the name of benevolence. (p. 138)

I do not raise notions of benevolent pathologisation to minimise the very real consequences of the boys’ anger in putting staff and other students at risk. Rather, I do so in order to question how institutional responses to students’ violence and aggression can position young people in ways that not only reinforce dominant racialised narratives, but also displace and delegitimize the validity of their anger. In this sense, ‘anger management’ as an intervention can be understood to draw on this “cloak of invisibility”, shifting the problem of anger as a defect of the individual, rather than a response to a system that we are each implicated in. As Clive Harber (2004) contends throughout his text *Schooling as Violence*, these are processes can that be understood as forms of institutional violence, which are so
easily obfuscated by positioning schools as sites of neutrality or benevolence. I explore this further through the next data story.

**Power dynamics and those in power.**

The exchange during this meeting also spoke to power dynamics between those in power, and how those of us working with young people in institutional contexts *exchange* power. The clash between Tim and Dani signified what I would come to observe as an engrained dynamic in the school, between education staff and wellbeing staff. Within the school context, teachers are positioned to be an authority; experts in knowing the students and what they need. However, as the school’s social workers and school counsellors, Dani and Triana were also positioned as figures of authority on the young people’s wellbeing, focused more on their social and emotional needs, which is what the meeting was about. As such, it is possible that given they were teachers in Year Level Coordinator positions, Tim and Linda felt the need to demonstrate their knowledge and care for the students. In this position, perhaps they were conscious of being spoken over or undermined by the school counsellors, who were introducing another member of their team – me. On a broader level, however, it is important to recognise the conditions teachers face within schooling environments. When examining the neoliberal forces that hegemonise and marketise the contemporary schooling landscape, Heidi Pitzer (2014a) describes how teachers have become the new ‘scapegoat’ of the system (p. 1), an idea I explore over the following chapters. In this sense, Tim and Linda’s dismissal of my role may also have been in an effort to remind me of my outsider status, my unfamiliarity with the community, and indeed that I had no experience working as a teacher under such conditions.

This was also an interesting moment for my own reflection, particularly in regards to the way power is accessed. I entered the space both as a critical researcher, conscious of my structural positioning as the knower, expert, and constructor of knowledge, as well as a practitioner invested in challenging hierarchical power dynamics. As this exchange took place, however, I found myself tempted to jump to defend my credibility, status, and expertise. It is possible that Dani’s actions in then doing so were due to her genuine confidence in the project. Alternatively, perhaps they were due to her frustration at the ongoing differences in the Year Level Coordinators’ approach, or even her own indignation that a project she had professionally sanctioned was being undermined. The exchange required each of us to confront persisting stereotypes pertaining to our own practice and credibility, and negotiate our own sense of power and authority in relation to each other.
However, the premise of the conflict was about how to support the young people’s safety and wellbeing at school. And while I believe each of us had these intentions in mind, this exchange symbolised the ways our own power relations may supersede these intentions as we seek to shore up our personal and professional credibility, which I explore further in the next chapter.

“Can We Write a Song About How Our Teachers are Racist?”

Data Story

We are several weeks into Boys Tune In, the year seven boys program, and we sit in a circle, talking about ideas related to masculinity. I explain to the group that I am interested in hearing about the expectations that they experience as boys: “What are the kinds of things that you’re supposed to, or not supposed to do, as boys? What does it mean to ‘be a man’?”

We are going to brainstorm their ideas and rework them into lyrics for a song.

They call out some responses, but they seem impatient, distracted, and disinterested.

Frank, who is one the most confident of the boys, stands up. “Miss”, he said, sighing. “It seems like you’re asking us to talk about unfairness? Right? Is that what this is about?”

I try to respond encouragingly, that yes, this is a way we could think about the topic of our song.

“Oh”, he says. “But if we’re gonna talk about unfairness, can we write the song about how our teachers are racist? That’s the unfairness I want to talk about and we’re never allowed to at school! So why don’t we talk about THAT?”

Schools and race in Australia.

Schools are referred to as a key site in which young people in Australia experience racism as it emerges in complex and shifting ways between teachers and students, reflective of broader systemic problems (see for example Vass, 2014; Gulson, 2018; Walton, 2018). However, discussions about racism amongst teachers often focus on individual attitudes and relations, ranging from teachers’ intentional and unintentional tendencies to highlight characteristics of students’ background, exclude students, treat students differently, and
collude with racist student behaviour (Mansouri, Jenkins, Morgan & Taouk, 2009; Casinader & Walsh, 2015). As the literature advocates, there is a need to move beyond the interpersonal level and address the way systemic violence is de-racialised in schools (as described by Walton, 2018). In this section, I focus on what the data story signifies about the ways structural violence is attended to, legitimised, and erased, and how this connects to current efforts to address gender-based violence in schools.

During this session, I hoped to generate discussion on the boys’ experiences of gender, and create conditions for each of them to reflect upon how these expectations shape the ways they perform masculinity. Frank’s subsequent question coded this conversation as ‘unfairness’, linking this conversation to his own lived experiences of racialised oppression, questioning if the conversation could instead turn to race. Frank’s inquiry pointed me to reflect on how I positioned the group discussion, and the invisible force of Whiteness in feminist spaces, where race is so routinely detached from experiences of gender (see Moreton-Robinson, 2000b). Relatedly, how these dominant ideologies position practitioners to see and legitimise structural violences as separate and distinct from each other. With these issues in mind, I questioned practitioners in school settings’ capacity to recognise, respond to, and address structures of oppression as they operate across multiple, intersecting lines. I sought to look at the ways in which masculinity can operate violently, and how practitioners such as myself, are bound up in these operations. This remains a crucial and legitimate undertaking for understanding contemporary Australian masculinity, and one which I examine further in Chapter Six. However, here I further examine the existing conditions at the school, to describe why the boys wanted to look at the ways in which racism can harm them, and the ways Whiteness was operating violently against them.

“Racism? Well, it’s non-existent”.

Examining contemporary attitudes and policies related to gender-based violence in schools, my overview of the literature in Chapter Two demonstrated a level of socio-cultural readiness to break open the gendered drivers of violence. In comparison, the literature on addressing racism in schools illuminates a tendency for education discourses to silence discussions of race (eg Castagno, 2014; Vass, 2014), continue to centre Whiteness (Rodriquez, 2000; Vass, 2018), and approach racism through a simplified and de-racialised “respect for cultural diversity” (Walton, 2018, p. 60). In her formative text, Teaching to Transgress, bell hooks (1994) wrote of her own school experience upon desegregation of the American education system. As her teachers became predominantly White and reinforcing of
racism, hooks describes entering a world where education no longer required a political commitment; knowledge was about information only, and students were there to learn obedience. More broadly, the racialised nature of education settings has been explored through critical race theorists who expose how schools function as White property and sustain educational inequities for students of colour (eg. Picower, 2009; Vass, 2014).

As a contemporary echo of hooks’ school experience, Hines (2016) more recently explored the continued cultural mismatch between teaching staff and students, where students of colour are taught by predominantly White teaching and principal staff. Drawing on a series of interviews with pre-service principals, Hines’ study (2016) exemplified the covert ways in which White voices dominate, while remaining reluctant and unprepared to acknowledge the normative power of Whiteness, termed ‘White fragility’. Overarchingly, a question has emerged here about the stability and truth of the narrative of progress, and whether anti-racism in Australian education discourse can indeed be viewed as a linear, forward-moving trajectory (Rudolph, 2018).

I considered Frank’s enquiry about our songwriting topic with this in mind. When I asked Linda and Tim during interviews about how inclusive they perceived the school to be, Linda stated that the students “don’t tolerate racists in the school”. Tim also focused on the students, “I mean, you only have to look at the school. Racism? Well it’s non-existent”. Tim and Linda’s comments are reflective of the narratives that emerge in the literature, about the ways racism is understood, obscured, and silenced in schools. For example, the notion that racism only occurs as individual acts of discrimination or prejudice, and can be undone by adopting a colour-evasive ideology, treating all individuals equally, and encouraging students to respect one another (see Walton, 2018). Or, that the celebration of ‘diversity’ can be used as evidence and replacement of actual anti-racism (see Ahmed, 2012). Finally, as interview data with staff throughout this chapter has pointed to, how assimilatory motivations can be obscured by discussions of “cultural issues”.

It is probable that Linda and Tim’s responses were driven by their sense of pride in the attitudes and behaviours they observed the students to display in regards to race relations. Perhaps they were also driven by their own sense of professional pride in working at a school that was visibly culturally diverse, and genuinely caring for the students of colour who they saw as disadvantaged by their lack of financial resources, access to services, and “cultural pressures” at home. I chose to include this data story, contextualised by the staff interviews, in order to highlight how bitterly fragmented experiences of the systems we exist within can be. In this case, while the school’s leadership teaching staff expressed pride that racism was
“non-existent” in the school, one of their students requested that the culture of racism amongst the school’s teachers should be the focus of their song.

**Tensions between students and teachers.**

In-depth interviews with the boys themselves echoed similar tensions raised in the story above, during which the students offered extensive critique of their teachers. When I asked Paul, a 13-year-old Yorta Yorta boy in the year seven group, about his attitude towards teachers at school, he explained, “I don’t work well with a teacher that’s mean to me. They’re mean to me, I don’t do anything.”

Paul’s reasoning spoke to the nature of teacher-student relationships and the exchanges of power and authority embedded in this system. While I did not enquire whether Paul’s experience of his teachers as “mean” had anything to do with race relations, the boys’ criticisms of their teachers as “mean” and “unfair” presented itself again and again throughout the sessions and individual interviews. I believe these tensions are intimately linked to the ways in which those with structural power relate to young people who express anger and aggression, particularly when these are ‘risky’ and ‘difficult’ subjects, who we seek most to support. Within an education context that functions through a hierarchy of power, even those teachers who care deeply and genuinely about the young people they work with must take up positions that will obligate ‘meanness’. In the following chapter, I delve into these complex subjectivities, and how processes of othering function to uphold this system.

While I observed and recorded sentiments that I coded across a spectrum of overt and covert racialised violence and erasure, I also noted how the staff demonstrated a passionate commitment to sincere respect and culturally-affirming practices within the school. However, as the literature articulates, teachers’ roles in schools do not actively encourage or even allow for the examination of the porous and evasive nature of Whiteness, within a structurally violent system (for example, see Picower, 2009; Castagno, 2014; Vass, 2018). Inevitably, they become caught in deeply engrained patterns of White benevolence and White virtue, that have historical underpinnings in colonialism (Wolfe, 2006; Moreton-Robinson, 2009), and the protection of Whiteness (Walton, 2018). Within this context, I noticed it appeared normal for an angry, aggressive student who behaves badly in class to either be disciplined or ignored when he complained. In turn, when such a student participates in a group where he is invited to critically reflect on how aspects of his identity shape his experience at school, he requests to write a song about racism. Across these many ways I observed structural violence
to be silenced or obscured, the notion of exploring and challenging gender-based violence began to feel more complex than I had anticipated.

**Conclusion**

The moments presented throughout this chapter speak to the problematic ways violence can be seen and attended to institutionally. Indeed, the staff at South East College recognised and acknowledged many forms of violence, such as the violence young people experienced in their homes, the pressure the boys were subjected to in their sports teams, the physical violence and aggression the boys used at school, and the relational aggression staff saw characterising the girls’ relationships. However, the three data stories in this chapter unearth some key questions concerning the broad range of violences that are perhaps too confronting, complex, or covert to address, especially when they force us to question the system they occur within.

Initially, I set out to explore the ways young people could participate in the primary prevention of gender-based violence, and how they might communicate experiences of gender-based violence in a music therapy context. However, these three data stories demonstrate the complex, unanticipated, and under-acknowledged violences that can arise within a project that sought to address this one form of violence. From these beginnings of the project, it began to feel as though ‘primary prevention’ was a framework that in some ways simplified and obscured these issues, placing the onus only on young people to recognise and challenge violence individually, while at the same time, violence was being persistently perpetrated and enacted in multiple, complex forms within the school. Indeed, these events began to reveal the ways in which we can see and condemn one form of violence, while at the same time enact and reproduce violence in another form.

In turn, I propose that gender-based violence prevention must better account for violence that occurs structurally, recognising the types of violence that can be missed or minimised when gender is a singular focus point, or when transformation is expected simply by asking individual young people to change their behaviour. It becomes important then, for music therapists or practitioners in schools seeking to explore gender with young people, to develop approaches that do not reproduce more covert forms of violence, or invalidate young people’s experiences. In doing so, we may recognise specific skillsets which support young people to reflect on and shift forms of violence they have been implicated in, from multiple directions. In the following chapter, I delve into the qualities and motivations driving the
power relations introduced here, before examining the role music and music therapy can play in this complex landscape.
Chapter Five

Processes of Othering

Introduction

Having demonstrated the complexities of how violence was attended to at the research setting, I now move from a structural and interpersonal analysis and into an examination of the relational dynamics which structure the subjectivity of the staff and young people who participated in the project. Here I sought to uncover what it truly meant for staff to simultaneously ignore or sanction one form of violence, whilst also perpetrating other forms, and how this related to agency and identity. Throughout the chapter, I draw on the concept of the ‘Other’ to examine what motivated these issues, and how the participants in this project, staff and students alike, used othering as a process to address and attend to the power dynamics present in the setting. Having begun to explicate and uncover discursive practices of dominance and pathologisation in the previous chapter, throughout this chapter I draw on postcolonial theorising in order to analyse the processes of othering which emerged. Recognising that othering is understood in different ways across multiple disciplines, I open the chapter by locating the postcolonial origins of the term. I draw on this body of scholarship in order to acknowledge the settler-colonial context of Australia, and the role of the education institution in processes of colonisation. In turn, these understandings of the Other recognise the racialising practices which are imbedded in these institutions, and become consciously and unconsciously re-enacted by those who exist within them.

Scaffolding my arguments across the chapter are two data stories and rich interview data. The first data story constructs the complex landscape I encountered wherein the young people and staff were persistently distancing themselves from each other. Drawing on literature related to deficit and risk, I reveal how staff positioned the young people as Other to them by directing blame at their local contexts, such as their families and cultural communities. In turn, I look to the ways the young people positioned the staff in this system, and how they chose to represent themselves when given the opportunity. The chapter then moves into exploring the consequences of these processes, in which young people feel vilified or victimised, fail or refuse to comply, or find ways of directing their pain and frustration laterally at each other. The second data story offers an example of the intersecting raced and gendered dimensions of teen boys’ identity construction, and how these were obscured, normalised, and misrecognised in the school.
Underpinning this chapter and driving my analysis are two key normative claims. First, that othering – in the sense it is used and analysed here – is an anti-relational force which must be recognised and understood in order to engage in the prevention of violence across interpersonal and institutional lines. And second, in a context where young people are constantly negotiating their identities in these complex relational fields, opportunities for them to engage in alternative ways of relating are especially valuable and necessary.

The Blame Game

Data Story

I am nearing the end of the project, and I have interviewed five staff members and a number of the young people. I observe every person sitting across from me during interviews, articulating their efforts to work, to help, and to survive. But at the same time, there appears to be a need in each person, to find someone to direct their frustration and anger towards. The students describe hating their teachers. They use their teachers to compare me to, and they tell me, “you’re not like them”. And indeed I’m aware that I’m “not like them”, because of how differently I’m positioned in this system compared to their teachers.

I also witness the ways the staff genuinely care for their students. They worry about them and they see the challenges school presents them with. And they don’t blame them. Instead, blame seems to be directed squarely towards their families, pinpointing all the pieces of their immediate circumstances that are failing them. Some of the staff’s resentment is coded, but with others it is open and explicit. In her interview, Dani, the Wellbeing Coordinator tells me,

There’s this sense of... entitlement, for some cultures? In the way they simply just speak to staff, the way they demand respect of others. So yeah that’s quite concerning to me. Because if we were in their country it would be expected that we follow their rules and have respect for what they uphold. Sometimes I’m not sure that that happens to the extent that it’s enforced upon us when we go to other countries.

I can’t ignore these kinds of comments, what is playing out before me, and what I am inevitably complicit in. I know Dani and I work alongside her every day. I witness her attending to these young people’s needs with passion and diligence, advocating for their wellbeing, often at the expense of her relationships with other staff. I make my own personal
judgments about Dani’s attitudes, and I sense my impulse to distance myself from the racism, telling myself, “I’m not like that”. But from a researcher’s perspective, I need to go deeper. I need to understand more about how power is operating here, because I sense there is much more to learn by seeing these issues beyond the idea of a ‘bad apple’. Everyone is blaming someone, and it is as though the system is set up for it. I feel like I can’t go any further in my analysis until I have attended to these processes.

Whiteness and representing the Other.

In a relational sense, othering is a process of categorisation that we use every day in order to refer to people who we perceive as slightly or drastically different to the ‘self’. Behavioural and psychology literature construct this through an organisational and social identity theory lens. Within this paradigm, othering is seen as a necessary process for constructing/reinforcing an individual and group identity, through categorising attributes and characteristics which we perceive to be salient or sharing our own (see Crisp & Turner, 2014). The term ‘othering’ is used across multiple other theoretical paradigms, such as a lens through which to examine and critique dominant paradigms in researcher-participant relationships (see for example Best, 2007; Agyeman, 2008), as well as in gender and sexuality studies (see for example Beasley, 2005; Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015).

Postmodern philosophy has also dedicated significant scholarship to understanding the relationship between morality, agency, and the Other. Postcolonial theorists engage extensively with the notion of ‘Other’ in order to understand colonial relations and power, and they point out that the rise of particular identities is not a coincidence. Rather, it involves a relational dynamic in which the coloniser needs the Other in order to create themselves, and how domination over the Other is achieved through subordination of Otherness (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2003, p. 97). As Ania Loomba (2005) writes, “The definition of civilisation and barbarism rests on the production of an irreconcilable difference between ‘black’ and ‘white’, self and Other” (p. 53).

Early leading theorists in this space include Edward Said (1978), who explored the creation of the Other through colonial relationships, particularly how Europe constructed the ‘Oriental Other’ for the purposes of domination. Correspondingly, Spivak (1985) explicated ‘othering’ as a discursive strategy for anchoring and deploying power within colonial processes. The notion of the Other and othering as they pertain to education settings comes into particular focus when considering postcolonialism’s contentions about the relationships
between knowledge and power. Rizvi, Lingard, and Lavia (2006) describe education settings as ‘contested terrain’ in this regard, in that schools are both institutions where people are “inculcated into hegemonic systems of reasoning”, but also sites where it is possible to resist dominant discursive practices (p. 257).

Throughout his work, Edward Said (2001) articulated a central question – how can we know and respect the Other? – resonating with the questions I was beginning to form in the data story above. My aim here is to begin to unpack the way the Other was ‘known’ in this context – how each of the people sitting before me during interviews came to construct the Other. In doing so, I am seeking to explicate how processes of othering occurred, the impact this process had on the relationships in this setting, and what this tells us about the complex subjectivities that play out between young people and those seeking to help and support them.

Dani’s indignation about the students and families in the school spoke to some very real and overt patterns of differentiation and comparison that are wielded in Australian institutional contexts. In expressing her shock and frustration at the audacity of families to “demand respect”, Dani explicated several key notions of Whiteness that not only construct the Other as deficient and abnormal, but overtly centre and universalise Whiteness (Montag, 1997). This occurs within a context of White representation of the Other being characterised by an invisible ‘knowing’, and White constructions being the signifiers of reality (Said, 1978). Unpacking notions of Whiteness and epistemology, Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2004) explores the spectrum of value placed on knowing and representation, some representations deemed truthful and commonsense, some contestable, and others invisible, “unnamed and unmarked” (p. 77). Under Whiteness, these dynamics place unequal value on representation itself. Moreton-Robinson (2004) explains how this system of representation has justified dispossession and divisive constructions of Indigenous people across a spectrum of savagery and untrustworthiness: “It is the apparent transparency of these normative representations that strategically enables differentiation and othering” (p. 77).

During analysis of five interviews with school staff, five themes emerged in relation to the contexts in which young people were represented: violence; gender expectations; ‘culture’; emotional regulation and coping; and socio-structural positioning. The previous chapter explored the ways race and culture were represented as one of these themes in their relation to violence. Implicit here was the suggestion that exploring oppressive constructions of gender and sexuality was most important for the students who were not White, and the notion that the school was a civilized and progressive space to do so. Such representations can be understood as a product of a “timeless opposition between ‘Western’ and ‘non-
Western’ people” (Loomba, 2005, p. 54), and the “subtle and persistent” construction of non-Eurocentric people and cultures as barbaric and in need of refining (Said, 1978). I turn here to staff interview data to unpack these representations, which were so strikingly characterised by a process of separation, comparison, and differentiation. Table 5.1 below offers illustrative examples of how I separated different forms of othering.

Table 5.1 Forms of Othering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violence</th>
<th>Gender expectations</th>
<th>‘Culture’</th>
<th>Emotional regulation and coping</th>
<th>Socio-structural positioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dani: It’s also about their learned behaviour, not just their cultural background, but what were they exposed to when they grew up, and how much time do we have to unpack all of this? I’m really mindful about not judging, and I haven’t walked a mile in their shoes, but what I will come down hard on is any abuse to a child.</td>
<td>Tim: And these boys, you know, they’re not being cuddled when they fall down. They’re being told to “Get up!”, “Stop crying”, “Stop sooking”.</td>
<td>Jan: For some of them it’s cultural. For some it’s background language, so for some of them no English is spoken at home, so being able to go home and experiment from your language and learn from your language, they’re the ones who are taking it home and for some they go home and NO English is spoken. For some of them it’s cultural expectations, or lack of cultural expectations of achievement.</td>
<td>Kamma: ....it’s often people who really can’t manage their emotions, they maybe let their emotions get the better of them, and just can’t... manage as well I suppose.</td>
<td>Dani: It’s the materialism and pressures for success, consumerism, technology and how much it infiltrates their lives. Social media etc. They’ve been brought up to be self-entitled without doing much, but they’ve been enabled, it doesn’t get bred from nowhere.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Whiteness and compassion.**

Across these examples are varying degrees of patience and care, as well as resentment and blame. What the statements share is a distancing in proximity from these young people and their families, and a sense of authority, legitimacy and virtue in the way they separate themselves from and condemn them. Such a position has been described by Moreton-Robinson (2009) as the “White imaginary” (p. 72), and by Schech & Haggis (2004) as a strategy of Whiteness and nationhood. Importantly, discussions of Whiteness are not simply pertaining to individual White people, but rather about Whiteness as hegemony (see Leonardo, 2004, 2007). Indeed, there were White students in the school and who participated in the project, and one of the staff, Kamma, was not White. However, I drew on the notion of Whiteness as a useful concept in examining the ways the young people and their families
were constructed as Other, in the context of settler-colonial relations in Australia, White
globalisation, and the normative power of Whiteness that dominates Australian schools (as
described by Walton, 2018).

Explicit examples of dominant White Australian modes of thinking included senior
teacher Jan’s comments in the table above about students’ academic struggles as a result of
their families’ failure to speak English. Or, in Dani’s statement in the data story about “if we
were in their country”. At other points, the power of Whiteness is more subtle, and instead
emerged through narratives of urgency and compassion described in the previous chapter.
Across the descriptions in the table is the sense that these students have been exposed to
things that others haven’t. In noting that she has not “walked a mile in their shoes”, Dani
explicitly outlines her separation and difference from the young people, and affirms the sense
of professional (and perhaps personal) responsibility she feels in advocating for their safety,
which importantly, she implies is most at risk in the home.

I saw this implication reiterated across the interviews – that it is in their homes,
families, and cultural communities that the young people are most subject to violence, harm,
unreasonable expectations, or a lack of expectations. The tendency for teachers in urban
schooling environments to see their students as ‘damaged’ by their home lives and families is
echoed across the literature (see Payne, 2008; Bettie, 2014; Pitzer, 2014a). At a deeper level,
this sense of distancing can also be recognised through the ways these four non Indigenous
Australians refer to these expectations, practices, language, and cultures as foreign, as
different to the way we do things here. Importantly, these attitudes can be linked to the
dominant White Australian mindset, of which an unwillingness to recognise its own status as
a foreign occupier is a primary tenet (Moreton-Robinson, 2003).

This form of distancing is complex and difficult to articulate, especially within a
context where the staff simultaneously assert their care, support and compassion for the
students and the community, and advocate for the broader frame of ‘equality’. As we heard
from Year Seven Coordinators Tim and Linda in the previous chapter, they saw the school as
progressive in regards to race relations. However, the very notion of ‘equality’ can be
problematised as anchored in an assimilation discourse (see Shore, 2004, p. 96), and more
broadly, framed by neoliberalism which claims the “transcendence of racial politics”, by
appealing to notions of meritocracy and achievement (Schech & Haggis, 2004, p. 176).
Through this lens, it is possible to understand the staff’s distancing as a form of frustration;
that the students and their families have failed to assimilate, or do not even attempt to.
**Individualising blame.**

What is interesting in the ways the staff distance themselves, is that they do so by emphasising the students’ *personal* disadvantage and marginalisation, while mostly avoiding these issues at the structural and systemic level. Such views can be located within a broader deficit discourse, which I identified in the ways the staff drew repeated attention to how students were either victims of familial or cultural *enabling* (“they’ve been brought up to be self-entitled”), or *disabling* (a “lack of cultural expectations of achievement”). Deficit discourse is a primary mode of othering for young people positioned as ‘at risk’ in schools, and is associated in the literature with notions of deficiency, failure and disempowerment (Fforde et al., 2013; Sarra, 2014). In the Australian context, Moreton-Robinson (2009) describes how these individualising discourses are informed by neoliberalism and manifest in practices of blame and rationalisation for the conditions Indigenous people exist within, which are seen “as a product of dysfunctional cultural traditions and individual bad behaviour” (p. 68).

Deficit discourse must again be understood as racialised and classed; its roots stem from eugenicist views on race and genetics (see Foley, 1997) and notions of ‘poverty mindsets’ (see Valencia, 2010). Australian literature documents the ways in which, in particular, Aboriginal students’ schools, curriculums, educators, and the surrounding data have been socialised into a discourse of deficit (Fforde et al., 2013; Rudolph, 2016; Walter, 2016). Again and again in staff interviews, circumstances of failure were levelled at the young people’s homes, cultures, and families (or all three), which had supposedly failed to provide, failed to nurture, and failed to inspire the students. As Dani stresses, “It doesn’t get bred from nowhere”. Crucially, the language used in these excerpts distinguishes these kinds of students from *adolescents in general*, using the trauma, deprivation, and their ambitionless homes to position them as the most vulnerable and the most in need. Such representations echo the work of Heidi Pitzer (2014a, 2014b), who asserts that deficit discourse is one of the most readily available tools educators rely on when supporting struggling students in urban schools. The function of blaming particular communities as incapable or insufficient constructs them as objects in need of control and help, and is an important and well-practiced strategy taken up by those in power more broadly.

**Delving deeper into boys’ subjectivities.**

Year Seven Coordinator Tim spoke with concern about the lack of nurturing he felt the boys experienced at home with their families: “With these boys we’re dealing with, I don’t
know how much love they’ve actually experienced”. Tim told me. “…They’ve experienced love in their way, I guess”. In Tim’s representation, it was as though even the kind of love the boys experienced was ‘Other’; they had only been loved in “their way”. He went on to unpack how the expression of emotion and kindness is perceived to be “uncool” amongst the boys, how they “refused to apologise or back down”. It is possible that here Tim was seeking to recognise and critique the ways in which emotion and toughness is so heavily policed and regulated under hegemonic masculinity, which he observed especially in “these boys”. As explored in the previous chapter, the boys he referred to were explicitly racialised as Other; he and other staff each made reference to the “cultural pressures” they believed to be influencing the boys’ experience of masculinity. Interestingly, this same sense of “toughness” is described as a key characteristic of White masculinity, especially as it pertains to those in power retaining control (see Kimmel, 2017). On this topic, Ben Wadham (2004) interviewed Aboriginal men who described their impression of the White Australian male mindset: “big boys don’t cry, male big boys don’t admit they are wrong, we’ll tough it out, we have nothing to apologise for” (p. 205).

This refusal to “back down” is reminiscent of the very attitudes Tim noticed amongst the group who were almost all boys of colour, and wished to condemn. As explored in the previous chapter, Tim’s renouncement of these dominant modes of masculinity was convenient as it allowed him to distance himself from his own accountability in this system. It is possible that while Tim sees the suffocating constraints of hegemonic masculinity at play in the way the boys can and can’t express their emotions, he attaches this (however consciously or unconsciously) to the culture of the Other, which he sees as more primitive. The implication here is that dominant White Australia understands hegemonic masculinity and how to guard against it with love and tenderness, while these foreign cultures remain fixed in a more barbaric and backwards narrative of what it means to ‘be a man’. Tim’s concern for protecting White masculinity can be understood as a form of settler anxiety (see Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013) and echoes broader literature that constructs White masculinity as more ‘progressive’ (see for example Jupp, 2013; Curry, 2017).

**Possible motivations behind othering.**

As well as the socio-political discourses that may have driven the staff’s positioning of the students and their communities as Other, I was interested in examining their own internal drivers. When I asked Tim what brought him to teach at the school, he responded:
As a teacher and as someone growing up in a low SES community I’ve seen a lot of
great people that have got no guidance, and because of that, seem to fall through the
cracks, and I wanted to make it part of my mission to be the person that would help
them so that they could achieve great things. Because I’ve seen the best people in the
world like, on the streets, because of just, not being able to access any support. And um
I have basically just built my knowledge base up through dealing with behaviour issues,
because behaviour issues are usually a symptom of something else… And um, I just
always had a pretty innate compassion for people who are being hard done by.

It was at this point that I learned that Tim had attended South East College himself. It
was therefore interesting to observe the blend of closeness and distance he created when
referring to the students. His statement demonstrates how othering can be understood as a
complex relational process which is influenced and constructed by our own experiences, the
institutions we work within, and the rules we follow, or the ones we choose not to. Rather
than placing himself into the category of those who have been “hard done by”, Tim constructs
himself as an observer of these tragedies, maintaining a certain distance from this
community, despite identifying his own lived experience within it. Tim does not disclose that
he himself had a lack of guidance or support, but rather that he was witness to these
inequities. The way he distances himself from this context, while emphasising his passion to
improve it implies either that he has “made it out”, or that he was lucky enough to come from
a “good” family.

Tim does not give much insight into how he managed to prevent himself from “falling
through the cracks”. Perhaps he attributes his success within a neoliberal framework, as a
testament to his merit, hard work, and perseverance. Or perhaps he recognises structural
privileges that have afforded him greater “access to support”. Perhaps what motivates him as
a teacher is his very own experience of having role models, of people who believed in him in
the same way he describes believing in these students. Interestingly, in these comments Tim
also eludes to structural oppression when he states that those who “fall through the cracks” do
so because they face systemic barriers to access. Perhaps it is Tim’s own lived experience
growing up in a poor community and facing or witnessing these barriers that has led to his
self-identified inherent compassion. Importantly, however, Tim also states that these
communities lack “guidance”, again bringing in the personal aspects of their deprivation. Tim
clearly identifies these students as victims of their local circumstances. In the next section I
pick up on this notion of victimhood, and analyse how it was constructed by the staff.
Constructions of victimhood.

As I noted in the previous chapter, the term ‘culture’ was used frequently by staff, while the term ‘race’ (or ‘racism’) was not. As Cowlishaw (2004) has illustrated, for some time ‘culture’ has been used in Australia as a more respectful, ‘catch all’ term for all matters regarding race, ethnicity, indigeneity, religion, values, and norms. On this topic, Alonso et al. (2009) note how the term ‘culture’ has been adopted particularly in relation to poor communities, functioning to lock them into a genealogy of deficit. In their text on deficit discourse associated with African American and Latinx students in the US public education system, the authors describe how ‘culture’ replaces more biologically-driven terms, enabling discourse “about essential differences among racial groups without having to use the now-loaded language of biological ‘races’” (Alonso et al., 2009, p. 52).

In some cases, such as Tim’s above, the young people were described as victims who were worthy of resources, time, care, and support (although these were often the very things that the staff described not having access to). However, others were described as victims because they had been enculturated to expect these resources, or to vie for them; and thus positioned as victims with a “sense of entitlement” (as Dani described). It appeared as though staff perceived other students to be ‘victims of culture’, having to navigate expectations from their culture, race, or religion that were incongruent with those of the school, or difficult to manage. Table 5.2 below offers examples of the ways staff interview data could be separated into these three distinct categories of ‘victim’.

Table 5.2 Forms of Victimhood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The worthy victim</th>
<th>The victim of culture</th>
<th>The entitled victim</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dani: “But then say we’ve got our Afghani families that have come… but the trauma and the violence that they’ve experienced… even if they told us, it’s not enough, to ever understand, I don’t think.”</td>
<td>Tim: “Well a lot of the issues that’ll be seen in the boys you’ll talk to, it’s just the cultural pressures, to be a big tough person.”</td>
<td>Jan: “For some of them, home is about what you can get off the government, not what you can do for yourself. So it’s trying to change that thinking as well.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda: “Cos I feel like sometimes there’s a bit of a stigma around these children, you know like cycles of poverty and so on, and I really think that’s terrible.”</td>
<td>Dani: “it’s more of a cultural issue, with our Pacific Islander families, and the way they discipline.”</td>
<td>Dani: “And certain families they know how to operate and manipulate the system, and they’re very good at it. It’s almost become their day job.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tim: “In some of our extreme cases there’s been mental illness in the family, like drug induced, and it just… yeah… we can do a great deal for kids I guess who’ve been neglected, but when you have mental illness as well, it creates a really, really hard environment for them to go home to.”

Kamna: “That’s again often cultural for quite a few of the boys, so that’s what they’ve learnt, that might have been how they’ve seen their fathers and older brothers dealing with things. And there is that expectation.”

Dani: “There’s this sense of… entitlement, for some cultures? In the way they simply just speak to staff, the way they demand respect of others.”

In the data, victimhood could be imagined along a spectrum, delineated by politics of class, race, and gender, with the entitled victim in direct opposition to the worthy victim. Importantly, across this entire spectrum, it is as though their victimhood is tied to a distinct sense that the young people cannot be helped. Julie Bettie (2014) raises these notions in her own research with young people in the United States, explaining how heterosexual, middle class, White girls are commonly afforded victim status, with a need to be rescued, while conversely, working class girls and girls of colour are positioned as unworthy victims, because they themselves are part of the problem (p. xxv). Through this lens, it becomes clearer why both Wellbeing Coordinator Dani and Year Eight Coordinator Kamna were reluctant to see Moana as a victim of sexual assault in the previous chapter, as though she was in some way acting entitled by causing “drama”, and in fact part of the problem.

Dani and Jan’s references in the right column of the table appeared to align with Bettie’s (2014) statements about unworthy victims, as they used dominant classed and raced narratives to depict the schools’ families as welfare burdens. The insinuation is that these young people cannot be helped because of their demanding or manipulative families. In the middle column, the ways Kamna, Dani, and Tim described the boys as victims of their culture also upheld assumptions about non-White masculinity that Tim eluded to previously. Their families appeared to be representative of their culture, and their culture representative of harsh and harmful pressures and expectations. Here, they insinuate that the young people’s behaviour and attitudes regarding masculinity and violence would be impossible to tackle in the school whilst they are subjected to “cultural pressures” at home and in their communities. In the left column, Tim, Linda and Dani’s comments speak to a specific tension in these families’ need and deservedness for support, juxtaposed by the terrible weight of their problems. Within this is also another sense of polarisation: “those places” the young people come from or exist within are seen to be violent and dysfunctional, while “our place” – the Australian school – is peaceful and welcoming. Within this, the young people are eluded to as being beyond help, perhaps because their trauma is too great for us, here, to “ever understand”. Or, because their problems are too “extreme”, such as having parents with
mental illness (which Tim pointedly implies is caused by their own actions, such as addiction).

These three types of victim were constructed based on the young people’s personal experiences, but for the most part the staff do not refer to the broader social and political forces that may relate to these personal struggles. How was it that these students were constructed through such disadvantage, deprivation, and trauma through their immediate context (such as their family, their homes, or their refugee status), while broader power structures like racism, colonisation, misogyny and more were so rarely (if ever) present in conversation, and in some circumstances even minimised? The interpersonal and childhood trauma the young people had experienced was described as so insurmountable that we had “Buckley’s chance” of providing enough support, and yet there was no connection made to how structural oppression shapes and delineates these experiences. My findings point to the ways othering allows us to dissociate these connections, and see individuals as victims of their local environment, rather than positioned by larger, more complex structures, that we ourselves may be actively constructing or complicit in. These tendencies reflected several dominant and inter-related discourses described in the literature: 1) respect for and celebration of cultural diversity without connecting this to, or challenging, systemic social inequalities (see Walton, 2018); 2) an absent and displaced discourse about class (see Bettie, 2014); 3) the growing neoliberal sensibility that blames individuals, rather than social structures (see McLeod, 2012).

Pointing to the students’ individual, immediate contexts also supports Pitzer’s (2014a) claim that a deficit discourse is the most readily available way of positioning struggling students in schools. It also raises the question whether, in a system that is well documented to provide grossly inadequate support and mentorship to teachers (see McMahon et al., 2017; Willett, Segal & Walford, 2014), there is a fundamental lack of time and support required for staff to engage in the kind of thinking and action that challenges the discourses readily available to them (Chatelier & Rudolph, 2018). Linda’s comment above in the worthy victim column, however, represents a glimmer of hope. As in Tim’s quote above about access barriers, by referring to stigma, Linda demonstrates that it is indeed possible to politicise the students’ personal struggles. While this may not be the most available or reiterated position, these moments demonstrate that these staff did in some ways consider their students in relation to the broader system at play.
The purposes of othering

While their descriptions drew on a range of discourses in the way they constructed the young people as victims, what their narratives appeared to share is a sense of the school as a neutral and benign place. Within the Australian context, this speaks to the success of the colonial project as an invisible force, never acknowledging learning as racialised, or the colonial roots of Australian education (Shore, 2004). Underlying the three victim narratives, as well as Tim’s statements about whether the boys have “actually experienced” love, is an assertion that the school provides an alternative, benevolent environment for these victims. In turn, the school and those working within it are logically positioned as a sanctuary compared to these brutal home environments which are void of emotion. In this sanctuary, the young people can take haven and comfort, and one way or another learn ‘our way’ of doing things.

In this light, it is possible to see Dani’s statement in the opening data story as an expression of frustration towards families who have not seen the school in this way, who have been unfriendly or uncooperative, rather than grateful for the school’s support. Saviour complexes and blame discourses are well documented in literature on under-resourced schooling communities, such as Christopher Emdin’s (2016) work in the urban American schools context, with young Black students and predominantly White staff. Emdin outlines how teachers often operate under the narrative that their school and staff are giving marginalised young people a life (p. 20). Emdin highlights how this not only constructs notions that one individual school or teacher can save students from positions of vulnerability, it also emanates from the idea that their present life is of little value, hence erasing the multiplicity and value of their communities. In her construction of the “neoliberal superwoman”, Amy Brown (2013) names neoliberalism as a defining force that underpins this saviour complex among White women in under-resources schools. In her doctoral dissertation in an American school, Pitzer (2014b) describes the relationships between schools and students’ communities as a ‘blame game’, in which teachers genuinely care for and love students in schools, but enact this in a way that places blame directly onto their families for not doing this love and care themselves (p. 48). Bettie (2014) reflects a similar idea, summarising, “parents tend to blame schools for not doing well by their child, while schools blame parents” (p. 82).

Understandably, if young people are perceived to be victims, or left floating “in the wilderness” as Tim described in the previous chapter, it appears vital that there are professionals there to protect and support them. Subsequently, it feels somewhat natural that as dedicated professionals, we see those we are supporting as Other, in order to position
ourselves as their support. However, the problematics of this relationship can be understood through the colonial frame, in that those in power need the subordinated Other to justify and legitimise their presence (see Moreton-Robinson, 2009; Rudolph, 2016). Of the many silences and complexities within this dynamic, there are several which I identified as important to consider.

Firstly, although each of the staff identified ways in which the young people were victims of systemic issues, the recognition of structural violence was not extended to their families. However, of equal importance, are the ways these staff themselves are held accountable to a system. A system which for multiple, complex reasons, can set teachers up to view young people as vulnerable, rather than innately capable and powerful, which McLeod (2012) attributes to forces of neoliberalism. Furthermore, through racial and economic stratification, young people are segregated into concentrated communities of people who have experienced multiple forms of violence, trauma, and adversity (as described by Alonso et al., 2009), so to recognise or emphasise such trauma appears to simply acknowledge the truth of these students’ experiences. And importantly, within such a system, emphasising victimhood statistics is indeed what may be required in order to obtain social responsiveness, funding, and political attention (Walter, 2016). In this sense, positioning the students as abject victims of appalling circumstances also allows the professionals who work with them to stabilise their own place in such a setting. Overall, the data reflected a growing concern articulated by Chatelier and Rudolph (2018) regarding the ways school staff must prove their professionalism, need for resources, and care for students, which in turn can actually undermine their genuine intentions for care and support.

Playing with power through othering.

On the other side of this power dynamic, processes of othering were also evident in the way the young people represented their teachers, serving the young people’s own purposes of protection and agency-building. During one-on-one interviews with the young people, I noted how frequently they explained my role through drawing comparison to their teachers. When I asked Ivy, a 14-year-old in the year eight girls group, how she would describe what I was doing in the school, she said,

You’re technically being a teacher. But I mean like. I dunno. The teachers in our school, they won’t really talk about that [issues of inequality]. You know? They don’t
really set inspirational things. Whereas you’re actually doing that, you’re like playing that part, you’re actually teaching us, the inspirational part, of life.

Ivy’s description points to some encouraging aspects of her experience during music therapy sessions, though I turn to focus here on how she does so through a process of othering. In this case, Ivy creates distance between myself and her teachers, pointing out their failures and highlighting the ways I have filled the role of what she perceives as “actually teaching us”.

In the previous chapter I introduced Paul, a Yorta Yorta boy in the year seven group, who described the ways he navigated the teacher-student power dynamic by refusing to work with teachers who he considered “mean”. Paul began this explanation by comparing me to the other staff, describing me as “more chilled” than teachers. He told me, “When you wanted us to do something they’d [the group would] do it. Because you’re nice to them, they’re nice to you, so yeah”. John’s description echoed Paul’s criticism: “When we talk they [the teachers] just yell at us straight away, they don’t even say ‘what you talking for’, they just jump to conclusions and yell at you”. We cannot know whether the young people would have represented different teachers in a completely different light, or if they were referring only to the handful of specific staff with whom they have difficult relationships. The background literature reveals how students with social, emotional, and behavioural issues can hold little trust in their teachers (Murray & Zvoch, 2010), or feel as though their teachers do not respect or value them (Lumby, 2012). Specifically, students of colour have identified the racialised and classed dynamics of their experiences of their teachers’ deficit-oriented expectations (Carter Andrews & Gutwein, 2017). Sevgi Bayram Özdemir & Håkan Stattin (2014) outline how poor student-teacher relationships combined with experiences of racism can lead to students’ lowered self-esteem and satisfaction with school. Although the young people in this project were describing their teachers in a particular context, I believe their attitudes speak to broader systemic issues and the complex subjectivities entangled in this power dynamic.

My interpretations rely on interviews between each of the young people and myself, a visiting professional adult, who was not a teacher, and who was inviting them to share their thoughts. Within this, I was arguably presenting the young people with a rare opportunity to undermine the regular staff, which they took up by referring to them as mean, unfair, and uninspiring. Through delegitimising the teachers within their roles, I contend that the young people were finding ways to empower themselves in a context where they recognise they are
frequently disempowered. When the students told me, “They just don’t get us”, “They see the worst in me”, or, “They don’t believe in us”, I tried to avoid focusing on the sentiments themselves, or how they saw me in comparison, but instead, on what this form of othering communicated about an exchange of power. What purpose can othering serve the young people in playing with power? In their survival? As I have demonstrated so far, young people such as Paul, Ivy, and John occupy a position within a system and relational dynamic that grants them only specific opportunities for taking power, rather than accessing it materially or structurally (as described by Vass, 2014).

When Paul explained how he won’t “do anything” if he perceives a teacher to be mean, he is hinting at how he finds ways to access power within this relational exchange. When a young person misbehaves, walks out of the room, or ridicules the adult in the front of the classroom, they access a short term sense of power. The circumstances I am describing throughout the previous and current chapter are such that young people are railing against violences that the school or teacher represents, in most cases without the teacher consciously or willingly embodying this role. In fact, the staff’s descriptions suggest that they may actually consider themselves the young person’s support, perhaps one of few stable, functioning, adults in the students’ lives. Through the complex relational processes embedded in this dynamic, the staff seek to empower the students by condemning their immediate contexts which they see the students as victims of. By othering both the students and their families, the staff can empower their own personal and professional sense of meaning, worth, and that of the system they work within. Meanwhile, the students recognise the power the staff hold in this relational dynamic and system, and they find ways to seize and undermine it, in order to empower themselves. Within these relational dynamics emerges the purpose that othering serves young people not only in gaining power, but in protecting their own identity.

**Agency and complex subjectivities.**

At the start of every interview, I asked each of the young people to introduce themselves, using whatever information they thought was important for me to know in shaping their representation throughout my research. Paul, who introduced himself as “a kid who likes sport, scooters, and music”, then told me, “My family is gangster. I like being Aboriginal. It’s different to other people. And yeah, learn a lot about the history. And I get to learn a bit of my language”. When I asked John how he would describe himself, he said, “Well, I’d do my cultural background. I’d say my parents were born in Samoa, I was born in
Australia, I’m a 13-year-old kid, and I like to play drums”. Phoenix, also Samoan, described herself, “I’m an Island girl. And I love sports and all sorts of things”. Leila, whose early years of trauma, displacement, and a complex journey to Australia seeking asylum had been conveyed to me by several staff, simply said, “I’m a relaxing person… I’m 17. I like to laugh a lot”.

Some of the young people’s introductions touched on their relationship to their cultural identity, as well as their families and their interests. Some of the young people, such as Leila, chose not to share any information about difficulties at home, while others chose to share a broad spectrum of information about difficult experiences in their lives and how this effects their identity. Amelia introduced herself by saying, “I’m from Australia, so my whole background is Australian… I live with my grandma and my grandpa, I feel like it’s better than living with your actual parents. Cos like, my parents weren’t suitable to be parents”.

In a context where these young people had been positioned so intensely as victims, as helpless youth carrying the weight of trauma, who had been deprived or failed by their families, how they chose to represent themselves is important for a number of reasons. For many of the young people in this project who were not White or middle class, their identity departs significantly from dominant norms of what civilisation or success should look like. I propose that while their self-introductions could be read as innocuous, self-explanatory, or simple, in fact, they were advocating for themselves as complex and multidimensional human beings, protecting not only their own agency, but also their history and their culture. This is crucial to examine, because these are the very aspects of their lives that the staff identified as the problem.

While the way they represented themselves sometimes recognised challenges, and at times their interviews became spaces to unload and voice pain and trauma, they still managed to retain a sense of agency. Many of the participants whose behaviour at school was identified as problematic, difficult, dangerous, or unmanageable, were the ones who referred to their teachers as “mean” and quick to jump to conclusions. Here we can begin to understand the function that othering their teachers served the young people in protecting their sense of self. In protesting, speaking out, and acting out, the young people communicated a demand to be seen, heard, and to have their agency recognised. In the ways they took up space with difficult behaviour or combative attitudes, perhaps they were engaging in the maintenance of their agency and capacity. This is especially meaningful in a deficit-oriented context where their sense of agency is so easily erased, ignored, or seen as the problem. In this lay a fascinating paradox: what their teachers and society more broadly
sought to work against, protect, and save these students from, were often the very things the young people found and asserted pride and agency in.

**Othering and misrecognition.**

These complex subjectivities become more visible when we begin to examine the ways the young people actually live and identify within the complicated dynamics of race, gender, and class, as well as with their experiences of interpersonal trauma and structural oppression. It was no surprise that the young people did not express a one-dimensional image of themselves as damaged, traumatised teenagers with families who have failed them. Or, in using Tim’s reference, as young people who had perhaps not “actually” experienced love. While they certainly expressed hardship, the only time they communicated feeling like victims was in relation to their teachers, when they did not feel seen or heard by them. These intricacies raise questions about the complex subjectivities young people like these are able to see and identify, complexities which seem invisible to those in power. In railing against the system, what are young people seeking to communicate to their teachers, and how is this behaviour being read and recognised?

I propose that within these dynamics lies another slow, subtle form of violence, wherein young people’s vulnerabilities and behaviour are misrecognised, and blame is placed on their families and cultural communities, which may be the very resources the young people rely on to express their agency and resilience. The misrecognitions that occur in this space are not due to a lack of passion, diligence, or care on the staff’s behalf. A troubling aspect I have identified in these processes of othering lies in the genuine intentions and desires of staff to support and recognise these young people, to protect them, and for the school to exist as a space in which they are safe. However, as I have argued, offering protection can be a deeply problematic desire when it emanates from the White “helper”, a saviour complex anchored by individualising forces of neoliberalism (Emdin, 2016; Brown, A., 2013). More broadly, when young people’s needs are recognised only through a lens of vulnerability, we risk invalidating their resilience and agency (McLeod, 2012; Brunila & Rossi, 2018). In exploring the role music can play in connecting to young people’s identities, validating their experiences, and fostering their collective strength, the following chapters identify a range of opportunities to repair some of this misrecognition. Here, however, I turn to the relationships between the young people, and how they responded to and recognised each other under these complex conditions.
Othering and Lateral Violence

Data Story

My attention has been drawn to a relationship between two boys in the year seven boys’ group – Frank and Josh. Although there are often arguments during group sessions, they usually end in laughter, and many of the boys who argue are clearly friends outside of the group. But Frank and Josh aren’t friends; their arguments have a nasty edge, and usually centre on racialised, homophobic, and emasculating language.

Frank is Samoan, describes himself as “short and sometimes very anti”8. He tells me that he was in the group because, “when I get angry I just lose control, just hit anyone”. Josh is White, taller than Frank, and describes himself in the following way:

“I am 13 years of age. I was born in Melbourne, grew up in Melbourne, I have moved houses a lot during the past, and my parents divorced when I was 11”. He tells me he thinks he was placed into the group because he is a “troubled kid”.

I recall the first session of the Boys Tune In group. Within seconds, I had noticed Frank’s popularity. He seemed charismatic, he socialized easily with the others, while Josh had been described to me by a staff member as an “angry loner”. There was a lively energy in the room that first day, as we established a set of group guidelines. Frank had stood up from his chair confidently, motioning around to the group with both hands, “Boys, boys, shhh”, before declaring that he thought the most important guideline for the group was “no racists”. He then sat down, nodding to the other boys’ approval.

He had pulled a tub of hair gel out of his pocket and applied it to his hair. He offered it around to the others, who started to do the same. Josh, who was the only White boy in the group, didn’t get offered the gel. I remember asking him if he wanted some, to which he replied, “No. I don’t need to look like a pretty boy”. The others erupted, “Ooh!”. “Shots fired”, they laughed. Josh rolled his eyes and muttered towards Frank, “And, if anyone’s racist here, it’s YOU... shorty”. When I then asked him what he meant, he sat back on his

8 A term to describe spending a lot of time on social media.
chair, “Whatever. Look around. We all know I’m the only one they’ll be calling racist, even though I’ve done nothing”.

Frank and Josh’s dynamic had continued this way throughout the eight sessions. During the final week, it culminates in two incidents:

First, the boys compete in a rap battle during a school concert with a visiting hip-hop artist. In his verse, Josh ridicules Frank and calls him a “garden gnome”, and Frank follows up, freestyling the line:

“Look he’s a White guy tryna rap cool
He’d be the type of guy to shoot up the school”.

They improvise verses about themselves and each other to a packed auditorium of their peers and teachers, until Frank is awarded the winner. The crowd cheers loudly for him.

Next, in our final session, as we are about to cut a cake and celebrate making it to the end of the year, I ask if each of us can say something nice we’d learnt about each other. When it gets to Josh’s turn, the boys become distracted and off-topic, yelling over the top of each other about something unrelated. I draw them back to the activity, aware of how hurt Josh might be. Frank laughs, “Ok ok everyone, time to talk about ____ the ____” [rhyming Josh’s real name with an insult]. Josh stands up, throws the feedback form I’d given him to fill out on the floor, and walks out the door.

Victim subjectivities.

The relationship between 13-year-olds Josh and Frank spoke to the complicated ways in which power plays out on a personal and structural level, and how these conditions can breed forms of othering between those with little power. This story adds to examples in the literature of the ways young people engage with raced, gendered, and classed subjectivities in the school environment to Other one another in highly explicit and damaging ways (see for example Ringrose & Renold, 2010; Bayram Özdemir & Stattin, 2014; Ward, 2017). But from Josh’s thinly veiled racism in calling Frank a “garden gnome”, and many efforts to emasculate Frank, to the opportunities Frank took to assert his popularity and social status
over Josh and humiliate him in front of others, these were not unusual exchanges between students in high school.

Indeed, the ways teen boys assert their masculinities within racialised regimes of power has been discussed in the Australian literature (see for example Martino, 2003; McDonald, 2016). However, the literature also highlights how the gendered, raced, and classed drivers of these exchanges are euphemised into the more neutral frame of “bullying”, and are commonly absent from public discourse, policy, and research (Ringrose & Renold, 2010; Charmaraman et al., 2013; Ringrose & Rawlings, 2015). I sought to unpack these exchanges between Josh and Frank by uncovering how broader discourses of power were performed, regulated, and policed between them. In doing so, I deliberately sought to avoid bullying typologies or creating binary categories of ‘bully’ versus ‘victim’ between Frank and Josh, for several reasons. Not only do these fixed categories erase the complexities of violence that characterise the messy reality of school social relations (as explicated in the previous chapter), they also locate the problems within the individual, again reinforcing a neoliberal-oriented deficit discourse, rather than pointing to broader power relations under which the individual is located (Ringrose & Rawlings, 2015).

In many ways, Josh successfully performed the sense of internalised dominance allocated to him as a white person in contemporary society (DiAngelo, 2012b). I observed him to express a lot of anger, and he often spoke to others with arrogance, almost as if he was reinforcing his rightful place within the school and society more broadly. Simultaneously, Josh was clearly desperate to be seen and valued as complex and human, using the normative resources available to him to cope with the structural and personal challenges he faced. The moments described in the data story led me to consider whether the way Josh embodied his position in the school was perhaps an attempt to gain a type of immediate power which, socially and interpersonally, he was unable to access. In this setting, Josh was the loner and outcast, in comparison to the popular and charismatic Frank. Who in this dynamic was considered Other, and by whom?

While it is crucial to acknowledge the structural power that Josh holds as a White person over Frank, it is also possible to see how Josh could come to the conclusion that it was he who was the victim of “racism” within the social landscape of the school. This is not to assert that what Josh was experiencing was in way racism, but rather to understand the personal and systemic conditions which led him to his conclusion of ‘reverse racism’ (as described by DiAngelo, 2012c). During his very emotional interview, after opening up to me about his fractured relationship with his father and several traumatic events, Josh described
himself as someone who was, “just dealing with a lot of things that are going downhill”. He told me, “I always expect the worst”. When navigating his experiences of disempowerment and hopelessness in the school environment, Josh looked to the resources available to him. These appeared to include entrenched racist and emasculating discourses to externalise his pain, and targeting his more popular peer, Frank. The production and regulation of masculine identities through abuse and othering within male peer groups has been well documented in the literature (Pascoe, 2012). Hillier et al. (1999) have asserted that in Australia, “othering remains an important component of young men’s identity work” (p. 76).

Again, power arises here as a crucial force for examining the intersections of different factors in their lives, and the different forms of masculinity both Josh and Frank were using to try and access power. Both of the boys were living in very low socioeconomic contexts, had large families, and were identified as ‘problem students’. Frank was popular, social, and played rugby every lunch time, though he was significantly shorter than all of his peers. He struggled academically, and I had witnessed his angry outbursts ending in tears (which he locked himself in a room in order to hide). Josh was quiet, and although he did not struggle academically, he was extremely hostile towards his teachers. During lunch, he played handball – undoubtedly the more ‘nerdy’ and less masculine sport. When Josh spoke about his place in the group during his interview, he openly identified as an outsider:

Josh: There were those kids, and then there was me. I do not think I’m anything like them.
Elly: How so? How would you describe them, compared to you?
Josh: I don’t think I’m better in any way. Rather just different. Not sure how I would say it.
Elly: Were there times that you felt particularly on the outer?
Josh: Nearly all of them.

Josh then went on to tell me that he noticed that he and I were the only White people in the group, and that this was an experience he was used to at school. When I asked him how he felt about the conversations we had in the group about racism, he told me that he didn’t pay attention, because he felt the conversations didn’t concern him. Again, an attitude contextualised by broader norms of White Australia, where Whiteness is so often unmarked and unnamed as a racialised position. As Moreton-Robinson (2015) articulates, racism is construed as the problem of the Other. I enquired if there were topics we discussed in the
group that did concern him, and that he did care about, to which he responded, “gender racism”. To my surprise, he continued, “Like how people look down on women. Or how people think if they’re a different gender, they can’t do a certain thing… just whenever I hear it I get pissed really.”

While I did not doubt Josh’s sincerity or ignore the moments of vulnerability and compassion he expressed in his interview that day, I was more intrigued to understand the subjectivities that enabled such a radically different self-presentation outside of the interview space. Leading masculinity scholars explore the burgeoning trend of ‘aggrieved entitlement’ within White masculinity (Kimmel, 2017). Josh’s sense of hostility, and the way he directed this at Frank with racialised and emasculating disdain certainly fits with Kimmel’s (2017) description, of the “potent fusion of two sentiments – entitlement and a sense of victimisation” (p. 1). Analysing his behaviour and words, it is unclear whether Josh is positioning himself as Other, or centring himself, and positioning everybody else as Other. I imagine navigating this must have been incredibly complex for Josh himself in this context. As a young person growing up in poverty and struggling to fit in socially, in many ways he was an outsider. And yet racially he was an insider, existing within a global culture in which Whiteness is normalised to the point of invisibility (as described by DiAngelo, 2012b). Meanwhile, in this local context where he was a minority as a White student, Josh was in some way a representative of the broader context of White dominance. And he responded to this complex positioning in the group by embodying the normative traits of this very identity.

While structurally Josh occupied a position of power, he was also close enough in proximity to be disempowered by classmates like Frank, who was responding to Josh’s sense of entitlement. On a personal level, Frank could look laterally to Josh to assert power, in ways that he could not with teachers, or at a structural level. As an example, Frank could exercise agency in choosing to offer his hair gel to every other student in the group but Josh. Perhaps this was part of his own private efforts of solidarity towards the other students of colour, or an act of identity politics, or perhaps simply to signal to Josh that he was not as entitled as he felt. And in turn, Josh’s sense of affliction and subjection was validated.

When Year Seven Coordinator Tim referred Josh for the group, he described Josh as “a narcissist”, and implied Josh may even be “a sociopath”. Meanwhile, as far as I was aware, Josh’s reference to Frank as a “garden gnome” in front of the entire auditorium did not appear to be noticed or picked up on by staff as an incidence of racism. The tense relationship between Josh and Frank appeared to be seen as a clash of teen boy identities: the quiet, spiteful nerd, and the charismatic, popular, sporty guy. In this sense, their clashes could easily
be coded through essentialised accounts of teen boys’ aggression: ‘boys will be boys’ (see Robinson, 2005). However, this data story has opened up alternative ways of understanding Josh and Frank’s relationship. I argue that to see their exchanges through the lens of pathology, or normalise them within the practices of teen boyhood, or neutralise these practices as simple instances of ‘bullying’, would each be acts of misrecognition. Rather, I have pointed out how othering occurs between young people as a result of the complex conditions of the system they find themselves within, and the minimal resources for subjectivity formation it provides.

Conclusion

Through this chapter I have articulated several dominant discourses which underpin the processes of othering that the staff and young people used to represent and position one another. Rather than seeking to admonish or hold these individuals accountable for these processes, instead I have drawn attention to how deeply embedded these relational patterns are in our contemporary system working with young people ‘at risk’. The value of these findings lies in recognising the ways broader institutions shape, embed, and normalise these power dynamics, to the point that they are invisible and unnoticed.

Through the first section of the chapter, I articulated several key silences or incongruencies in the way young people are constructed through discourses of risk and deficit by those who genuinely seek to help and support them. While young people were so intensely represented as victims of trauma and deprivation, the school staff most noticeably apportioned blame and responsibility to the young people’s immediate contexts, such as their families, their home lives, and their culture. These processes echo the wider literature which asserts how, particularly in marginalised communities, institutions such as schools can be positioned as sites of neutrality, safety, and benevolence, while students’ home lives and communities are seen only through risk and deficit. Meanwhile, in analysing how staff represented marginalised students, I noted that broader structures of power such as racism, colonisation, and economic oppression were often ignored. However, as I have eluded to at several points in the previous and current chapter, in several ways, the young people in the project communicated a deep desire to explore these exact issues.

Within this chapter, I provided examples of the ways the young people introduced and represented themselves in the research, which emerged as particularly important given the ways they had been represented by staff. This was because their self-representations often protected their cultural identity, and advocated for their own sense of agency and
multidimensionality. Ironically, these were the very aspects of their lives which the staff had identified as the problem. However, as much of the literature in this chapter has pointed to, the staff and students alike are embedded in a system that relies on positioning young people as abject victims of poor circumstances, and the schools they attend, or professionals who work with them, as their saviours. The logic of neoliberalism emerged as particularly important in understanding the realities of this system, placing immense emphasis and responsibility on the power of the individual, setting services up to compete for funding, and undermining the ways staff demonstrate care for young people in schools. I contend throughout the chapter that processes of othering are the most readily available means for representing and relating to one another in these conditions. For professionals who consider themselves to be offering help or protection, locating marginalised young people as Other and locating failure within their families becomes normalised. This is especially clear if staff are working under conditions which do not allow them the time or support necessary to challenge these discourses. Othering is also a readily available tool for marginalised young people who are attempting to express their own agency or access short term power, by delegitimising their teachers, or ridiculing and policing one another.

The data and arguments presented throughout this chapter have illuminated some complex relational dynamics at play in this system which are crucial to consider when conducting work which seeks to address violence and uncover power dynamics. It is evident that young people and those who work with them genuinely wish to be seen as agentic and multidimensional human beings, however existing structural forces restrict this. In a context which appears to reproduce young people’s ‘need’ to be controlled and helped, and to stifle their expressions of agency and strength, it becomes increasingly important that young people are supported to write their own narratives. In the following two chapters, I outline how the music therapy project responded to this need. In Chapter Six, I focus on the unique affordances of music to engage young people to explore gender, the focus of the project.
Chapter Six

The Role of Music

Background

Music is located as a resource across cultural, therapeutic, educational, economic, social domains and more, and research into the effects, possibilities, and purposes of music spans across disciplines and methodologies, dependent on epistemological position. In order to examine the role of music in this project, I commence the chapter by locating my stance, and positioning my approach to using music as a music therapist. From a neurological perspective, ever-expanding understandings on the brain and developments in neuroimaging have built a body of work concerned with the neuroscience of music, also laying a foundation for the field of music psychology (see for example Saarikallio & Ekkilä, 2007; Zatorre et al., 2007; Schellenberg, 2011). Whilst there are numerous theories on the role music may play in relation to human emotion and cognition, even these are situated within a context of only very preliminary understandings of the brain and how it relates to music. Those who adopt a more ecological perspective note how connections made in the research between music, neurology and cognition can detach the socially, culturally, and politically situated person from these processes, and position music as something that is received passively (Ansdell, 2014, p. 35).

Theorists concerned with the intrinsic, relational, and evolutionary nature of music view its role not as a special gift of the few, but as a core part of what it means to be human (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009). This raises several interrelated notions that are influential in the music therapy discipline, and crucial in my thinking, practice, and the stance that I adopt as a researcher and therapist. A point of departure lies in what Paul Nordoff and Clive Robbins (1977) described as ‘core musicality’; a theory that proposes that every child holds a musical self which can be supported and nurtured in music therapy. Related is the notion that music itself is a language or proto-language, stemming from research into interactions between infant-parent dyads; a theory known as ‘communicative musicality’ (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009). These concepts have been further developed and expanded into ideas of ‘musical personhood’ (Pavlicevic & Ansdell, 2009), which considers music both in terms of its personal, internal components, as well as how it is situated within and supported by the surrounding sociocultural ecology. Gary Ansdell (2014) provides a contemporary summary underpinned by these ideas, describing musicality as a “human faculty, like speech or reason,
something that not only defines us as human beings, but also promotes our development, and flowers into a variety of culturally directed musical behaviours.” (p. 101)

Outside of music therapy and music sociology discourse, this viewpoint requires a radical shift in thinking, particularly within a school context, where music is commonly associated with educational outcomes, aesthetics, and Western cultural literacy (see Hess, 2015; Crooke, 2019). This very clash was exemplified in Chapter Four when Year Seven Coordinator Tim advised me that he didn’t believe the boys they had identified for me to work with would respond to “something like music”. My reaction was based on these informing theories about musical personhood, as well as the underlying gendered, raced, and classed assumptions that can be drawn from assertions about who can participate in what kinds of music, as explored in Chapter Four. Christopher Small (1998) uses the verb ‘musicking’ to describe all possible interactions in music, rather than distinguishing between these. Small contends that doing so leads to hierarchies of value, of both the music and those involved. He summarises his position stating, “If everyone is born musical, then everyone’s musical experience is valid” (p. 13).

My choice to adopt an ecological stance in exploring the role of music in this project is informed along several interrelated lines. First, this stance is congruent with the theoretical resources utilised thus far in the dissertation, engaging critical theory and centring the power dynamics of cultural and interpersonal meaning systems. Recognising the ontological and epistemological tensions between neuroscience and sociology, I draw on several key texts that focus on the affordances of music in sociocultural context, rather than literature from music psychology or music and neuroscience. In doing so, I journey away from an analysis that constructs music as an intervention or a mechanism, which may position young people as objective, passive recipients. Such a position brings into focus the social, cultural, and political context of the person and place of musicking, which Ansdell (2014) refers to as the “sonic ecology” (p. 35). Finally, in adopting this stance, I seek to contribute to and expand on existing literature, which similarly locates music in socio-political context, including music with young people in schools (see Rickson & McFerran, 2014), and music therapy as an anti-oppressive practice (Baines, 2013).

Rather than leaving musical processes in the methodological ‘black box’ in the ways a randomised control trial requires, DeNora (2013) contends that a meaningful way of unpacking the role of music in both therapy and social context is to examine in detail the times in which people are actually engaged in musical activity (p. 139). This chapter explores this ‘middle’ territory, with data stories that delve into the moments in which the young
people were engaged in musicking, as well as moments that speak to the affordances of music that emerged as important in this context. Unpacking these data stories at times delves deep into the detailed context and dynamics of how these moments occurred, while at other times draws heavily on the young people’s perspectives during interviews, as well as presenting a range of da(r)ta (Renold, 2018), such as lyrics and artefacts created during the sessions. In order to connect to the question of the role of music within this context, I asked a range of questions of the data related to the issues raised in the previous two chapters. For example, how did music create conditions that supported the young people to express agency, in the context of the processes of othering that were occurring in the school? What did the affordances of music offer in relation to the complex violences occurring within the school? What purpose does finding meaning in music serve young people in the knowledge that they do not have real, material power in this system?

From the data, I identified four broad and highly interrelated themes related to the role of music in exploring gender and power with young people: 1) Expressing and connecting to identities; 2) Building and repairing relationships; 3) Transforming, expressing, and validating emotions; and 4) “Music is a hook”. The first data story describes a session of the ‘Boys Tune In’ group, in which I use a gender lens to examine the ways they performed and experimented with their individual and collective gendered identities through music. The second data story is split into two sections, introducing the relational complexities raised in the ‘Hear Girls’ group, and how music offered a space for the girls to see and relate to each other in new ways. The third data story introduces “John” as a case example for examining the links between music and emotion, through an interview in which John described how he uses music as an emotional resource. The final data story depicts a session with two boys in year eight, illustrating the multiple opportunities music offers for social, cognitive, and emotional engagement, and the importance of these in a context where young people are positioned by risk and deficit.

Each of these themes takes a different perspective on the affordances of music in relation to notions of gender and power, and invokes a range of literature. They are, however, connected by three key ideas: a) emphasising the importance of context; b) highlighting the young people’s agency and subjectivities; and c) unpacking the ‘whole experience’ that made music powerful, rather than constructing music as an objective or mysterious mechanism. The focus on situations and circumstances in which these key moments occurred draws in the ways in which music and the sonic ecology can interface with the young people’s “health ecologies” (Frank, 2004, as cited by Ansdell, 2014, p. 47), prompting a type of critical
questioning: Which young people had these experiences? How were these young people situated? What did music look like in this setting? What did these explorations of ‘gender and power’ mean in this context? Informing the ecological perspective arguments are two key texts by Gary Ansdell (2014) and Tia DeNora (2013), whose ideas are drawn on heavily throughout the chapter.

Music Expresses and Connects to Identity

Data Story

It’s the final session of the Boys Tune In group. We’ve just finished cutting a cake, filling in a feedback form, and each sharing something we learned from one another. It’s noisy, and the eight boys are excited to have free reign over the room for the next hour, jumping up from their chairs and spreading around the room. “Someone put some music on!”, one yells. We’re in the music classroom, where there is a PA system with microphones and speakers, a full drum kit, a piano, several keyboards, guitars, and plenty of other instruments. Paul selects a track on his phone – ‘Bitches Ain’t Shit’, by rapper YG. “Yeeeeees”, John responds, pumping his fist in the air along to the beat. The lyrics are graphic and misogynistic and I notice the boys watching me for my reaction. I haven’t heard the song before but I can hear it samples lyrics from an older hip-hop track I know – I ask Paul if he’s heard the original. The others begin to scramble to all corners of the room.

“Shotgun DRUMS”, John yells. He sits at the drumkit, grinning, and hits the sticks together, 1, 2, 3, 4, counting himself in. Starting with a complex fill across the cymbals, John then begins to play along effortlessly to the trap beat over the speakers. Paul yells along encouragingly, grabbing a drumstick and beginning to bash the tom drums alongside John.

The song on the speakers changes, ‘Used to This’ by Future and Drake comes on, with a more contemporary, triplet-focused beat. Paul and John swap places, and John shows him how to play along with a basic beat. “That’s awesome Paul, I didn’t know you played drums!”, I comment. Paul, who doesn’t usually give much away in our sessions, bursts into a grin. “Yeah, Mr. P. showed me. My dad reckons I’m good enough to start getting lessons”.

John moves over to the bass guitar and plugs it in, starting to play a riff along to the song. I look over at Frank, who is usually the star of the show in our sessions, now sitting alone at
the piano, seemingly deep in thought. He is trying to find the right keys to play a chord progression, seemingly undistracted by the cacophony of sounds around him. I go and sit next to him, and ask if he’d like me to show him something to play. Frank nods, taking his hands off the keys. The progression he’s playing is similar to ‘Love Yourself’, by Justin Bieber, which is one of Frank’s favourites, so I play a section of the verse and begin to sing,

“And I didn’t wanna write a song, cause I didn’t want anyone thinking I still care, I don’t, but, you still hit my phone up”

We’re interrupted – “RAP BATTLE IN THE OTHER ROOM!”, Mahmoud yells, sprinting towards the small, adjoining soundproof room. Josh has been sitting alone in silence, but I notice him look up when he hears the word “rap”. He stands up and slinks into the room, plugging in the microphone and shutting the door behind him. Mahmoud pops out, “Elly! Elly! Can you come in and listen, in five minutes?!”, I nod, and he continues, yelling for the others, “Frank! FRANK! Come on we’re doing a rap battle!” Frank doesn’t move, it seems he is waiting for me to continue. “We’ll come in soon!”, I call over to them.

I turn back to Frank, “What do you reckon Justin Bieber means in that line, ‘I didn’t want anyone thinking I still care, I don’t’?” Frank laughs, “I dunno, trying to be all tough guy and not show the girl he’s soft”. I gasp and feign my shock, “Wow so you have been paying attention these last couple of weeks!”. Frank laughs again, “Haha, yeah Miss, you’d be surprised.”

I show him the two-part chord pattern, and he begins to sing, too. Unlike almost all the others in the group, Frank’s voice has not yet broken. He sings easily in the same register as me, fluently moving between notes in an R&B style. As we get to the pre-chorus, Bobuq, Paul, and John, who have been blasting a drum sample from the keyboard’s inbuilt sound bank, recognise the song and look over at us. By the time we reach the chorus, they’ve figured out how to turn the sample off, and start to sing along.

“Cause if you like, the way, you look that much, oh baby you should go and love yourself”, they holler.
Music, identity, and gendered contexts.

The idea that identity work is a primary reason for participating in music is central across the literature, particularly in relation to young people. Feminist music educator and researcher Patricia O’Toole (2009) draws on Small’s theory that connects musicking, relationships, social context, and humanity, arguing that context is the “playground for identity formation” (p. 28). Miranda (2013) contends that for young people specifically, music provides a ‘soundtrack’ to an intensive period of identity formation. Ecological perspectives focus particularly on the ways music is appropriated internally for identity work, as well as outward processes of social, cultural, and political identification (Ansdell, 2014). This data story illustrates one example of a music context as a playground for the participants to perform, affirm, and in some subtle ways, experiment with their gendered identities.

The ways the boys participated that day, gravitating towards (or avoiding) certain musical roles and occupying the space, can be located within a range of familiar and entrenched gendered dynamics. As background music, we heard hip-hop-associated genres that featured exclusively male artists (though the cultural significance of these genres is an important component, which I explore below). Although most of the boys apart from John did not consider themselves to be musicians, they approached the musical space with excitement, immediacy, and willingness. They grabbed unfamiliar instruments without hesitation, flicked power switches on, and cranked volume knobs all the way up. They struck the drums hard, and they played the strings of the guitar and keys of the piano with little regard for whether they were the ‘right’ ones.

I reflected back to sessions I facilitated in that same room with the girls group. I recalled the sense of hesitation and distance the girls met these same instruments with; both groups of similarly aged young people, none of whom were especially quiet or reserved outside of music. I often observed the girls to be quite happy to sit in one section of the room, and focus on conversation, as though we were in any other classroom, instead of surrounded by instruments, knobs and switches, a drum kit, microphones, and a PA. This session with the boys was a striking contrast; words only serving to exclaim a response, to punctuate their
experiences, as they experimented and tested out different musical roles. Such striking
differences between the ways the groups each occupied the space are unsurprising when we
consider spaces in schools as a cultural phenomenon in which gendered power relations occur
(Shilling, 1991), and the degree of space in which girls and other identity groups feel safe to
take up in schools as a whole (Woolley, 2017). From a gender perspective, the way the boys
occupied the musical space echoed the gendered map of the school which the girls annotated,
shown in Chapter Four. Their confidence to play and try out these musical roles can be
contextualised by deeply engrained narratives of boys as instrumentalists (see Hallam,
Rogers & Creech, 2008; Halstead & Rolvsjord, 2017), as well as the gendered narratives that
exist in contemporary musical culture more broadly (see O’Toole, 2009).

**Musical identities as a political resource.**

An ecological understanding of the role of music in connecting to and expressing
identity is considered in relation to identity as a “process of becoming” (Ansdell, 2014, p.
135), and a process that is always situated in socio-political context. The roles and behaviours
we take up in musical spaces are important. Not only does music act as a “mirror” to reflect
one’s own identity (DeNora, 2000, p. 70), it can also be appropriated to find, shape, and
recognise pieces of our selfhood, which is particularly pertinent during transitional or
potentially challenging periods such as adolescence (Ansdell, 2014). Affirming stereotypic
narratives of boys as drummers, rappers, and as confident, loud musicians must also be
understood in the sociocultural context in which they are positioned. Within this context, as
explored across the previous two chapters, “boys like these” were subject to processes of
pathologisation and more. Their positioning constructed them as failures, out-of-control, and
(as one staff member described) “out in the wilderness”; victims of their families and
community.

As mostly boys of colour in a very low socioeconomic community, with various
developmental and learning disabilities, and who were facing increasingly serious
consequences for their issues with violence and aggression, they could indeed be located
across a range of risk factors. Within such a context, expressions of agency and pride in their
identity become increasingly imperative, and the ways young people draw on their social and
cultural resources to negotiate and reflect these identities comes to matter greatly
(Hollingworth, 2015). In turn, as a ubiquitous resource during adolescence, music plays a
crucial role both in connecting to and expressing identity (Hargreaves, North & Tarrant,
2006; Miranda, 2013). Rather than coding the musical expressions that affirmed stereotypic
gender roles simply on the latter end of a ‘good or bad’ binary, I sought to better identify when and how they were occurring, and their occurrence in relation to other intersections of identity. Stig-Magnus Thorsén (2002) describes the function of music in regards to a ‘mosaic’ definition of identity that includes culture, gender, class, language, and more:

Cultural identity expresses a flexible complex whole with many dimensions and alloys. Here the function of music is to give language for discussions in peer groups, to understand social changes in one’s life, and give symbolic expressions that sum up values and memories, to feel in touch with ourselves, and our community. (p. 2)

In this sense, any given musical expression can be seen as an offering of any given part of one’s identity, and each of these axes of identity cannot be separated from its other intersecting parts (Crenshaw, 1989). For example, it was not lost on me when during the final session, after eight weeks of exploration related to gender, power, and specifically masculinity, the first song that the boys selected to blast over the speakers was ‘Bitches Aint Shit’. However, my choice not to make any comment on this was in no way a matter of overlooking the misogyny evident in the lyrics. From an ecological perspective, I located 13-year-old Paul in context. A Yorta Yorta boy who was strongly connected to his Aboriginality and who identified as being passionate about issues of racism, Paul’s identity was bound up in the ongoing impacts and injustices of colonisation, and the strength of his culture’s resistance and survival. Throughout the program, he often spoke about his favourite rap artists, using hip-hop as a way of publicly constructing his identity. As well as being a multifaceted musical subculture rooted in unpacking racial injustice, hip-hop has also been described as the dominant language of youth culture (Akom, 2009), and has been used as a form of liberatory praxis in classrooms (Kruse, 2016b), Black feminist activism (Brown, R. N., 2013; Durham, Cooper & Morris, 2013), and queer-affirmative musicking (Kruse, 2016a). Marc Lamont Hill (2009) specifically describes how hip-hop identification is an important resource for young Black students in colonised institutions such as schools.

In this sense, Paul’s song selection can be understood as a “refurnishing” activity (DeNora, 2013, p. 49), a way of claiming his place and identity in the space, and establishing his “sense of me” (Ansdell, 2014, p. 135). ‘Bitches Ain’t Shit’ certainly did not challenge stereotypes that persist across media and academia about hip hop as a genre that perpetuates misogynistic and homophobic narratives. However, as Adam Kruse (2016a) points out, “painting hip-hop subculture, and particularly its music, with this reductionist brush misses
out on a more complex understanding of these issues” (p. 103). Shimeles, (2010) notes how such a view positions hip-hop (and by association Black urban culture) as the underlying cause of these issues, rather than analysing how the genre exists within a broader culture of misogyny and homophobia.

**Experimenting with identity**

A topic explored in depth in the literature on the sociology and ecology of music, is how music enables us to perform our identities, not only as a reflection of who we are, but also who we could be (Ansdell, 2014, p 135). In the room that day, the boys were constantly performing and building their musical identities. John and Paul both identified as drummers in their varying ways. John revelled in his expertise as “a drummer”, showing off for the others, demonstrating both his own mastery and his prosocial relational skills in teaching Paul a beat. Meanwhile, Paul revealed that he was a ‘learning’ drummer, which he clearly took pride in, connecting this identity with his father’s expression of support. Mahmoud, who was often on the outer of the group, was excited to invite the others to “rap battle”, something I expect he did in hope of instigating something he thought the others would respect. Indeed, this caught Josh’s attention, a participant who had self-identified as a rapper throughout the project. Frank, the confident, smooth, and charismatic unofficial leader of the group continued to play out this identity in learning a pop song.

The gendered signifiers that are enacted when musicking, such as boys playing stereotypically masculinised instruments, or expressing preference for a genre such as rap, can also be experimented with, as Bain et al.’s (2016) queer music therapy model suggests. If we consider identity to be a process of becoming, and understand music to be a site of identity that is fully engaged in processes of identification, then we can indeed appropriate music for this very purpose. As an example, in this context, the act of singing together as a group signified an experimentation with the limits of hegemonic masculinity. There is little about the act of singing an emotional and lyrical melody such as Justin Bieber’s ‘Love Yourself” together that adheres to the kind of hegemonic masculinity that is upheld and policed in Australian schoolyards and classrooms (see Martino, 2003; Connell, 2005; Robinson, 2005). Indeed, singing is an act which is subject to deeply gendered discourses, though rarely examined in music therapy literature (see Rolvsjord & Halstead, 2013). In fact, over the eight weeks we had spent musicking in various ways, the boys had never used their voices to sing together. Using the voice as an instrument to sing, particularly at an age where the voice may be rapidly changing in tone and range, can be a particularly vulnerable
experience for early adolescent teenage boys (Palkki, 2015). And yet, with Frank’s lead, the boys did so that day. Frank was the only member who had occasionally sung in the group, and indeed he identified as a singer. It was intriguing then, to examine the context of this identity, and what led to almost all of the boys coming together to sing the last of ‘Love Yourself’.

A highly charismatic, popular, proud Samoan 13-year-old boy, Frank was often positioned (by himself, his peers and the staff) as a ‘ladies man’. In fact, he described himself to me as “very romantic”. Frank was also very short, a slim build, and later than his peers to hit puberty. The interactions between Frank and Josh described in the previous chapter often centred on Josh targeting Frank by pointing out these characteristics – enacting an intersection of racism and emasculation in calling Frank a “garden gnome”. He was the smallest boy on the rugby field every lunch time, and within a peer group, family, and broader community that strongly identified with a highly masculinised rugby culture, I was interested to observe how Frank dealt with his positioning. Perhaps Frank’s strong identification with being a “ladies man” assisted him in shoring up his masculinity in this context, in that his sexuality was less likely to be questioned. However, Frank was also proud to deviate the conventions of hegemonic masculinity, and his popularity seemed to enable him to do so. He identified openly as romantic, he cared about what the girls around him thought of him, he preferred melodic pop music over rap, and he sang expressively. During our previous songwriting sessions in which we explored “what it means to be a man” (see Appendix N), Frank had led the discussion, problematising stereotypic notions of what men should look like, and often first to point out that height should not determine a man’s “inner strength”. Frank was, in many ways, a crucial figure for the group’s exploration of masculinity. This was again enacted during this final session, in which Frank’s willingness to sing Justin Bieber’s pop ballad offered an opportunity for all of the boys to experiment with a less intensely masculine way of musicking.
Music Builds and Repairs Relationships

Data Story

Part One

The six girls and I sit in a circle, on the floor of the music room; it is our first group session. Several weeks ago one of these girls had punched another in the face at school, and the words “[NAME] is a slut” were written on the walls of the toilet.

I start off the session by asking them to choose some background music to play through the speakers in the room. They choose an R&B pop song from 2000, ‘Seven Days’, by Craig David, which I know well.

“So let me get this straight – we’re doing a music group so you can get us to stop bitching about each other?” one of the girls, Amelia, directs at me immediately. “Suits me, we get to skip class”, Ivy replies, sighing as she lays down on her back, putting headphones in her ears. There is a scattered energy amongst them. Some are talking over the top of each other, laughing, some rolling their eyes at each other, some sitting in silence, watching me with eyebrows raised, or avoiding my eye contact completely.

“Does anyone know what the word ‘improvising’ means?”, I ask. I explain that this is what we are going to do; to play together, using the percussion instruments I had placed in the middle of the circle. “There are no right or wrong notes”, I tell them. “The only rule is that we have to start in silence, and end in silence”.

Almost all of the girls pick up an instrument, play continuously for a while, continuing to talk and laugh, before tossing the instruments down again and going back to their conversations.

One girl, Aisha simply watches, before exclaiming loudly, “Oh my days you all look hilarious playing those things”. Ivy remains lying on her back with her headphones in, before pulling them out to ask, “Do we have to be here?”.

“Yeah I don’t really want to do this, this is weird”, Amelia responded. “Haha, wait, look”, she grins to the group, reaching for the instruments. She picks up a wooden stick and moves
it in and out of the hole of the guiro, raising her eyebrows up and down. The other girls scream with laughter.

**Figuring out the girls group.**

The girls group arose from difficult circumstances. Their conflict with each other was clear, and it seemed they were not particularly excited or engaged by the prospect of playing instruments together. I imagine Aisha’s comment played on the others’ insecurities about playing these unfamiliar instruments for the first time. Using her own act of musicking to remove herself from the group, Ivy and her headphones demonstrated she wanted no part in engaging with the others. DeNora (2013, p. 49) describes how these kinds of removal activities can be a form of symbolic action, which “becomes a stance and thus also a statement of rejection of the environment or some of its features”. In her text, DeNora (2013) explores how musical objects such as headphones, and behaviours like these can also be seen as a type of refurnishing (p. 50), just like Paul’s chosen hip-hop song during our final group. I looked for opportunities to engage them, to encourage them to integrate their furnishings, and to build a new space for the girls to relate to each other. In the next session I had some luck.

**Part Two**

“Hey, can I show you a video I found last night?”, I ask. We watch a video of a teenager in Canada, reading a poem about her experiences of girlhood. I pull out a big piece of poster paper and coloured pens, switching the background music back on – more early 2000s pop. “So what does it mean, to be a girl?” They go quiet for a moment. “What’s it like to be a girl, here and now?”

“Ugh, I HATE being a girl, especially in THIS school”, Amelia sighs. “Yeah there are so many rules about what we can do, and how we all have to act”, Ivy responds. Moana jumps in, “Yeah and also it’s all double standards. Just listen to what he’s saying in the song”, she gestures to the background R&B music. “Stuff about sleeping with this hot girl. But like, girls can’t say sexual things like that, can they?”. The others mostly agree.
Katherine raises her hand, “I don’t know, I think we shouldn’t be so negative. There’s no point in just complaining all the time, this is the way it is”. I begin scribing everything they say onto the poster paper:

We fill up the poster paper in only a few minutes. I take their engagement as an opportunity to pull out my iPad and open GarageBand. “It seems like everyone here is into R&B, so I thought we could come up with a beat and chord progression and start to reshape all of this into some song lyrics”. They look at me blankly, and don’t seem particularly interested in moving the discussion into musicking.

I program a beat similar to the Craig David song they’d listened to last week. Alongside the beat, I play the chords on the guitar, and sing the tune to ‘Seven Days’:
“On Monday, I took her for a drink, on Tuesda-ay…”, but I replace these with the lyrics:
“In one way, it’s hard to be a girl, in two wa-a-ys…”.
They turn to each other and scream, “OH MY GOD! You’re a singer!”

“Sing again!”, Amelia yells, grabbing a djembe and hitting it in time to her demand.
“SING – A – GAIN!” (thump thump thump)
“Yeah! Sing!”. They start to chant, beating the drums together,
“SING! SING! SING!”
I’m flooded with relief, having found something musical they seem interested in. Ivy tells me, “I’m a singer too you know!”, and the others all nod. “Yeah she’s really good”, Katherine says. Channelling this excitement, we get to work on the song. As we progress with the lyrics, there is heated discussion about whether the girls’ experiences can be described as sexism, or “just the way it is”. But they all agree on a range of expectations they feel is implicit in the identity of ‘girl’. We open verse one with the words, “There’s a number of things expected of girls”.

**Expected of Girls**

**Verse 1**

There’s a number of things expected of girls  
Don’t sound so fair to me when we’re supposed to run the world  
Think I’m a stereotype, like I’m blonde dumb and weak  
“Social media addicts” this “attention that I seek”  
Like I save my time and energy just for guys?  
No we’ve gotta get it straight, cos it’s us who’s on the rise  
Don’t make assumptions, expectations, reiterations make it look like  
Girls get sad, and girls get mad about things other than, the boys around them

**Verse 2**

But we’re looked at like we're just a piece of meat  
Told that boys will only like us if our bodies are elite  
When we can run or lift something you all act so surprised  
But I can do more than just be stared at with these thighs  
So stop staring all the time like when I’m at the gym  
Cos I’m not judging my body and I’m not looking at him  
Do what I like with my body, dress it up or dress it down  
Cos we can all have different skin and wear a different crown

**Bridge:**

And I wanna be  
A strong woman in the world  
Independent and loving, a role model  
For my kids if I have them and for all of the girls  
I wanna be confident, and fearless
Have the courage to be kind
Not judged for my body, so I will work on
Not judging others I find

Music in relationships, music as relationships.

This data story presents an account of how music provided scaffolding for the girls to connect with each other. Ansdell (2014) writes about these relational qualities, “Musicking is connecting: tone with tone; tone with person; person with person; place with tone with person… and so on, in a spiralling web of relationships” (p. 139). His perspective draws on Small’s (1998) ecological perspective of the role of music, which proposes that the relationships we establish when musicking together are central to the meaning of the act of musicking itself; that musicking is a relationship (p. 13). In an interview with group member Amelia, we delved into this discussion, as she described the way the group shifted her relationships with the other girls:

Elly: So what was your experience of the group like?
Amelia: I liked the music bit, that was pretty good, like what we wrote, cos it’s true.
Elly: Tell me about how the music bit fit into it for you?
Amelia: I feel like it was better. I felt, like it helped us more, cos when we played the instrument, we all combined to play one tune. I feel like it was better.
Elly: Than what?
Amelia: Than just sitting there.
Elly: What about if we had just talked about it?
Amelia: Talked about what?
Elly: Like for example, we did a bit of talking about problems that affect you guys, but then we also wrote a song about it. What was the difference?
Amelia: I feel like the song is better. Like, more people will want to do music than just talking. And like, if you have a song, more people will hear it, instead of you having to tell your story to every single person. The song tells it to anyone who wants to listen.
Elly: What about the act of you guys actually writing and singing it?
Amelia: I liked it. Because we got to write the song. Like you didn’t just write it. Like, we put our ideas down and then you made it better cos we didn’t really know what to put it in, we just knew what to say. Um, and then…
Elly: So how much ownership do you feel like you had over it?
Amelia: I felt like a lot. Cos we all made it. I don’t feel like just one person made it. I feel like we all did, so it was better.

**Musicking together: profoundly simple.**

Amelia raised an important notion in her interview around the depth and profundity of meaning afforded when musicking together, which she describes in reference to the songwriting process. Her words reflect a sense of simplicity, as though playing music together had been natural and easy, despite the reality of how the group had begun. This is also significant because music is complex, particularly in a school context where musicking often speaks to a “tidy categorization of skills”, and draws upon only a narrow range of White, middle class identities, which these girls may not have been able to relate to (O’Toole, 2009, p. 299). Although none of the girls had initially identified as musicians, or even as interested in music, Amelia reflects on the group almost as though they were a band. Describing what it meant to music together, she distinguishes musicking from the shared experience of “just sitting there”, and the evocative power of their song, as opposed to having to “tell your story to every single person”. Ansdell (2014) refers to this distinction, “How musicking can afford this depth and complexity of relationship without recourse to words is especially important for people who for a variety of reasons have significant problems connecting and communicating with others” (p. 140).

The process of writing, recording, and playing their group song together, written based on the girls’ own lived experience, moved away from music as an individualised practice, or an institutionalised performing art form, and into a new way of relating together. My interview with Amelia continued, and I chose to ask her explicitly about the fractured relationships that had contextualised her place in the group:

Elly: What was it like for you, to be with a group of girls who’ve had so many fights and so much tension?
Amelia: I feel like we’ve become closer. Like, I’ve definitely… I definitely have come a little bit closer with Moana, like I can at least say hi to her in the yard. Before she’d just make me angry, I’d just want to hit her, but this time I can say hi to her in the yard. Elly: What do you think did that? What do you think changed that?
Amelia: The group. Cos we were all together. And we like, had to talk, and put our points across.
Hearing that Amelia felt “closer” to the girls after the group was intriguing, and I wanted to find out more about what had helped reshape these relationships. I continued, initially avoiding asking directly about whether music had played a role in this, instead trying to clarify what she meant by being “all together”:

Elly: How did that compare to regular class? Or like, just being in the school yard?
Amelia: Better. Cos you’re in a smaller space yeah? And you’re like together, so it’s easier to talk like that. Because normal space, normal classroom, you just walk past each other. But we just was DOING it, just there. And we were writing stuff down and making music and stuff.
Elly: Do you think making music played into, like talking about these issues that you all clearly cared about?
Amelia: I think because we all wanted to put our points across, but I feel like music brings more happiness, than just talking. So I feel like we were all getting our points across, and we were more happier, not just being, “I don’t like this” and “I don’t like that”.

In unpacking how music affords connection between individuals, Ansdell (2014) refers to the tonal relationships as the “intimate connectors of a musical ecology” (p. 140). He describes the complexity of how pitches connect across horizontal and vertical planes, to afford a qualitatively unique experience for each person connecting with the other. This ecological mode of communication is not simply about transmitting information. The experience of musicking with others is a much more complex, messy, and non-linear process. It is relational and dynamic, where we communicate information with one another by sharing a presence, and recognising each other’s embodied personhood. However, what is important to note here, is that rather than experiencing or perceiving this phenomenon intellectually, “our lived understanding of this comes naturally” (p. 142). The way Amelia describes the role of music in supporting the girls to build a sense of connection between each other speaks to this embodied quality: “when we played the instrument, we all like combined to play one tune”. She describes just “DOING it”, almost as though the ‘it’ couldn’t be explained. It is possible that “doing it” was about embodying new roles alongside each other, which assisted to repair the engrained and socially prescribed roles they had previously known. It is also possible that “doing it” was recognising the issues that affected their lives, as well as each
other’s shared experiences; finding new ways to relate and “get our points across” about these experiences.

**Co-subjectivity and intersubjectivity.**

Ecological perspectives on how musicking supports relationship-building are also informed by DeNora’s (2000) concept of ‘co-subjectivity’. This notion stems from the affordances of music in generating emotional contagion: when a person’s emotional experience triggers similar emotions in others, and a group of people experience something together outside of themselves (Egermann & McAdams, 2013). Co-subjectivity characterises how individuals who are focused on a common object of attention (music) enter a state of powerful and empathic shared connection. Sociologist Randall Collins (2004) relates to this concept when describing what makes attending a concert a vastly significant experience compared to listening to a recorded piece of music at home. “It is the experience of belonging to a focused crowd”, he writes. “The main experience of the pop concert is the mood of the other fans; this is a textbook case of mutual buildup of emotion through bodily feedback in all its modalities” (p. 59).

Part two of the data story, in the second session of the girls group, offers an example of a moment of co-subjectivity when I sang a well-known song and revealed my musical identity as ‘a singer’. In sharing this experience of surprise and glee together, it seemed as though the girls were brought closer. Related is the concept of intersubjectivity, referring to a more active type of communication between people, which then leads to an increased reflexive and empathic awareness of them (DeNora, 2000, p. 149). Vuoskoski, Clarke and DeNora’s (2017) description below points to how something as seemingly simple as hearing somebody sing, could shift a relational dynamic:

To put it somewhat simplistically, if I witness the same emotionally moving music as you, and if I believe that you and I have both been moved by it (i.e. that we have had an empathic experience), this then may cause me to feel drawn into an intersubjective relationship with you. (p. 15)

Ansdell (2014) suggests these two terms should be considered along a continuum, reflecting on how the potential to share a co-subjective response to music is “preparatory” (p. 155) to our capacity to relate to each other *intersubjectively*. Reflecting on my own personal experience, I recall the shift that seemed to occur when I sang to the tune of the Craig David
song in the second session. Not only had witnessing me transform an aspect of their discussion into music caught their interest, it was as though it had shifted how they were prepared to see me, as something different to another adult in charge of a classroom.

Although Amelia’s reference to her shift in relationship with Moana (i.e. no longer wanting to “hit her”) might not quite be considered an empathic shared connection, it does reflect a shift to now acknowledging Moana’s personhood. While Amelia’s reflections in her interview did not refer to any specific moments of relatedness that occurred in the actual group, again and again she refers to the shift in their relationships. Using her own language, she exemplified how musicking allowed the girls to build a new type of relationship, based on what they had shared in the group: “…we all combined to play one tune. I feel like it was better”.

Music Transforms, Expresses, and Validates Emotions
Data Story

“What was the best part of the group for you?”, I ask John during his one-on-one interview at the end of the project. He responds immediately, “Music. The music.”

“Why’s the music good?”
“It calms me down easily.”
“How does it do that do you reckon?”
“I just let all my anger out on the drum kit, that’s why I love it so much. That’s why like, I play it. Cos like when I play it at home they tell me to shut up. It’s funny as.”

Unlike most of the other boys, John doesn’t have any issues with expressive language, and he chats away easily during our interview, for over an hour. I ask him how he’d like to be represented and described in my research, and he responds, “Do you know I’ve got one kidney? I’m going to die when I’m 20”. “WHAT?” I exclaim, and he laughs, “Just joking... How long do you survive when you have one kidney?”. I tell John I have no idea, and ask him if there’s anything else he’d like to say, to introduce himself in the research. He pauses.

“My parents are from Samoa, I was born in Australia, I’m a 13-year-old kid, and I like to play drums. That’s how you do it, Miss.”
John paints vivid pictures of his experiences across the spaces and structures he finds himself in – school, home, church, McDonald’s – intermingling laughter and jokes with thoughtful questions and painful memories that hang heavy in the air. “So why do you reckon you were in the group?”, I enquire. With each question I ask, he opens up an entire world.

“I’ve got a bit of a mental issue. Sometimes I get really angry, for like no reason. But then I learned how to calm myself down. Now I just laugh. Used to be straight away SMACK! [John punches his fist hard into his other hand]. Cos like my whole family’s mental. My two older brothers are mental [John laughs], but they learned to let it out in the boxing ring. My brother right, he used to be a drug addict. He used to like, hit girls. He takes me out every weekend to the movies, with his girlfriend. I used to see him hit his girlfriend, I was scared as...”

There is silence for a moment.

John continues, “Bobuq told me he likes being around fighting and violence. But I don’t. It brings up memories, of my brother. You gotta wait until he hits you first. He told me, ‘John, don’t be like me. Be better than me’, but I don’t know if I can. Cos he gets paid $30 an hour now! Miss, is getting $30 an hour good?”

Our conversation then moves back to his experience in the group. “So, you said before that the music was the best part of the group for you”, I ask, “Can you tell me more about what that was like?”

“It felt like freedom when I was playing the drums.”

“It felt like freedom when I was with my boys, no teachers, no nothing. We’d just all have a chat, have a laugh. A little bit of a laugh. Play instruments together. I felt it, cos like, I never got time to spend with the boys. Cos we’re always too busy doing work, and we can’t speak to each other, cos each time we speak to each other we laugh. And when we laugh loud, the teachers come down and give us detention, or time out. And then we stop. And when we came to you we started speaking a lot. As you can tell, yeah? We started speaking a lot, and yeah.”

I reflect this back to him, “So, was it like a chance for you guys to... to bond?”
Music is transformative. Is music magic?
The way 13-year-old John described music was evocative and powerful, especially because he integrated these descriptions with deeply moving stories of his life. He referred to music as a solution to his “mental issue”, a mechanism to resolve the many challenges he navigates. This kind of language was not uncommon with the participants, who often reflected on the potential for music to drastically transform their emotional state. As Amelia reflected, “music brings more happiness”. Another participant in the boys’ group, Luka, referred to his emotional response to music in conjunction with his relationships, “I heard music, I like music, and I heard other voices, like my brother’s, and my friends. And it made me feel calmer”.

So what is the role of music in these significant emotional transformations? For boys who declare they have issues keeping their anger under control, who recognise how quickly they can lose control of their temper, to state that simply by hearing music, they feel calm? Andsell (2014) and DeNora (2013) have played a pivotal role in unpacking the tempting explanation that music itself did these things. This is an explanation that both aligns with the kind of language utilised by the young people, and might even be more convincing or straightforward when thinking about the implications for music therapists and their role in psycho-educational spaces. However, a context-driven, critical, ecological approach begs deeper consideration. This approach, critically informed by Small (1998) contends that music itself does not have a magical power to change our emotions, to ‘make’ people calm, or grant people happiness. Rather, the role of music “shows up between people, within situations, and about specific local needs and possibilities.” (Ansdell, 2014, p. xvi)

This shift in perspective does not seek to invalidate the young people’s experiences, nor argue that music is not powerful or transformative. Instead, it demands a greater focus on context, and on the prominent affordances of music, within space and time, that engender these radical shifts in emotion (DeNora & Ansdell, 2017, p. 239). Indeed, the emotionally transformative potential of music is well documented, even in the literature that takes an anthropological or ecological perspective, rather than a mechanistic perspective. Scholars have documented a continuum of emotional states we can enter in music, from the enhancement of one’s emotional experience (Colombetti, 2009, p. 13 as cited by DeNora,
all the way to an out-of-body *trance* state (Becker, 2004, p. 131). DeNora (2013) elucidates how we can “transform emotion” through shifting from one cognitive and/or sensory orientation and into another, when we are engaged by music, a process she describes as “musical recalibration” (p. 114). Ansdell (2014) describes the potential for people to enter emotional states of musical ecstasy, where “emotion, music, collective joy, spirituality and healing align” (p. 268). However, Ansdell contends that these states of emotional intensity are *not* directly caused by the music itself, but rather the “total event” (p. 269). This total event refers to the physiological and psychological experience, occurring within a particular sociocultural context, and often embedded in an immediate ritual. Using this idea, we can understand John’s statement about letting all of his anger out on the drums across several layers of contextual meaning.

**Why might music feel like “freedom”?**

First, we know from John’s introduction that he wants to be represented as a drummer, drawing on this musical identity as a source of mastery and achievement. This is an identity that holds particular meaning given the role he plays in other contexts, such as the classroom, which he refers to in relation to his *inability* to meet expectations. Second, I imagine that when John plays the drums, his emotional expression does not get him into trouble, as it does in other contexts. Sitting behind a drumkit, John’s emotional experience expression is not policed, his anger is not pathologised or sought to be managed. Here, any emotional pain he feels can be physically transformed into another energy, one that is sanctioned, and indeed appreciated. In the physical act of drumming, he can exert all kinds of energy, move his body, and strike objects. As Ansdell (2014) describes, instrumental play is an act of relaxing the boundaries between one’s physical and psychological self (p. 270). Contextualised by the complexities John confronts across his school and home life, we understand a little more about why “it felt like freedom” to play the drums.

A more mechanistic explanation may contend that music itself *causes* a physical release and psychological change that results in the regulation of his emotions. Indeed there are key elements associated with drumming, such as rhythmic entrainment or the melodic trajectory of what John plays along to, that invite his engagement and might induce these effects. An ecological perspective proposes, however, that these features rely on *John*, as a person, subjectively situated in context, to bring himself *towards* the musical affordance in order to enact the positive effects, rather than mechanically occurring *to* him, as a passive subject (Ansdell, 2014, p. 38).
Although this perspective dispels ideas of music as a mysterious force, it does not in any way diminish the intensity of emotion that music can afford, as a “catalytic agent” (p. 269). In their one-on-one interviews, several of the participants associated music with the expression of emotions, including John’s description of the way he released or deescalated his anger. For Ivy, a participant in the girls’ group, music did not appear to have a particularly memorable role in her experience, and she spent most of the interview reflecting on her experiences of gender expectations. However, when I asked her what role she thought music could play in exploring these concepts, she responded,

There’s different ways to show it, and I think music plays a part in it. To express our feelings in a song. Instead of just talking about it… cos like, in a song, more of your feelings are let out. You just express everything, in a song!

**Emotional validation and the politics of emotion.**

The notion of expression is important because it ties into the broader health ecologies that these young people were situated within, and the politics of emotion in these contexts. My point here is therefore not only that music can play a powerful role in expressing emotion, but also the personal context and political significance of the emotional expression itself. In this context, this meant exploring issues related to gender, power, violence, and more. Emotional expression, validation, and containment were deeply related to the kinds of questions we explored: What kinds of emotions are sanctioned under hegemonic masculinity, and which ones are forbidden? What are the expectations of femininity that code the expression of emotion?

John’s description of how he would “just let it all out” on the drums, was cased within his explanation of his family, what he was witness to, the emotional weight of his brother’s words, “John, don’t be like me. Be better than me”, and his confession that he was not confident that he could be. In this admission, we also hear how John self-pathologises his anger as “mental”, and sees his own emotional outbursts as “for no reason”. The way John speaks of his own emotional expression is reminiscent of Wayne Martino’s (2003) exploration of Australian Aboriginal boys’ expressions of anger in school. Martino proposes that the socio-political context of the school serves to construct Aboriginal boys as violent aggressors “for no reason”, rather than questioning the racialised and gendered relations and practices that their anger occurs in response to. When Ivy shared that she believes you can “just express everything in a song”, we don’t know exactly what “everything” is, though we
can make many educated guesses in the context of their lives. During 13-year-old Josh’s teary interview in which he told me about his experiences of family violence, Josh told me he felt that everything in his life was “going downhill”. When I asked him about the role of music in our groups, he told me, “Kids might have trouble saying what actually happens, so they may need to express it in a musical form”.

For the young people to regard their emotional expression as complex, too confronting, or too extreme, spoke to the politics of emotion central to the workings of school systems, where ‘emotionality’ is constructed as “the separate other to the rational business of mainstream education” (Neary, Gray & O’Sullivan, 2016, p. 250). This idea draws particularly on the work of Sara Ahmed (2004) into the power-imbued workings of emotionality in institutional spaces. Within the local context, music was often positioned hopefully by staff as a new and unique form of emotional management and regulation. For example, the year seven and eight boys’ anger were frequently described as “out of control”; as we saw in Chapter Four, Year Eight Coordinator Kamna described the girls as “really really malicious”; and Wellbeing Coordinator Dani wanted the girls to “build on their empathy”. Considering the politics of their stories, and who might or might not want to hear them, brings a new lens to Amelia’s words during her interview, when she explained what she liked about songwriting, “instead of you having to tell your story to every single person. The song tells it to anyone who wants to listen”. Given she was a participant in the year eight girls’ group which Kamna and Dani requested to shut down following Moana’s disclosure of sexual assault, it is possible that Amelia was indeed conscious of what the school wanted to listen to, and what they did not.

Interviews with these participants led me to believe they were cognisant of the dominant narratives associated with their uncomfortable, difficult, or complex expressions of emotion. Building on the findings explored in the previous chapter, Neary et al. (2016) describe how marginalised young people in schools are easily seen as “abject subjects with emotional difficulties and disturbances” (p. 251). The role of music has particular significance when reflecting on the participants’ statements about “what actually happens”, or “expressing everything in a song” through a lens of what Ahmed (2004) describes as the relationship between ‘emotions and (in)justice’. Through this lens, it is not even necessary to infer what stories or experiences the young people are referring to in order to understand the implication of having a space to express their emotions. Spaces where young people feel as though their emotional expression is valid and accepted are precious, especially for those whose stories and emotional experiences are historically not believed (such as Moana’s);
those whose anger is pathologised (as John referred to when he described himself as “mental”); and those whose identity is othered because of the trauma they have experienced (as described in the previous chapter). Ahmed (2004) summarises the transformative potential of this kind of validation:

The emotional struggles against injustice are not about finding good or bad feelings, and then expressing them. Rather, they are about how we are moved by feelings in a different relation to the norms that we wish to contest, or the wounds we wish to heal. Moving here is not about ‘moving on’, or about ‘using’ emotions to move away, but moving and being moved as a form of labour or work, which opens up different kinds of attachments to others, in part through the recognition of this work as work. (p. 201)

“Music is a Hook”

Data Story

The final bell calling the students back into class after lunch has just gone, and I am walking back to my office. I notice Kamna striding over the basketball court towards two students who haven’t returned to class. They are both in the year eight boys group, Ale and Mo. Ale is to my left, swinging his backpack around and around above his head, while his classroom teacher shouts at him from the doorway. To my right, Mo is kicking the overflowing bin over and over. Flavoured milk cartons topple out; chip packets float onto the ground. Kamna is their Year Eight Coordinator, and she is now standing between them trying to negotiate their return back to class. “Ale, that better be your bag and not someone else’s! Put it down and go inside with Mr. P”. “Mo, can you stop what you’re doing to the bin? You don’t want to get in any more trouble this week do you?”. Mo doesn’t even look up.

As I’m watching, I realise that while kicking the bin, Mo is singing a well-known song, White Winter Hymnal by the Fleet Foxes. “I (KICK) was following the, I (KICK) was following the, I (KICK) was following the... ”, he sang. I walked over to him and started singing along. Kamna notices me and calls out to Ale. “Hey look Ale, Elly and Mo are singing! Why don’t we see if Elly might have some time to go do some music with the two of you?” , she looks at me pleadingly, and I nod. Ale sticks his middle finger up at his classroom where he is supposed to be, and jogs over to me, “Sucked in Mr. P, I’m going to music!”
Kamna mouths “thank you” to me and heads back to her office, and Ale, Mo and I walk down to the music classroom. Ale knows the song too. “I was following the, I was following the, I was following the...”, we all sing, in time with our footsteps.

I look up the chords to the song and position my computer on top of the piano, but Ale sits at the piano and starts to play the chords, without even looking up. I pick up a guitar and start strumming along in the same key, singing along too. Ale’s hands move up and down the keys, his eyes closed, head tilted back, with a grin on his face, and I work to keep up with him. Mo, who doesn’t consider himself a musician, looks at us with an expression that is difficult to read, before turning away and kicking Ale’s bag on the ground, just like the bin.

I put the guitar down and pull the conga drum and a djembe over. “That’s the beat!”, I tell Mo. “Can you keep us in time? Play the one that you think sounds best”. Mo starts drumming along on the conga. We all sing it together, and I notice them both reading the lyrics to the more wordy verses of the song up on my computer screen. I’m surprised by this as I’ve been told both Ale and Mo avoid reading entirely because they have very low literacy. “Shall we record it?!” I ask them.

We spend the whole period on this song – White Winter Hymnal – standing and seated by the piano. We try out different instruments, arrange who will play which part, and learn the harmonies. I press record:

“HI! My name is Mo!”, he shouts enthusiastically into the computer. Ale plays a rising swell on a cymbal, before starting to tap a beat on the conga. I enter with a soft fingerpicking pattern on the opening chord, and Mo beatboxes along. I begin singing the verse,

“I was following the, I was following the,
I was following the pack, all swallowed in their coats
With scarves of red tied ‘round their throats...”

As the first verse nears its end, the melody rises higher, building in tension, and we all pause on the final G chord, before re-entering the next verse. Ale enters on the piano with a dramatic flourish, and Mo is playing the conga now, while still beatboxing. The words begin
again, and this time Ale and Mo both sing with me, starting off in a joking voice. The melody is very high and uncomfortable in their range.

“I was following the, I was following the,”, they screech.

I continue to sing the words, not reacting to their joking tone, and immediately they adjust and start to sing with me, even though it is in a difficult register of their voices (and mine). We sing through the verse and enter the instrumental section. The chords cycle through, while I repeat the “Oooh” riff. To my surprise, Ale and Mo begin to ad lib:

Mo calls out, “I’m doing this for everyone!”
Ale continues, “Shoutout to all my homies out there!”
“Shoutout to PJ!”

I continue strumming the chords and singing the “oooh” riff. The boys join me on the “ooohs”, before verbally ad libing again, this time moving between English and Samoan. I open out to an “ah” sound underneath them. We haven’t decided how long this section will go for, but somehow Ale and I enter the verse together at the same moment, this time a cappella.

Ale and I sing the words, in harmony. Mo joins us for a moment, before singing the melody with Samoan words. As we get to the tricky high section, they stop singing and start to laugh, and again start wailing in the high-pitched voices.

I continue with the words, and on the very last line, they join me again. We end the song with our voices alone, in harmony, sustaining the last note until a moment of silence. At that point, Mo yells out, “HELLO!”, Ale bashes several chords loudly on the piano, Mo hits the congas, and they fall over each other laughing.

**Why use music?**

This data story speaks to the opportunities musical participation affords for engagement, in ways that foster and strengthen young people’s resources, and work against discourses of deficit. Drawing on research from neuroscience, education, psychology, and musicology, a wealth of research has demonstrated the beneficial outcomes of active music-
making on young people’s intellectual, social, and personal development (Hallam, 2015). Although this impromptu afternoon session with Ale and Mo didn’t touch on any of the issues we were exploring in the group around masculinity, emotions, and power dynamics, I have included this story to portray the possibilities for (re)engagement, motivation, and the significance of these affordances in this context.

There appears to be a relatively well-accepted belief in educational spaces that music is an enjoyable and motivating medium for young people, so it was not surprising to me when Kamna encouraged the boys to join me for “some music”. This could be based on the extensive research into the links between music and non-musical abilities (Schellenberg & Winner, 2011); intelligence (Shellenberg, 2011); psychosocial functioning (Rickard et al., 2012); or more pop-psychology understandings of the ways music can stimulate the brain seemingly magically, such as the ‘Mozart effect’ (Helding, 2014). Alternatively, it was possible that Kamna was drawing on her own personal experiences of the ‘power of music’. Or, perhaps she was aware that both of these boys were deeply embedded in musical cultures with their church community, family, and friends, and hoped this would motivate them to engage. It is also possible that Kamna simply saw an opportunity to extricate the boys from the trouble they were causing in that moment, or to keep the boys out of their respective classrooms where they would likely continue to cause trouble for their teachers.

**Ale and Mo in context.**

Having come to know and work with Mo and Ale for some weeks by then, there was no denying that they were students who were difficult to manage in a highly regulated institutional space. At the time, Mo was on his ‘final strike’ at the school, after physically pushing a teacher the previous week by accident. The school speech pathologist had informed me that Mo had a language disorder, and I sensed he had multiple other cognitive processing issues. I had observed how difficult his expressive and receptive language issues made it for him to participate in school. How he would become extremely frustrated during conversations, or ignore people completely when they spoke to him (such as when Kamna eluded to the potential consequences that might arise from him continuing to kick the bin). Ale on the other hand, was quite talkative and responsive, and he was known in the school as a “gifted” musician. Ale was diagnosed with ADHD and an intellectual disability, and he got easily distracted, disengaged, and described going from “0 to 100” – swearing, fighting, storming off the rugby field and out of class. When I interacted with Ale, Kamna’s voice often reappeared in my mind, after she had told me that Ale’s mother was “an utterly
hopeless mum”. When the staff spoke in their interviews with me about students who “probably wouldn’t make it”, who were “stuck” in this age group with little avenues for alternative options, or who we had “Buckley’s chance” of adequately helping, these were the kinds of students I believed they meant. Indeed, when I heard about their home lives, their diagnoses, their involvement with Child Protection authorities, I too felt myself positioning these boys within the victim narrative and risk discourses that I described in the previous chapter.

**What does musicking require?**

It was unsurprising for me to learn that neither Ale or Mo were engaging particularly well in the music curriculum, but not because I didn’t realise they were highly musical young people. I assumed their inattention, angry outbursts, and poor marks in the music classroom might be related to their diverse learning needs, their disinterest in the material, the highly regulated nature of classroom style learning, and the ways these issues may converge with music curriculums that remain “under the influence of lingering colonialism” (Bradley, 2006, p. 2). So how was it that during the hour or so that Ale, Mo, and I spent together learning and recording White Winter Hymnal, they were such active, focused, and capable participants? They attended to the one task for the entire hour, in the same spot. From a cognitive perspective, both of the boys were processing an enormous amount of information, having to engage similar auditory analysis skills used in language processing (which for Mo may have been incredibly demanding) (Hallam, 2015, p. 35). They were utilising receptive language skills, following verbal instructions (in a language that I anticipated was not the primary language they speak at home), and simultaneously, utilising complex cognitive and sensorimotor functions required to sing and play a range of instruments.

Hallam (2015, p. 61) summarises the research on the higher order executive functioning and self-regulation skills required to play in a musical ensemble, such as the conscious control of actions, thoughts, and emotions, planning and ignoring irrelevant information, inhibiting automatic responses, and the capacity to adjust to continually changing demands. The demands of active music-making on our cognitive flexibility and sustained attention alone are remarkable for each and every one of the participants involved in the project. They are particularly striking when we consider the context the boys were embedded in, and the information above about Ale and Mo, whose presence at school was characterised by a multitude of learning needs based on disorder, dysfunction, disability, and the associated literacy, numeracy, and emotional and behavioural issues. What I suggest here is that the
musical affordances that made it possible for the boys to participate using the strengths and resources they *did* have, also shaped an environment in which they were more confident to *continue* participating, even with skills that may be more difficult in other environments, (such as reading the lyrics to the song). When I interviewed Luka in the year seven boys’ group, who also had a language disorder, he told me:

I could understand what we were doing in our group. And like, in normal class when they’re trying to explain something, I don’t really understand what they’re trying to say, so yeah.

I enquired about why Luka felt as though he could understand more, and hence engage in our group, and he told me:

Cos like, I understand cos like my friends were there, and we did the same activities. That’s how I could understand what we were trying to do. Cos if I didn’t understand it they’d explain to me, a lot shorter, and then like when I don’t really get it they’d play the drums. And then after the drums, they’d put them down and ask me if I understand then, and I’d be saying yes. And after that we’d do more drumming and stuffs. And that’s how I could understand, cos of music.

Although he summarises that it is simply “cos of music”, Luka’s response actually unpacks how “understanding” was not only made possible by utilising different cognitive processes, but how “understanding” was situated in the context of the relational, sensory, and embodied experience. The value here lies not in knowing whether or not Luka actually comprehended more in our group than in regular class, but in how he felt valued and included in the experience.

*Ale and Mo’s musical resources.*

Ale was an exceptionally skilled musician; able to pick up the guitar or piano and attune aurally to the key of a song and subsequently figure out the chord progression (which I had to look up). While he did not formally ‘play’ any instruments, Mo also participated in the session with a high level of technical skill, maintaining a complex two-handed beat on the congas, while simultaneously beat boxing. Both Ale and Mo were at times self-conscious about their singing voices, which became particularly apparent when the song required them
to stretch to the very top of their range. And yet, they sang in key, made adjustments to their pitch throughout (indicating a high level of aural perception), and even harmonised with my melody.

From an ecological perspective, they were able to engage in musicking at such a high level that day not because the music worked a ‘magic power’ on the boys, somehow suspending the cognitive challenges they face in the classroom, but because Ale and Mo brought themselves ‘towards’ the affordances of music. Just like John’s emotional transformation when he played the drums, Ale and Mo’s engagement could be seen as the result of the ‘total event’. This total event can be unpacked from multiple standpoints, including the function of music within their cultural identities. Their high level of musicianship spoke to their familiarity with an aural musical culture, and the cultural resources the boys both draw on in the diasporic context, where music functions as a key site for developing and maintaining cultural connection (see Stige, 2002). Within the racialised Australian school context, it is also crucial to consider the cultural dimensions of Ale and Mo’s musicking, where aural traditions of singing and drumming serve not only as a means of connecting to culture, but of reconnecting to a cultural history in which the aural experience is regarded with respect and value (see Cooper et al., 2015).

Given their technical level of musicality, I imagine both Ale and Mo had had active engagement with music during their childhoods, which is shown to produce structural changes in the brain, develop the auditory cortex and neural auditory skills (Hallam, 2015, p. 11). Ale was certainly recognised for his remarkable musicianship among staff, and I saw this as a genuine attempt to recognise his strengths and cultural identity. However, these attempts were grounded in an incongruency that I wish to highlight. While Ale’s family was seen as “hopeless”, his musicality was esteemed and inadvertently positioned as a “gift”, rather than a result of his familial and cultural ecology. The fact that their musical skills were aurally learned and did not translate into academic achievement also likely plays a role in this incongruency. In arguing the ways Western music education delineates these kinds of music skills, Spruce (1999) wrote,

Children who do not possess high linguistic and logico-mathematical skills, but who may nevertheless possess pure musical skills, are unlikely to be successful in such a music curriculum model and therefore be, once more, labelled as failures. (p. 77)
These understandings build into the previous chapter’s analysis, which revealed how readily the students’ families and cultural community were blamed for the difficulties they had at school. Where classroom music under these conditions may risk further instances for young people to be positioned as failures, opportunities for musical engagement that are strengths-based and participatory, rather than outcome-oriented, are increasingly valuable.

**Musical engagement: “It’s kind of like fishing”**.

Although Ale and Mo were not interviewed during the project, the notion that music has unique affordances for engagement arose in several interviews (and indeed can be noticed across all of the narratives in this chapter). Because of how 13-year-old Josh had participated on the sidelines of the year seven boys’ group, it was surprising to me when I asked him how he would describe what we were doing in the group, and he responded,

> It’s kind of like fishing. You hook them in and then once they’re up and playing with the bongoes and whatnot, when you write raps, they think, “Oh cool, we’re doing something new and we’re doing something exciting”. You give them the topic, and they write about it, and then they see the message, and it’s getting through to them. Like “Oh, this is actually a real problem. This is actually something that’s happening in the world”.

The notion that music is a ‘hook’ is a profound metaphor for the unique affordances of music in engaging people, and how these affordances occur in ecological context. Playing with Josh’s metaphor further, we might imagine the ocean to be the sociocultural world that each of the young people are embedded in and positioned by. Not every type of fish will be attracted to the same type of bait, nor is there only one type of fishing rod and tackle for all conditions. In fact, every fishing activity requires thoughtful consideration of the conditions, the water, the weather, the most suitable bait for the fish aiming to be caught, the right tackle. And still, even if music is the ‘hook’ (or perhaps the bait on the hook), its participants are still required to use their own agency to move towards the bait, rather than being inadvertently snagged. Although Josh’s description speaks to a slightly less agentic and empowering process for the participants than I might describe, I believe what he is articulating here are the affordances of music to engage us actively; music creates conditions for an experience that is “always situated, embodied, holistic and interactive” (Ansdell, 2014, p. 61). Just like fishing involves many factors – the ocean, the fish, the right conditions for the person to go fishing,
the bait, and the tackle – engagement in music operates at the intersection of the whole person in context. This includes, but is not limited to, their sensation, cognition, perception, social and cultural identity, and the broader socio-political environment.

During my final days at the school, Ale asked if we could do music one lunch time because he had been in trouble all morning, and he wanted to calm down. I asked him if he’d like to write his own song, and he agreed. We spent the session writing a song that articulated how music was a resource in his complex life, and how it served his personal and social identity. The song was based on his experience forming and participating in a band, which he was now the leader of. This time, Ale played the guitar, and I accompanied on piano. Ending this chapter, I present the lyrics to Ale’s song, which speak to each of the themes presented throughout the chapter. Ale refers to the ways music connects to his identity (for example, “in the band, I’m the leader”); how he formed and developed relationships with music (“it’s about the connection we have found”); his emotional expression in music (“I’m the calm one now”); and the engaging, participatory nature of music (“I’ve got talent”).

Ale’s Song

Verse 1:
We started in primary school,
Back when we were young
And we had a band,
All about family and love

Verse 2:
We named it ‘Culture-licious’,
From our different backgrounds
Cos we’re from all over,
But it’s about the connection
We have found

Chorus:
Sometimes, I can be trouble
The bad boy, the sad boy
But in the band,
I’m the leader
I’ve got talent,
I’m the calm one now,
Conclusion

This chapter has identified four broad themes to explicate how music supported the participants in this project to explore gender and power. Centring notions of context was particularly important in outlining the affordances of music, not only in aligning with my epistemological and ontological positioning throughout, but because of the findings presented in the previous two chapters. Across the chapter, I examined many seemingly simple or neutral acts of musicking. Breaking these moments down through analysis of the data stories, four overarching themes emerged in relation to the role of music in exploring gender.

First, I articulated how musicking supported the boys to express and experiment with their masculinity, in ways that were agentic and connected to their cultural identities. These findings were particularly meaningful because of how these young people had been positioned in the school, as hardened, out of control, and as victims of their families and cultural communities. Indeed, the boys’ willingness to engage in music and try out different musical identities aligned with entrenched narratives that exist in relation to music and masculinity. However, in considering identity as a process of becoming, and music as a playground for identity exploration, it was also possible to see how music can be appropriated for transgressing gender roles, and the contextual factors that allow for this.

Despite the fractured relationships that premised the Hear Girls group, and indeed the staff’s representation of them as malicious, dramatic, and in need of developing empathy, the affordances of musicking arose here in the form of relationship-building. The group created an opportunity to experience relationality in ways that were both verbal and non-verbal, where the girls could journey from “just sitting there” and into vitality, telling their story “to every single person”. In this case, the collective ‘story’ they told was about the gendered expectations they experienced, and that they sought to oppose and resist. Musicking together was based on their shared experience of ‘girlhood’, moving away from processes of individualisation and pathologisation, and into moments where the girls could enter intersubjective relationships with one another.

Through the third data story with John, I explored the profound opportunities music offers for young people to express and transform their emotional state, and the significance of emotional validation in a context where emotionality is policed by many complex forces. I explored emotional transformation in music as a ‘total event’, not only a blending a physiological and psychological experience, but one that is rooted in a specific sociocultural
context. In the context of this project, the young people at times seemed to refer to their emotional expression as *too much*; their emotions were difficult and complex, and they got them into trouble. However, in music they described an alternative experience, where they could “just express everything”. The gendered discourses surrounding emotion come into focus here, and have implications for the possibilities in music for young people to experience what it is to feel, be moved, and be heard.

Finally, I drew on a session with two young people whose identities in the school were firmly located by failure, disability, and disadvantage, to demonstrate the participatory and strengths-based qualities of music, which opened up an alternative experience. The broad range of cognitive, social and cultural capacities that Ale and Mo engaged, in order to sing and play the Fleet Foxes song that day, were not explicitly related to gender. However, the purpose of this data story was to elucidate the musical affordances that make it possible for young people such as these to participate, using the resources they already possess. Through a metaphor suggested by one of the participants, this theme explored how music can act as a hook, or bait, for young people to use their own agency to move towards. Rather than seeing only music as ‘the hook’ however, I noted how we might recognise all of the conditions that allow for music to engage young people: we must recognise the conditions of where we are fishing, the water they are swimming in, and the bait that is meaningful to them.

The affordances of music for identity work, relationships, emotions, and engagement have been explored across multiple and diverse contexts. The notion that music can create conditions in which young people find new ways to see, be seen and relate to one another is widely suggested. What my results illuminate are the relevance of these affordances when exploring gendered subjectivities, and in this context, the possibilities these affordances open up for young people located by discourses of pathology and deficit. Having recognised the function of music, I now turn specifically to music therapy. The following chapter examines the role of music therapy, unpacking new techniques and approaches discovered within the project, inspecting music therapy practice within the complexities that have arisen throughout the findings, and pointing to the implications of these findings for the music therapy discipline.
Chapter Seven

The Role of Music Therapy

Background

As the final presentation of results from the project, this chapter seeks to integrate what I have explored thus far in relation to the complex, structural violences embedded in the school context, and how processes of othering were used to represent and relate to each other in this system. Having outlined the ways music can act as a ‘hook’, in this chapter I focus on the role of the music therapist in facilitating these conditions for ‘fishing’. In the chapter, I present three key themes, commencing with a data story based on the complexities that can arise when exploring topics related to gender and power, and working with young people who have experienced violence and harm. This section outlines the role music therapy can play in reframing trauma through an anti-oppressive perspective, and the ways music therapists critically examine relational and professional boundaries. The second theme then delves into the specific expertise that anchors music therapy as a flexible and creative practice, and the skillset that emerged as particularly meaningful in this project. A data story in this section depicts several sessions with the year seven boys group to highlight these skills, and to introduce a new technique developed during the project. The third and final theme focuses on the dominant narratives related to music and power that arose during the project, and implications for music therapists seeking to explore gender with young people. As with previous chapters, each theme commences with a data story, and also draws on interview data to unpack the participants’ experiences and perspectives.

While the chapter focuses on music therapy practice, the findings have implications for a range of disciplines, including work with young people who are marginalised or have experienced harm, and work that explores issues related to gender within institutions such as schools. Specifically, a question arose related to the messy and complicated consequences of conducting this work within systems that do not fully recognise structural violence, and may not adequately support disclosures of interpersonal harm. Overarchingly, the chapter emphasises the importance of music therapists developing and applying a critical lens, in order to better understand and address violence as it occurs structurally and interpersonally. I contend that doing so requires music therapists to be mindful of multiple layers of power relations, to sensitively navigate the ways music can be positioned as variably mysterious and
powerful, and to recognise the multiple aspects of identity that emerge when exploring issues related to gender and power with young people.

**Reflexive Practice and a Critical Lens**

Data Story

It is one of my final days at South East College. I am interested to hear what Aisha has to say in her interview, which she agreed to during the final session of the girls’ group. Aisha has attended every session, but she was often distracted and spent the session cracking jokes, or making fun of the others when they participated. She often complained that the activities were weird. When we would go around the circle sharing an idea, an experience, or a musical contribution, Aisha would go silent, or roll her eyes and say, “PASS!”

In the second week, we each filled sheets of paper in response to the words, “What kind of woman I want to be”. The other girls constructed mind maps or lists, with words and phrases like, “a role model”, “I want to have the confidence to do/wear/say anything I want”, “fit”, “married” and “have courage and be kind”.

Aisha scribbled on the paper for a minute or two, before pushing it aside and declaring she was bored.

But in the school yard, she is much louder. I often notice her standing atop the lunch tables, yelling at her friends, or shouting to get teachers’ attention, then ducking to hide. I get the sense the staff see her as a troublemaker. But now is my chance to get to know Aisha a little better on her own.
As I do in each interview, I ask 14-year-old Aisha how she would describe herself, so that I can portray her in my research based on her own self-representation. She struggles to respond, laughing. “I don’t know. Oh my damn. I don’t know!”

I try to open the conversation up, clarifying that there is no right or wrong way to answer. Eventually, she sighs, “I don’t like to describe myself... NEXT.” We move on.

I ask her about music, and she tells me, stiltedly, that she most likes listening to music through headphones, on her phone, preferably 90s R&B. I ask her why she thinks we were playing music in the group, and she responds, “Cos music’s powerful. A lot of messages come out of it...”

I ask her what she thought about the messages that we explored in the group, and she tells me, “Guys in our year level, they think they can just do whatever they like. But with me, they don’t. Cos they know I’ll say something. I don’t like to be touched.”

I wait for her to go on, but Aisha sighs and then goes silent. “Mmm. That’s really powerful”, I say.

Aisha appears awkward. More silence.

Eventually, trying to be gentle and non-directive, I ask Aisha if she would like to turn the recorder off and just have a regular chat. She nods. I turn the recorder off and sit back down, positioning myself next to her, but not too close. Silence.

Aisha is looking down at the ground, I try to avoid looking at her directly, but I notice that she is teary.

“We can chat about anything you like, or we can just finish up and you can go back to class. Or we can just sit here in silence, I can do some work and you can hang out here for as long as you like.”

Silence.
“Would you like me to open the door up, or keep it closed?” I ask. “Closed”, she whispers, choked up.

“Is there something particular on your mind?” I ask. Aisha nods. I nod back, “Ok”. I sense what is coming and I try to stay calm. “Is it something you’d like me to know?”

“It’s…” Aisha is shaking. “I’ve…”

“Nobody knows”, she says finally.

“Ok. That’s ok”, I tell her. “You’re ok. I’m right here with you. You can tell me as much or as little as you like. We’ve got all afternoon”.

Aisha and I spend the next hour or so in the room, as she discloses childhood sexual abuse, and ongoing, life-threatening violence in her home. “Nobody knows”, she tells me again, about some of the information she has shared. “You can’t tell anyone”.

I try to explain the mandatory reporting procedures to her. She asks me not to tell the police.

After an hour and a half in my office, we finish up, and I ask Aisha if I can check in with her tomorrow. She agrees. “Is there anything you need right now Aisha?” I ask. “Nah, it’s all good”, she sighs. She walks out the door and into the corridor, which has now filled up with students, moving in between their classes.

**Music therapists, trauma, and critical reflection.**

Listening back to the audio of Aisha’s interview prior to my turning the recording off has been a painful experience in this research project, for a number of reasons. I chose to include this data story because it signals some important issues in this space from which I propose practitioners can reflect on and learn, as I have sought to. As Rickson and McFerran write, “Reflective practice becomes essential if we are to minimize our potential to inflict or reinforce injustices on other players that mirror what they are experiencing in wider society” (p. 27).
While I would prefer to write how my therapeutic judgment pre-empted Aisha’s disclosure from early on in the project, it would not be truthful. If I had interpreted meaning in the image Aisha drew in the second week, perhaps I would have been better prepared. But my intuitive response came only that day, half way into the interview. I would also like to be able to explore how music therapy could have supported Aisha following this day, how working together may have allowed Aisha to re-experience moments of safety, or trust. But my role with Aisha was isolated to the sessions in the girls group, and this interview, after which my project at the school ended.

I have tried to reassure myself that good therapeutic practice is not defined by a professional’s capacity to predict when these moments will arise. Key trauma literature suggests that ‘best practice’ translates to an orientation to the potential range of complex impacts that trauma has on our innermost sensations, our relationship to our physical reality (Van der Kolk, 2014), as well as how it functions to disempower victims within a social context (Herman, 2015). As music therapists, we have established an orientation to how music can unearth and acknowledge painful and unconscious material (Bunt & Stige, 2014; Odell-Miller, 2018), promote restructuring of experiences (Krüger & Stige, 2015), adopt healthy coping behaviours (Bensimon, Amir & Wolf, 2008), and foster the individual’s identity outside of the trauma (Sutton, 2002). Another aspect of music therapists’ expertise and indeed responsibility, arises in our adoption of a critical lens. This requires ongoing and reflexive consideration of the moments that have arisen in our work, the needs of the people we work with, and how the impact of trauma may reshape how we proceed (as described by Harris, 2016; Wentling & Behrens, 2018). Advocating for the role of music in creating cultural shifts towards inclusivity in schools, Rickson and McFerran (2014) articulate the importance of a critical lens:

It is useful to adopt a critical perspective when issues of power are evoked. A critical approach involves wondering about our own values and motives and engaging in consistent, ongoing, and close examination of our work to determine whether we are truly embracing the values to which we aspire. We need to consciously consider how our worldviews have been developed and shaped by society and entertain the possibility that we may be reinforcing power relationships, social dominance, and ongoing injustices. (p. 27)
Through developing a critical lens, and drawing on contemporary anti-oppressive approaches to violence and harm, I propose music therapists have an opportunity to work with young people and the systems they are embedded in, where disclosures will inevitably arise. Here, I use the data story with Aisha as an opportunity to examine what this critical reflection may look like.

**Critical reflection: A case example.**

In this case, I reflected upon key observations I had made throughout the several months I had known Aisha. From a trauma-informed perspective, aspects of her behaviour in the school met many fundamental understandings about arousal and reactivity, and the physiological basis of trauma (Van der Kolk, 1994). Her reluctant and awkward participation in the sessions themselves may well have been related to specific challenges that those who have experienced trauma may have with unpredictability and spontaneity (Herman, 2015), as well as trust, experimentation, and play (Lefevre, 2004). One of the most uncomfortable of these reflections for me, was the many times in the girls group that we had discussed issues around safety, agency, and bodily autonomy. I might see Aisha’s lack of participation through Van der Kolk’s (1988) explanation of trauma as “unspeakable terror” (p. 282), during which we experience neurochemical changes in the brain that can encode memories and associations into implicit and sensorimotor form that makes verbal expression difficult, or impossible (Perry, 2009).

However, while trauma-informed care has crucially informed shifts in the ways institutions like schools might respond to a young person’s behaviour, its limitations have been identified from a number of critical perspectives. One leading critique has emerged within postcolonial discourse, which seeks to challenge a Eurocentric trauma paradigm, and deconstruct the traditional view of trauma as a single, catastrophic event (see Andermahr, 2015; Craps et al., 2015). Drawing on these ideas, critical race/youth activism theorist Shawn Ginwright (2018) advocates for a shift from trauma informed care to ‘healing centred engagement’, emphasising how harm does not occur in a socio-cultural vacuum, nor within individual isolated experiences. From this perspective, I sought to understand Aisha’s trauma not as rooted in problems in her own neurons, but within the systems and structures who failed her. This meant resisting what anti-oppressive researcher-practitioners Cathy Richardson and Vikki Reynolds (2014) refer to as “totalising victim stories” (p. 155). Those who advocate for this paradigm shift seek to reposition survivors of trauma away from the identity of an ‘object of violence’ without agency. This requires those working with them to
actively witness their stories of resistance, and commit to being in solidarity with them (see for example Wade, 1997; Richardson & Wade, 2010; Reynolds, 2010; Andermahr, 2015).

Through this lens, I reframed Aisha’s participation in the group by considering her ‘adaptive responses’ (see Wesley-Esquimaux, 2009). I noted how she may have chosen not to contribute to our discussions as a way of protecting herself from re-traumatisation, and how she used humour to connect with the other girls and deflect from putting herself in a position in which she felt unsafe. I reflected upon Aisha declaring her agency to the “guys in our year level” during the interview, because “they know I’ll say something”. Richardson and Reynolds (2014) explicate the practice of ‘structuring safety’ with people who have experienced (interpersonal and historical) trauma. The authors emphasise that instead of focusing solely on heartbreaking stories of pain and suffering, therapists should strive for curiosity about the survivor’s acts of resistance against their suffering and oppression (p. 157). They see this approach as an act of solidarity, emphasising consent, and supporting a client to reflect on the community who is important to them – those who walk alongside them (p. 156). In this sense, structuring safety thus challenges notions of individualism which I have been referring to throughout the dissertation as inherently bound up in neoliberal logic, such as the idea that an individual teacher or school can ‘save’ struggling young people (Brown, A., 2013; Emdin, 2016).

I reflected on the ways I negotiated consent and planning during the interview with Aisha. By offering containment, choices and responding to her way of being, I endeavoured to support what Richardson and Wade (2010) describe as a relationship of dignity. Dignity is characterised in this work by reimaginging dominant processes of ‘helpfulness’, wherein obtaining the ‘story’ of a person’s trauma is positioned as the real therapeutic work (Richardson & Reynolds, 2014). Instead, these authors advocate for a process of witnessing, whereby the therapeutic relationship offers containment for suffering, and invites opportunities for the survivor’s agency and resources (Wade, 1997; Richardson & Wade, 2010; Richardson & Reynolds, 2014). A paradigm shift towards structuring safety also required me to identify the missed opportunities, and how the role of music therapy may further develop in this space. Through this lens, I reflected on the moments Aisha had offered where I might have further explored what Richardson and Reynolds (2014) describe as her “resistance stories” (p. 155). When she disclosed what she had experienced, I might have asked, “what did you do to survive?”, or “how did you arrive at this place of strength, so the boys at school know that you’ll speak out?"
Critical reflection: Trauma in schools.

It is crucial, in anti-oppressive practice, to critically examine the unjust structural conditions in which our clients’ struggles occur. In this case, Aisha’s disclosure did not occur in the context of an ongoing therapeutic relationship, but in a research interview which signalled the end of our relationship, as well as some broader tensions and issues at play in this context. The data story ends with Aisha walking out into a busy school corridor, while I sat and contemplated the options I had to support her: making a notification to Child Protection, who would likely inform the police; raising the disclosure with Wellbeing staff; and informing her teachers. All of these options required me not only to go against her will, but on a structural level, to engage with authorities and systems that have historically failed to protect vulnerable young people like Aisha, despite relying on policies that position them invariably as vulnerable (see Daniel, 2010). Looking at schools more broadly as the primary institution young people attend, while I have found a wealth of data that indicates just how many young people have endured or witnessed violence and abuse, there is a glaring lack of appropriate support in schools for young people disclosing, and a lack of support provided to schools to do this work.

In a best practice report for gender-based violence prevention with young people in schools, Fileborn (2014) points to the possibility that these programs will lead to disclosures of young people’s experiences of interpersonal harm (p. 13). Echoing these warnings, in my project I noted that roughly half of the young people I worked with at some stage mentioned their own experiences of abuse: whether this was violence they witnessed or experienced in their homes, or sexual harassment they experienced at school. While the Respectful Relationships Education resource notes that disclosures can be expected during any program that focuses on human relationships and sexuality (Ollis, 2018, p. 12), it emphasises that the program is not for managing disclosure, or “comforting students who have experienced gender-based violence” (p. 11). The curriculum encourages teachers to remind students that they are not required to disclose any personal experiences, and suggests protective interruption as a strategy to prevent a public disclosure if they feel the student “may say something inappropriate” (p. 12). Although the systemic consequences of disclosure are important for educators to consider to protect students, I question whether an avoidant/censorship approach may only further a culture of stigma and shame. Moreover, a question persisted: how can we adequately support teachers or young people to address the endemic nature of violence, when we uphold a culture of silencing? Is it sufficient to provide teachers with only these few options – to stop a student from speaking, and reporting their
families to Child Protection authorities when they do? The curriculum provides two sentences about mandatory reporting procedures (p. 12), noting that each school should have its own policies and legal procedures for dealing with disclosures. Meanwhile, there appears to be no reference as to where young people should look for “comforting”.

Following disclosures, the most common school responses for young people who have experienced violence or abuse is to report the incident, and have them attend individual counselling or psychology sessions, within the school or privately. Broader research also shows that young people are usually reluctant to seek help themselves (Gulliver & Griffiths, 2010), and for young people from non-dominant cultural groups in Australia, there is a lack of trust in professionals like school counsellors due to issues of systemic cultural insensitivity (De Anstiss & Ziaian, 2010). Fileborn (2014) emphasises the importance of creating a safe space, but describes the difficulty of achieving this in reality, the level of skill doing so requires from facilitators, and the need for understanding where to direct young people following disclosures (p. 13).

Within this context, Aisha’s teachers’ responsibilities lie in delivering curriculum content, and assessing her based on how she integrated this content academically. In fact, they are subject to increasing expectations related to the delivery of curriculum, and how their students perform, in order to keep their jobs (Chatelier & Rudolph, 2018). Understandably, Aisha’s psychosocial welfare was in the hands of the Wellbeing team, who, I gauged after discussion with Aisha and then one of the counsellors, had already reported to Child Protection after learning of her father’s violent behaviour earlier in the year. Aisha had told me that her father was already under a court protection order to not make contact with the family, but was currently living in the family home. It was the kind of situation that brought Tim’s words from Chapter Five into focus – Aisha was “falling through the cracks”. Within these complexities, I endeavoured to uncover how music therapy works to create these crucially safe spaces, and how the frameworks that underpin music therapy practice may fit into this system.

**Music Therapy Frameworks**

A paradigm shift towards reframing trauma from a structural and anti-oppressive perspective is especially congruent with Resource Oriented Music Therapy (Rolvsjord, 2010). Specifically, Richardson and Reynold’s (2014) safety structuring practices require an attendance to power dynamics, and efforts to locate and foster clients’ inherent resources and agency, within and beyond the therapeutic space. As described by Rolvsjord (2010), these are
efforts that are also central to Resource Oriented Music Therapy. I wanted to delve deeper into the theoretical underpinnings of music therapy to explore potential reasons why Aisha chose to stay in the room and disclose her experiences to me that afternoon. I sought to do so not to validate the idea that therapists are entitled to young people’s stories, or need to seek them out, but because I contend there are key affordances of music therapy in this context that have the potential to create conditions where young people like Aisha feel safe to share such information. These affordances come into focus more clearly in light of the context of young people’s disclosure in schools that I have described above.

Rickson & McFerran (2014, p. 23-24) have outlined several theoretical frameworks that equip music therapists to work in schools, and to engage with young people in ways that are inclusive and empowering, including Community Music Therapy (Ansdell & Pavlicevic, 2004; Stige & Aarø, 2012), Culture-Centred Music Therapy (Stige, 2002), and Resource Oriented Music Therapy (Rolvsjord, 2010). The emergence of music therapy as an anti-oppressive practice (Baines, 2013) anchors these tenets most explicitly, because this lens requires therapists to examine the social and political origins of our clients’ ‘personal problems’ in detail, and to amplify their voices as service users within these contexts. Importantly, all of these frameworks locate individuals within their broader political, social, and cultural ecology. Within all this lies a crucial meeting point for music therapists working in schools, given that the frameworks they are likely to adopt particularly emphasise notions of context, power, and social change. It is possible then, that music therapists may be more likely to be informed and aware of the social context of harm, abuse, and violence, more likely to adopt positions that encourage young people’s agency and resistance, and less likely to pathologise or position them in relation only to their trauma.

Disclosures and boundaries.

Critical, reflexive music therapy practice also requires acknowledging how the affordances of music that can forge and deepen relationships, can also do harm. Connie Isenberg (2012) describes the potential for harm as necessary to examine as a possibility for any practice that claims to offer good or healing: “to recognize the potency of music to do both good and harm” (p. 76). Central to these issues is the understanding that music therapists are not simply ‘benign helpers’ (Edwards & Hadley, 2007, p. 202). Instead, music therapists actively engage in the construction of what constitutes as ‘helping’, which is deeply linked to their own identity, positioning and more. Reflecting on the data story with Aisha, I pondered the ways I may have actively reproduced the dynamics Richardson and Reynolds (2014)
warn against. In assuming that I was entitled to Aisha’s story, I assumed that my knowledge would be of assistance her, because of the ways I have constructed myself as a ‘helper’. From a psychodynamic perspective, these assumptions may well reflect my own countertransference. Drawing on Isenberg (2012), these assumptions could be characterised as a failure to meet clients’ needs, or a means of serving my own.

The dynamics between therapist and client have been examined critically and reflexively and across many music therapy frameworks (see for example Dileo, 2000; Rolvsjord, 2010; Papadopoulou, 2012; Medcalf, 2016; Baines & Edwards, 2015). Predominantly, they draw on the field of psychotherapy to develop music therapy theory on how boundaries provide safety and holding for clients’ therapeutic work, and how music therapists implement them critically (Pope & Keith-Speigel, 2008) and ethically (Wheeler, 2014). During the interview with Aisha, I first sensed that her silences may have been related to the immobilising impacts of trauma, and I felt the affective intensity of what had started as an interview begin to shift dramatically. My therapeutic training orientated me towards trying to offer containment in that moment: suggesting we turn off the recording, trying to be as non-directive as possible, using my voice and positioning my body consciously, and offering choices and validation. These steps echo the literature on the ways music therapists navigate boundaries. In her doctoral research on this topics, Medcalf (2016) found that when music therapists sense an acute vulnerability arising between the therapist and client, they work to create structure within the intense experience. In regards to training, Edwards & McFerran (2004) have emphasised the importance of music therapy courses equipping students to navigate these moments. They describe how music therapy courses must address disclosures of abuse, and present current information about legislation, child welfare, and mandatory reporting procedures. Aisha telling me about the abuse she had endured as a child (and never disclosed to anybody until then) underscores this point. Being prepared for disclosures, navigating therapeutic boundaries, and ‘structuring safety’ is especially relevant for music therapists exploring gender with young people, because of the likelihood of disclosures, and the (often inadequate) systems these disclosures occur within.

**Power dynamics and disclosures in music therapy.**

As the previous chapter explored, young people use music to define and present their identity. While adolescent music subcultures can be subject to crisis-driven discourses that seek to control or trivialise their preferences and choices (Epstein, 2007), music therapists centralise and delve deeply into them. The unique and flexible ways in which music
therapists work with young people (explored in detail in the next theme) can support a therapeutic relationship that is open and collaborative, rather than hierarchical and expert-driven (Bolger, 2013). It is possible that Aisha was more open to disclosing her experiences with me because of the safety and respect she experienced in our relationship, as opposed to other relationships with adults which had been characterised across a spectrum of power, violation and fear, or misrecognition. As a non-deficit oriented medium that draws on the strengths and resources of the people we work with, music therapists are inherently positioned to decentre themselves as the experts and more inclined to focus on a client’s ‘whole self’, rather than identifying, focusing on and ‘treating’ trauma as a pathology (Solli, Rolvjord & Borg, 2013). Furthermore, as explicated in Chapter Two, and then expanded upon in Chapter Six, music therapy is something clients ‘do’, as opposed to something that is done ‘to’ or ‘for’ them.

Most explicitly in anti-oppressive and resource-oriented frameworks, therapists see problems in a broken system, rather than within those who have been impacted by it (Baines, 2013, Bain et al., 2016; Sajnani et al., 2017). Such an orientation appears to align with Richardson and Reynolds’ (2014) focus on survivors’ agency and resistance, prioritising consent and the importance of the client’s own resources and community. These congruences have implications for music therapy practice, and signal the need for further investigation into how music therapists navigate disclosures, from managing therapeutic boundaries in the moment, to engaging with broader child welfare systems and policies from an anti-oppressive perspective.

While there are accredited tertiary degrees to train music therapists, codes of practice that bind the profession to particular standards of care, and bodies of literature that continually develop professional knowledge across multiple and diverse areas of practice, there is undoubtedly a great deal of practice that lies in the subjective individual. In the context of my project, I found myself continually asking questions of my role pertaining to power, credibility, and where my loyalties lay. I reflected on an unspoken expectation I felt in the school setting, that staff should exercise a sense of ‘expertise’. As I explored in Chapter Five, this appeared to play out in the school as a means of shoring up our professional identities, grounded in the notion that well-meaning individuals and schools could ‘save’ vulnerable young people. Actively working to challenge these discourses, I tried to recognise moments when I was positioning the young people as needy, or positioning myself as a figure whose expertise could come to their rescue. Again, this can be firmly located within existing music therapy paradigms that nurture client’s existing strengths in order to encourage the
development of new resources (Rolvsjord, 2010), as well as recognising the agency and reflexivity that clients themselves bring to music therapy (Rolvsjord, 2015). These theoretical underpinnings allowed me to adopt ways of being with the young people that felt collaborative and mutually respectful, as opposed to weaponising my professional status over them.

However, there were also many points in which I did exercise power and quite consciously asserted expertise. For the most part, these were moments in which I felt this was necessary in order to gain the respect and trust of the staff around me. For example, at the beginning of my time in the school, I spent several weeks observing classes, and meeting with teachers, Year Level Coordinators, the leadership team, and Wellbeing staff. During this time, I felt as though there were misunderstandings about my role and the project, and misconceptions about my experience and skillset in working with young people. Specifically, I was met with assumptions that I was an undergraduate student on ‘placement’ or ‘work experience’, spoken to as though I had little understanding of what it means to work with complex young people, and at some points, I was dismissed completely (such as when Tim advised me that running a group with the boys was bound to fail).

I reflected upon possible reasons for the dismissive attitudes I perceived: perhaps they were grounded in a sense of protectiveness over their students against an outsider researcher; perhaps they were based in unconscious biases related to how they perceived my age and gender; perhaps they emanated from music therapy as a relatively unknown and misunderstood profession. Subsequently, throughout the project, I made several deliberate efforts to affirm my status and expertise amongst staff, such as during the whole staff meeting when I presented as a “PhD researcher from the University of Melbourne” (described in the Data Story in Chapter Three). During the presentation, I overviewed the key aims of my project, what I hoped to achieve in working in collaboration with staff, and deliberately mentioned my tertiary qualifications and clinical experience working with ‘at risk’ and ‘vulnerable’ adolescent populations. I reflected on my use of the very same terms that I have problematised throughout the research, as an example of how these discourses of power and expertise can be used in specific and calculated ways, but also how researchers can position their status within local communities.

While I would like to claim that my assertions of power and dominance were only exercised between staff, undoubtedly, these moments arose throughout the project with the young people as well. An example that springs to mind is during one of the boys’ groups, when Mo threw a drumstick across the room at one of the other boys, and in my panic, a
threat of detention flew out of my mouth. These moments of despair and panic arose frequently throughout the boys’ groups – when I felt the sessions had descended into chaos, when what I had planned for the group seemed unengaging or failed entirely. In these moments, I felt myself suddenly assuming a highly directive role, raising my voice, or looking to the punitive responses I knew the boys were familiar with in their classes. These moments gave me sobering windows of insight into how teachers must feel in front of a classroom of 25 students for up to six hours a day. How, even as someone so hyper critical of punitive responses, I naturally turned to wielding power and punishment in order to maintain control and order. Having examined some of music therapists’ more abstract, reflexive skills, and existing frameworks that align with anti-oppressive approaches to reframing trauma, I now turn to the practical skills that prepare music therapists for exploring gender with young people.

**Music Therapists Hold Relevant and Specific Expertise**

Data story

**Session 1**

Since I opened the door to our first session of the year seven ‘Boys Tune In’ group, I’ve felt the alarm bells of chaos chime loud in my ears. It is just as noisy inside the room in reality, as the boys shout, laugh, grab instruments and bang on them hard, before tossing them on the ground. “OOOOPS!”, one of boys yelps, behind me. I whip around to see him grab the side of a large television screen, just as it begins to topple off the trolley it sits on atop. He shoves it back up into place.

“Ok can everyone grab a drum each and sit back down?” I call out. “I want to show you a game called poison rhythm!”

I’m relieved when the eight boys begin to make their way back into the circle. I start speaking, at first loud enough so they can hear me over the top of their yelling, “Ok, so for this one you’ve got to listen REALLY carefully at the very beginning”, then I slow right down and speak with a soft, suspenseful tone. Tapping my ear, I almost whisper, “I’m going to play a beat that you’re going to want to remember”. They are silent for a second, until Bobuq grabs a djembe from the ground and motions like he is cocking a rifle. He holds it up into Frank’s face and yells, “BOOM”.

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The noise erupts again, Paul grabs his djembe, leaps to his feet, knocking his chair over while he pulls the djembe up over his shoulder and motions as if he is about to hit Josh over the head with it.

Immediately, I play a simple one bar, syncopated beat, loud on my own drum. They quieten a little and those who are still sitting down echo it back on their drum. “Nice”, I say, nodding. I play another beat, and they all sit down and repeat it back. “Thank god”, I think to myself. “Ok, but now THIS one is the POISON rhythm, so listen carefully”, I play a loud, simple beat: TA-TA-TITI-TA. “From now on, you repeat every rhythm EXCEPT that one”. I explain the rules, with as few words as possible, demonstrating with my hands as I go.

“Let’s do a practice round?”

**Session 2**

I am trying to get a sense of the boys’ attitudes and beliefs, as well as each of their receptive and expressive language skills, so I’ve made up a game to start our session off, ‘Belief Beats’. “It’s kind of like poison rhythm”, I tell them. “This time you’re playing the SAME beat over and over, but you’re focussing on the words I SAY”. They are quiet, and appear mildly interested. “If you agree with the belief, you keep playing, if you disagree, you stop!”

I keep the beat consistent this time, playing while I speak:

TITI-TA-TITI-TA – “I love music”, I say. “If you agree, then you keep playing”
We all keep playing – TITI-TA-TITI-TA. I continue.
TITI-TA-TITI-TA – “I think everyone should be equal in the world”
They all play back – TITI-TA-TITI-TA

TITI-TA-TITI-TA – “I think we all are ALREADY equal in the world”
This time, about half of the boys play the beat back – TITI-TA-TITI-TA
TITI-TA-TITI-TA – “I think it’s ok for boys to cry”
They stop playing, “Aw but miss! It depends!”, Bobuq yells. Frank plays loudly on the djembe, TITI-TA-TITI-TA.
“Nah, it’s cool”, Frank declares. “I think boys can cry Miss! Listen to Drake’s music, he’s heaps emotional!”.
“Ok Frank, can you take over now? Come up with a belief, and we will all keep playing if we agree”. The session continues.

We end with an activity from the Respectful Relationships Education curriculum in which the students are asked to brainstorm what they see as the differences between men and women. Their words go up on the board, and I try to generate discussion from their responses:

![Brainstorming differences between men and women](image)

“Are these things ALL true for everyone, do you think?” I ask. They don’t respond, some of them roll their eyes. They start chatting to each other. I press on, “Also, what about people who don’t fit into these categories?”, they look at me, confused. “Can people only be either a man or woman?” I ask. “And does being one of those mean you have to be everything on this list?”

“My cousin is fa’afafine”, John calls out. “Would you be able to explain to the others what that means?”, I ask John. I find a music video I know of that relates to what John has raised, and we watch it together.

**Session 4**

We start the session with poison rhythm, which has become our weekly ritual. Our topics of conversation have often centred on dominance and control in relationships, and arguments about whether this is essential to ‘being a man’. But I find that when we’re not actively musicking, the boys disengage, we lose focus, and sessions quickly descend into chaos. So this week, I am trying something new.
“Ok, let’s listen to Drake!” I announce, playing the song ‘Hotline Bling’ over the speakers. They all cheer and laugh, “WHAT MISS?!” Luke yells excitedly. “Haha yessss, sucked in Josh”, Frank jeers over at Josh, who hates Drake.

They all know the song, so I slowly fade the volume out after a minute or so, and begin to speak. “So who’s Drake singing to?” I ask. “His girlfriend!” they call out, excited. “Nah, his EX girlfriend!”, “Yeah it must be about Rihanna!”

“Right. So now we’re going to think about a different side of the story. I’ve written an imaginary story as this girlfriend, or EX-girlfriend”. “Ooooh like you’re being Rihanna?!”, John asks, “You know they were together Miss!”. I go with it.

“Sure, yep we’re just imagining, so we can imagine that this is from Rihanna’s perspective if you like”.

I begin to read out the narrative that I’ve written to prepare for the activity, detailing her perspective on their relationship. This alternative side of the story speaks to themes of control, jealousy, possessiveness, and more: the kinds of topics that have been arising during our discussions. To my surprise, the boys are completely silent, listening, as I read out the whole narrative, from ‘Rihanna’s’ perspective. When I finish, we listen to the song again, this time reading the lyrics on the screen in front of them. The boys remain silent, varying expressions on their faces.

“So now we’re going to write a response rap, from her to Drake”, I announce, standing at the whiteboard with a pen ready. “So WE’RE being Rihanna now?”, Frank asks. “Yep! And now we’re going to write our own track, where you can tell him how you feel”, I respond. “What would you like to say to him? What’s he saying in Hotline Bling that you want to respond to?”. We begin to brainstorm.

**Flexibility and creativity: “The trademark of music therapy”**.

These excerpts from the boys’ group represent some of the unique assets that I propose anchor music therapy’s potential contribution in this space, such as flexibility, creativity, and the diverse opportunities for engagement that these afford when musicking. Flexibility is
identified by several music therapy theorists as a key strength in music therapy research and practice. McFerran (2010) describes flexibility and creativity in adolescent practice as “the trademark of music therapy” (p. 57). DeNora (2013) describes music itself as an inherently flexible and emergent medium, which “like health/illness, takes shape in relation to other things” (p. 136). Stige (2002) proposed that therapeutic flexibility is how music therapists support clients in meaning making (p. 96), while Rolvsjord, Gold & Stige (2005) explored flexibility as an important asset for music therapists researching with integrity and rigour. In particular regards to school music programs, researchers have emphasised the importance of ‘strategic flexibility’ as a skill that enables music therapists to successfully work within school structures and teams (McFerran et al., 2017). In their review of music therapy in schools, Carr and Wigram (2009) found that flexibility also prepares music therapists to work inclusively with young people from diverse cultural backgrounds, while Rickson and McFerran (2014) emphasise how therapists’ flexibility maximises young people’s musical participation. In reality and as I sought to demonstrate through the data story, I identified flexibility most powerfully as it pertained to my readiness to recognise where my approach was not working, and to draw upon my expertise in the moment to adapt and reshape activities, or move on from them entirely.

Creativity is inextricably linked here, because the generation of ideas (one component of creativity) is understood as a function of flexibility (Nijstad et al., 2010). These links were especially pertinent to this project, considering this is an emerging area of practice for music therapists. Because there is limited research into the role of music therapy in exploring gender with young people (and some of this research was not yet published while this project was underway), many aspects of the program required new ways of thinking and practicing. From the very beginning, I was aware that in order to work with the group in ways that were highly nuanced, context-driven, and anchored in their individual needs, I would have to balance my existing knowledge and skillset, with entirely new strategies and ideas. Because the research was action-based, this allowed for an emergent process in which I could adapt and modify existing ideas, trial new ones, and weave a new ‘tapestry’ of practice (as described by Liang et al., 2016). For example, call and response drumming interventions are common in group music therapy practice with young people, and I recognised immediately that the boys appeared interested and attentive when engaged in drumming games. Informed by literature which emphasises the importance of understanding young people’s attitudes and beliefs about gender and violence (Harris et al., 2013), in the second session, I adapted a regular call and response activity to focus on gauging their attitudes and beliefs and
generating discussion. I called this activity ‘Belief Beats’. This session also represented a level of flexibility in my in-the-moment adaption of the Respectful Relationships activity and movement towards an entirely different conversation. As I looked at the list we had constructed on the board, I recognised how the “men” vs “women” lists reinforced the idea of a clear, oppositional gender binary, and tried to steer the discussion in a different direction. When John brought up that his cousin was fa’afafine (a gender expression in Samoan culture), rather than speaking with authority about a culture that is not my own, I drew upon my internal library of music, and played a section of a music video documentary⁹ that celebrates Polynesian fa’afafine culture.

**A new and informed approach: ‘Insight-Oriented Narrative Songwriting’**

By session four, I had noted the boys’ music preferences, and that the artist Drake was a topic of ongoing discussion among the group. I was also crucially informed by the literature that demonstrates how hip-hop and rap may serve as an engaging, liberatory, and culturally meaningful genre to work with (Akom, 2009). But while the simple, game-oriented music activities were successfully engaging the boys’ attention, I had noted that they weren’t creating conditions for sustained discussion, emotional engagement, or critical thinking. Meanwhile, I noted the boys often disengaged during the activities I drew from the Respectful Relationships resource, especially when they required sustained attention and literacy, which many of the participants struggled with. Having a good sense by now of the social context and the potential for issues related to violence and harm to draw on their own experiences, I also needed to think creatively about ways of working with this complex material which did not require them to delve into their own personal lives.

In Drake’s ‘Hotline Bling’, I recognised a potential for us to relate the themes that had been arising concerning toxic masculinity, power, and control in relationships. By creating a fictional character’s perspective, and then writing the song from her shoes, this modified approach to songwriting offered us an opportunity, as a collective group, to take on the role of somebody in a relationship whose behaviour was being policed by dominant gender norms. Baker (2015) describes the evocative, narrative potential in songwriting, “the songwriters put words to their experiences, and in doing so process the meaning and ramifications of their stories and their emotional responses to it” (Baker, 2015, p. 18). While the range of emotional, embodied, and cognitive processes involved in songwriting are usually described in relation to telling one’s own stories, they can also be harnessed by young

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⁹ See: Coco Solid – Heaven’s Gate: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5HMtN77oqu0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5HMtN77oqu0)
people as a means of exploring alternative gender identities (Bain et al., 2016). Informed by Bain et al.’s (2016) use of songwriting in their queer music therapy model, this is a new application of therapeutic songwriting which I refer to as ‘Insight-Oriented Narrative Songwriting’.

This application specifically functions to invite young people to embody a new perspective, drawing on the known therapeutic benefits of songwriting, while adding an insight orientation. Carefully facilitated roleplay activities have been used by creative arts therapists working with young people who have experienced trauma as a safe and multisensory way to embody and establish relationships between group members (Van Westrhenen et al., 2017). Through temporarily taking on this character’s perspective, the boys were required to engage their own processes of empathy and emotional intelligence. This songwriting technique did not seek to dialogically impart information to the boys about the extent and underpinnings of gender-based violence, nor simply ask them to evaluate their attitudes about gender roles. Instead, Insight-Oriented Narrative Songwriting was highly tailored; a motivating and developmentally appropriate space for the boys to delve inwards to ask, “How would I feel if this was me?” with a social action lens, “What do I want to say about this?” This technique enabled the boys to push the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity which so often result in a distancing from their emotional and bodily experience (Connell, 2005), instead encouraging them to engage with and express a spectrum of emotions such as sadness, vulnerability, and fear that are so rigidly policed for boys in social and institutional spaces. This example reveals the kind of informed and creative thinking that equips music therapists to practice in this space, combining a cognisance of the nuanced and specific needs of the people we work with, and utilising a medium that is engaging and can be flexibly tailored to meet these needs.

**Unique expertise.**

During the first half of this chapter, I emphasised music therapists’ orientation towards mitigating expert-driven power dynamics. I now turn to the unique and distinct expertise that our practice requires, not to contradict this orientation, but in order to further my argument for music therapists’ readiness to successfully carry out this work. Music therapy practice requires multiple layers of diverse skills. These include: higher order cognitive skills such as planning, critical thinking, reflection, and creativity; therapeutic expertise in order to manage group dynamics, assess and address clients’ needs and therapeutic goals, and containment in order for them to feel safe and supported across a range of contexts; and finally, the technical
skills to provide diverse and meaningful opportunities for musicking. The data stories above offer examples of the ways music therapists might facilitate groups, from how I used my voice to try to engage the group and shift away from a classroom dynamic, to the different ways I used language and demonstration to communicate, to offering a range of modalities in order to maximise participation. Music therapists’ unique skills are documented across a range of research. The participants in Baines’ doctoral study (2014) noted music therapists’ specific expertise in holding an extensive musical repertoire, the value of their documentation for the wider multidisciplinary team, and their capacity to work inclusively and respectfully with those who experience structural oppression. Carr and Wigram’s (2009) systematic review of music therapy in mainstream schools emphasised music therapists’ expertise in working supportively with clients with diverse cognitive skills and behaviour, and in developing a therapeutic relationship to support their development. The capacity to offer diverse and accessible opportunities for participation was especially pertinent in this project, because the participants had a range of cognitive disabilities, developmental issues, complex behaviour and emotional needs. More broadly, music therapists’ skills in fostering inclusion and participation are relevant on a structural level, because while schools are increasingly pushed to include students with diverse developmental, psychosocial, and learning needs, they are routinely not provided with the support and theoretical understandings necessary to do so (Daniels & Hedegaard, 2011; Rickson & McFerran, 2014).

**How did the participants describe my role?**

In the previous chapter, I included 14-year-old Amelia’s reflections of the year eight girls group, during which she said that she had liked songwriting in particular,

> Because we got to write the song. Like you didn’t just write it. Like, we put our ideas down and then you made it better cos we didn’t really know what to put it in, we just knew what to say.

When I asked her if she felt like the girls had ownership over the song, Amelia told me, “I felt like a lot. Cos we all made it. I don’t feel like just one person made it. I feel like we all did, so it was better.” Amelia’s descriptions of how the girls were supported to express their thoughts and experiences draws into play the unique set of skills required to facilitate a therapeutic group songwriting experience. These include managing group dynamics so that the participants all feel safe and supported to articulate and contribute their ideas, sensing and
carrying out the appropriate level of direction and scaffolding required to get the actual song written, as well as having the technical skills to create and adapt the musical elements according to the group’s preferences. And all the while, continually balancing the importance of the process, versus the outcome. In describing the ecology of musical relationships, Ansdell (2014) describes the role of the therapy as facilitating this ongoing process of communication, in “initiating musical conversations” (p. 143). Beyond Amelia’s concrete and comparative language, there is a sense of vitality in the act of musicking together, which is particularly salient given the fractured relationships that characterised the creation of the girls group in the first place.

Within my one-on-one interviews with the young people, I asked each of them a question about how they would describe my role, seeking to foreground their understanding of my approach. Their responses have assisted in developing specific terminology that incorporates whether the ways we conceptualise our role as music therapists are actually understood by young people, which I have since published (Scrine & McFerran, 2018). Some of their responses to this question included:

Phoenix: You’re different to a music teacher, cos we got to play together, and open up.
Katherine: You were really good at welcoming us all… and expressing everyone’s feelings, and sharing stories.
John: You’re good. You’re a calm teacher. You’re funny. You’re better than frickin all those… dumb teachers. And yeah.
Luka: I would describe your role like a teacher, but like actually a teacher. One of those, um what’s it called? Those ones who like to chill and stuff.
Vu: You were like… you weren’t like a teacher cos you let us do anything. Well not ANYTHING, but stuff we wanted to do. And um, like um (long pause). You were like, an advisor, instead of a teacher.

In the previous chapter, I explored some of the possibilities as to how the young people may have used this question as an opportunity to express their agency through these disparaging comments about their teachers. It is also possible that response bias was emerging here, as the young people told me what they predicted I wanted to hear. From a therapeutic standpoint, it is possible the young people were showing care towards me by expressing supportive reflections on my role and invalidating their “dumb teachers”; perhaps a form of agency expression that Rolvsjord (2015) has described adult clients performing in a
mental health context. Hearing the students draw comparisons between their teachers and me was complex, because while they may have expressed some of the unique skills a music therapist offers in this context, they also spoke to complexities of a school system that places immensely difficult demands on teachers, and in turn creates an imbalance of how skills and time are valued (Pizter, 2014a). It became evident in my interview with Year Eight Coordinator Kamna, that she recognised these complexities, and accurately predicted the comparisons the young people might draw between me and other staff:

I think the kids saw you as… I mean they obviously perceive us, student management as… they often feel like they’re getting in trouble, so they have a love/hate relationship with us! Whereas I feel like they were very open with you, and they felt like you were somebody not necessarily attached to the school. And a bit of an independent person, and obviously they were doing things with you that they really enjoyed. So they’re like ‘this is a person I’m really comfortable with, and this has nothing to do with my schooling, in terms of my subjects and bla bla, and this a person who has no previous judgment about me’.

When I asked social worker Dani how she thought the students saw me, she also drew on comparisons between my role and the other teachers’:

They weren’t resistant, and I think because you’ve got such a nice, calming energy about you. And I think that’s because you’re not a teacher, that always helps. Well yes, you’ve come in as an authority figure because we are the adults, but you’ve made them feel like we’re a ‘WE’. It’s not like ‘I tell you what to do’ – It was ‘what can WE do? How can WE write the rap song? Could WE perform this?’… You were quite accommodating in the way you know, you could spend some one-on-one time with them, whereas a music teacher, doesn’t always have that availability?

It was interesting to hear both of these staff raise some of the structural conditions to shape their perspectives on how the students saw my role. These included time constraints, power and authority, and my ‘visitor’ status within the school, which brought into focus the inherent privileges that we have as researchers, temporary staff, and perhaps non-teaching staff in general. For example, a music therapist, school counsellor, or any other professional in Allied Health is expected to spend time alone throughout their day, planning sessions,
reflecting on them, and accessing regular professional supervision. Furthermore, in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia where neoliberal assumptions, frameworks and processes have been so well incorporated into the education system, teachers and schools are subject to increasingly entrenched public systems of rating and commodification. Indeed, systems that a music therapist, or a qualitative researcher are arguably more protected from. Within this, it appears music therapists’ roles allow for a level of time, space, and expertise required to think critically, and that perhaps it is therefore our responsibility to do so.

In light of the specific comparisons between music therapist and teacher that arose in the data, I looked to Rickson and McFerran’s (2014) exploration on the changing roles of therapists in schools, and the ways music therapists and teachers can share in critical, contemporary practice. Their text highlights how traditionally, educators have focused on the acquisition of skills, and therapists on the treatment of problems (p. 14), and outlines a contemporary approach that requires a critical turn from both professions, and an emphasis on collaboration between all members of the education community. Although not widely documented, this approach is increasingly common in school teams where diversity and inclusion are a priority for the school. In light of the unique expertise music therapists hold in working inclusively, and in using a medium that young people may perceive more positively in comparison to their teachers, I propose that music therapists working in schools have a distinctive role to play in supporting other staff. Furthermore, in a role more likely to be seen as “independent” from the school system, or as having a “nice, calming energy”, a responsibility emerges here for music therapists to utilise the time and space afforded to engage in critical thinking, where their co-workers may not.

**Situating social justice at the centre of healing.**

The response rap I mention at the end of the data story became the basis of a group song which we continued to work on in the boys group throughout the eight weeks. Part one of the song was an introduction verse that contextualised the rap, and in part two, the boys explored toxic masculinity and unpacked different aspects of what it meant to ‘be a man’ (see Appendix N for lyrics). When 14-year-old Moana described my approach, she began by exclaiming, “Um first of all, I did not know you could sing!” She continued by describing how this challenged her preconceived notions of the group, saying, “I thought we’d just talk about stuff”. When asked whether this surprised her, she said:
Yeah. I felt like, “there’s a lot more things to come”. And not just from you, but like what the others would say. How smart they all are. They act a lot more dumb outside of this, but they got so into it! Talking about family violence and stuff, it was a lot unexpected!

Although the research has clearly identified the link between attitudes about gender and endemic sexual and family violence (Gleeson et al., 2015), school curricula are only recently beginning to incorporate discussion about these links. For the young people in this project, the music therapy sessions were the first time they recalled discussing notions of gender and power at school. Given this context, it was not particularly remarkable that several participants expressed surprise at what felt like their first experiences of activism during this project. When I asked Amelia how she would describe my role, she said, “At first I thought, ‘oh this is gonna be some boring thing’”. When asked if and when her opinion changed, she replied, “It was when we were talking about stuff and listening to videos. I really liked that bit, listening to videos. Actually talking about what happens in the real world!”

I asked her, “What kind of things were like the real world things for you?”’. She replied, “Sexism. Girl on girl hate. All that kinda stuff. Like, it happens, you see it in your everyday life. Definitely girl on girl hate”. During interviews, several references were made to this notion of the “real world issues”, which the young people appeared to feel passionate about. When Josh described music therapy being “kind of like fishing”, in the previous chapter, he referred to music as being the ‘hook’ to exploring what was really important. “This is actually something that’s happening in the world”, he told me, when we spoke about his desire to address issues related to domestic violence.

It has been noted across the literature and this dissertation, that young people themselves want to explore violence prevention in their schools. Ellis (2008) summarises, “Where they [students] have had this opportunity, an overwhelming majority report the lessons were positive and worthwhile” (p. 126). The idea that young people in schools hold a great deal of passion and capacity for social justice work in general is well documented (Cook-Sather, 2014; Jones, Stewart, Galletta & Ayala, 2015). On gender specifically, Bragg et al. (2018) found that young people in schools are passionate and eager to speak about gender equality, stereotypes, and homophobia. Similarly to my own findings, Bragg et al. (2018) noted that many of the 100 British young people they interviewed stated that the research was the first time they had been encouraged to speak about issues related to gender. Indeed, with or without the support of their schools, young people are creating new platforms
for themselves to speak about and document their experiences of gender and oppression (Keller et al., 2016; Retallack et al., 2016; Ringrose & Renold, 2016; Renold, 2018).

The salience of these “real world issues” has implications for bridging worlds between activism and music therapy. These links have been explored explicitly in music therapy (Curtis, 2012), the creative arts therapies (Sajnani et al., 2017), anti-oppressive practice in social work (Baines, 2011) and narrative therapy (Reynolds, 2012a). Central to exploring the intersections between therapy and activism is an acknowledgment of the problematic histories of therapy as a tool of pathologisation and social control, and how the nature of one-on-one therapy has contributed to individualisation of people’s ‘personal problems’. Reynolds (2012a) writes,

A therapeutic engagement with social justice is imperative, I believe, but never enough, as we need to participate in direct actions as activists to change the social context in which the privatisation of pain occurs. (p. 59)

Community music therapy (CMT) scholars have for some time now been outlining the activist qualities that underpin the CMT framework, shifting away from individualised interventions and clinical goals, and into our role in the social domain (Ansdell & Pavlicevic, 2004; Stige & Aarø, 2012, p. 23-24). The young people’s sense of activism when exploring issues that were important to them (and that they saw reflected in their everyday life) speaks to the role music therapy can play in what Sajnani et al. (2017) describe as therapists’ responsibility to “situate social justice as central to healing” (p. 28). I propose these links can be further strengthened by the approaches I have described that reframe trauma from an anti-oppressive and decolonial lens (Richardson & Reynolds, 2014). In his proposal to shift away from trauma informed care to a more collective, healing-centred model, Ginwright (2018) writes, “healing centred engagement is explicitly political, rather than clinical” (p. 13). This model emphasises the importance of young people being engaged in addressing the structural causes and collective impacts of trauma. This goal is informed by Isaac Prilleltensky’s (2008) concept of ‘psychopolitical validity’, which refers to the extent to which we situate social justice, power, and oppression into how we construct ‘health and wellness’. Baines and Edwards (2015) draw on notions of psychopolitical validity in explicating the potential for anti-oppressive practice in music therapy research. They note the propensity for more socially radical practices to be overlooked or marginalised when working within settings where power functions through hierarchies and models such as the medical model (p. 29). Alternatively, by
creating spaces and opportunities for young people to advocate for social change, we may enable them to experience a kind of wellbeing that they have been active agents in creating, rather than passive victims of trauma, or recipients of clinical intervention (Stige & Aarø, 2012; Baines & Edwards, 2015).

**Music Therapists Critically Examine Power**

Data story

The team in the Wellbeing Office consists of social workers/school counsellors, an adolescent nurse, a speech pathologist, and disability integration workers. They inform me the school has never employed a music therapist, but they all believe in the power of music.

“And we ALWAYS have recorded music playing in the Wellbeing space”, Dani tells me on my first full day. “We find it calms the students and creates a relaxing environment to work in. It’s really therapeutic”.

While I experience a range of attitudes about the importance of exploring gender with young people, there is a general sense that music is a welcome, positive presence in the school. The speech pathologist is the one staff member who has heard of the music therapy profession, as she worked with a music therapist while her son was unwell in infancy. One of the disability integration workers describes to me how her daughter tried five different sports, “But nothing’s made her happier than singing in her school choir!”. During a meeting, Dani talks at length about how much she believes music can achieve. The other school counsellor Triana is mostly quiet, but she nods along and finally, emphatically states, “Music is life!”

One of the teachers Jan, who works with the senior students who are in a vocational-based learning program, is also delighted to have me work with her students. During an interview during the hangout period, I ask her about why she’d like to see a music therapy program in the school:

“Well, music is just a magical tool in terms of thinking, living and relaxation! Music for your soul, your head, your heart. Some kids are just stuck in their cultural music... I want them to hear some of the classical music that they don’t get to hear... For me you know, there’s
actually this one piece of music that just makes me see the world in a completely different way."

Another morning before the boys group, I am in my office listening to three students who are sitting in the wellbeing space, eating the free breakfast provided by the school. All of a sudden, one of them stops speaking, stands up, and bursts into a song. Once he’s finished, they are all laughing, and he interrupts their chatter, “No seriously guys, singing is actually my LIFE!”.

Everyone here has their own musical relationships, identities and experiences. They don’t need to know anything about music therapy, or ask me much about exactly what it is that I’m doing at South East College. They believe in music, and they know I want to use music to ‘make change’. When I am more specific about the goal of my research to use music to explore the gendered drivers of violence, there are some common responses:

“So are you going to be looking at rap music?”
“It’s good that you’re exploring sexism, because some of the hip-hop these kids listen to is just so degrading!”
“You’re talking about violence? Through music? Well, let me show you this music video I just saw!”

Music and power.

In the previous chapter I explored the ways music can be positioned as ‘magic’, especially in its potential to facilitate emotionally transformative experiences. In this chapter, I look at the relevance of this notion for the role of music therapy. Throughout this section, I unpack ‘the power of music’ as a discourse which is both important and complex in music therapy (see Rolvsjord, 2006). The data story above speaks to ways the staff and students referred to the power of music in their own lives, which were congruent with a range of the themes I explored in the previous chapter, such as identity construction. The data story also exemplifies some of the ways this discourse is enacted in response to music therapy, and can in fact be utilised particularly as a means for music therapists to gain access to spaces. There is an interesting tension here, because while music therapy theorists argue against a purely mechanistic perspective (Ansdell, 2014), I suggest the mystery and ‘magic’ of music is often
how the people we work with across many contexts relate to the role we might play as therapists.

In the contemporary mainstream schooling context where music is often considered superfluous to the ‘real’ agenda of education (Bray, Green, & Vogan, 2012; Crooke, 2015), and where schools such as South East College are stretched for resources, the reality of music therapy being adopted as a standard support service for students is unlikely. As Hess (2013) writes, “music education itself is traditionally understood as a frill in the neoliberal context of society” (p. 3). However, as demonstrated in the data story, there is a commonly held belief among teachers and students that music is powerful and transformative (Rickson & McFerran, 2014). Despite this, mainstream schools are one of the lesser common areas of work for music therapists in Australia (AMTA, 2018), and music therapy in mainstream schooling is an under-developed area of research (Carr & Wigram, 2009). I sought to examine how music therapists negotiate these tensions, using my own experience to exemplify how we may encounter narratives on ‘the power of music’ that we identify as problematic, and end up utilising them.

When interviewing Jan, her comment about the piece of music that allowed her to “see the world in a completely different way” gave me insight into her own relationship with music, and her attitudes towards using music as a space where the young people could explore (her understanding of) the world. It appeared as if her own passion for and belief in ‘the power of music’ meant I was welcome in her class anytime; she made it clear I was free to work with the students in any way I wished. But what were the power dynamics underpinning my ‘welcomeness’ in her classroom? Had I not been White, well dressed, and university educated, perhaps Jan may have coded me a less benevolent figure. Indeed, these were the very characteristics that likely led Jan to believe I could support the students to “see the world in a completely different way”. Importantly, what Jan appeared to be advocating for was the re-inscription of the dominant Western classical music paradigm, as though she saw this as being marginalised.

As Jan spoke to me, the most striking part of her statement was how she posed music as a resource for the “soul, head, and heart”, while being deeply troubled by the ways the students were “stuck in their cultural music”. I suggest that because of my positioning, Jan assumed I might support her aim to draw the students out of their “cultural music”, and into more ‘cultured’ (White, Western classical) music that “they don’t get to hear”. Jan’s hopes aligned with the broader narratives of assimilation expressed by school staff in Chapter Four and Five. In this case – using the music “they don’t get to hear” to signify further ways they
were being disadvantaged by their families. More broadly, her attitudes can be contextualised within a colonial hierarchy of taste that privileges Western classical music in schools (Bartel, 2004; Hess, 2015). Within this lies an implied assumption that young people enter music in school as ‘blank slates’ (Buller-Peters, 2004), therefore delegitimising the rich musical lives and histories that they bring into their classrooms (Peters, 2009). I propose that within these institutional contexts, music therapists have a unique responsibility to utilise the structural power we hold, as (any combination of) White, middle class, non-disabled, university educated professionals, and beneficiaries of colonisation. This responsibility lies not only in recognising the ways our peers relate to music, but also the dominant norms that underpin these and enable our access as music therapists, and crucially, identifying how these can be challenged. Below, I explore one way I sought to do so.

**Navigating dominant narratives present in music.**

I was not surprised when rap and hip-hop arose in people’s minds in relation to issues of misogyny and violence in music. Throughout my research, this has been a consistent response when I have described my project, from conference and academic spaces, to my fieldwork at South East College. Certainly as I noted in my literature review, the research suggests young people are a primary group to whom media and popular culture is central in shaping their beliefs about gender (Harris et al., 2015). Music videos in particular have received widespread criticism in the literature for their exploitation, objectification, and domination of non-male and non-normative bodies and sexualities (Conrad, Dixon, & Zhang 2009; Oosten et al. 2015; Peter & Valkenburg 2007). And indeed, hip-hop and rap genres are regularly identified as routinely sexualising and objectifying women’s bodies in their video and lyrical content (Frisby & Aubrey, 2012). However, as I have articulated throughout this dissertation, much of this research and broader popular discourse can be problematised and re-examined for the reductionist brush with which it paints hip-hop as a subculture (Kruse, 2016a, 2016b), and the ways these critiques consistently under-examine race and other power dynamics (Porteous, 2013). My previous chapter noted some of these dynamics at play with the Boys Tune In group, aligning with literature which details the emancipatory role these genres play for young people and oppressed communities (Ginwright, 2004; Akom, 2009; Brown, A., 2013). Here, I turn to the role of music therapy and the implications for music therapy practice, in negotiating the power dynamics present in the material we use.

Although music therapy and musicology scholarship has built crucial ecological theory locating music and identity in social context, these texts rarely engage explicitly with subject
positions such as patriarchy, racism, colonisation, or heteronormativity as power structures that situate the identity of the cases they examine. Rickson and McFerran (2014) summarise this tendency in music therapy research,

A typical example of this in music therapy has been the focus on learners’ psychological states and our attempts to improve the individuals’ experiences of them without acknowledging the social, economic, and political influences that may make change impossible. (p. 27)

While the literature has demonstrated a dedicated interest in music therapy as a form of social and political action, as well as feminist frameworks in music therapy, there is limited research that accounts for music in therapy as a site of performance, negotiation, and affirmation of dominant gendered and raced norms (see Hadley, 2013a, 2013b, 2017; Rolvsjord & Halstead, 2013; Bain et al., 2016). What do music therapists do when they recognise the medium they use for therapy, may also be reinforcing these dominant norms? As music therapists, we are met with these moments continuously, as clients share (or indeed write) musical material which reflects gender stereotypes. While there is a wealth of research focused on how sexualised music video content impacts young people’s attitudes and beliefs (see for example Oosten et al., 2010), as I have argued, there is very little research of any orientation that seeks to understand how young people actually negotiate gendered discourses. In considering how music therapists confront these issues in practice, I emphasise two key arguments.

First, it is not in music (and particular genres) where these issues originate from. Rather they occur within and reflective of sociocultural context which must be understood and transformed. For example, exploring masculinity and homophobia as a cultural standard within hip-hop, Nebeu Shimeles (2010) demonstrates the role of capitalism as a colonial force which has instituted these dominant narratives. Relatedly, Kruse (2016a) reveals the practices of White co-option which position certain genres, such as rock music, with a “veneer of safety and respectability” (p. 118), while locating the problems of violence and misogyny specifically in hip-hop. Rather than identifying specific genres, individual songs, or artists as the problem, music therapists may develop further expertise through interrogating the power dynamics, broader forces, and economic systems which underpin them. Second, as experts in challenging mechanistic perspectives of music, music therapists can contribute knowledge and understanding into how young people negotiate dominant narratives in music.
Rather than perpetuating moral panics and public anxieties about music acting on passive minds to ‘make’ young people think or feel a certain way, music therapists may offer an alternative perspective. The role of music therapists exploring issues related to gender with young people is thus to acknowledge dominant narratives as they arise within the “total event” (Ansdell, 2014, p. 269). As experts in nurturing and developing young people’s relationships with music, music therapists can combine this expertise with a critical lens, to support them to do this negotiation work.

For example, in the previous chapter, I described the final ‘Boys Tune In’ group session, when Paul shared a song that contained misogynistic themes. As a music therapist, I considered the possibility that Paul chose ‘Bitches Ain’t Shit’ as a means of affirming his identification with the broader hip-hop subculture, as a way of ‘refurnishing’ (DeNora, 2013) the White, institutional space. Or, perhaps he chose a song that he recognised was especially provocative in the context of the gendered discourses we had been exploring. In this case, such a deliberate choice may well have been a signal of his engagement with the material we had discussed. The role of the music therapist exploring gender with young people is to critically consider these many contexts and sets of possibilities; to question what it may mean for them to introduce potentially complex, provocative musical material; and decide when and how to delve deeper into this with them.

In this case, I chose not to question Paul about the misogynistic lyrics in his song choice, instead I attempted to demonstrate a level of cultural competency by asking a question related to the song. However, during a subsequent moment with Frank in which we sat at the piano discussing Justin Bieber’s lyrics, I did choose to ask a question related to the gendered dynamics in the song. I did not frame this question as an attack on the song and artist he identified with, but rather enquired, “What do you think he means in that line?”. I did so while remaining present in the musical moment we shared, and based on my impressions of how he may respond after many weeks of rapport and trust building between us. I contend that trust and adequate time are an important component of exploring these issues, alongside an understanding of the context and conditions in which they arise. In this case, Frank was not defensive, but instead responded with the impression that he had formed, possibly supported by our eight weeks of working together (he thought the artist was “trying to be all tough guy”).

In recent years, research has demonstrated how young people may use music not only as a healthy resource, but also for unhealthy purposes of rumination and more (Saarikallio, Gold, & McFerran, 2015). Relatedly, the literature has developed an understanding into
music therapists’ expertise in supporting young people to adopt a more empowered relationship with music (McFerran & Saarikallio, 2014). My own findings reveal some parallel opportunities here, for music therapists to develop expertise in recognising the power relations that underpin dominant narratives arising in music, and also in supporting young people to negotiate these complex narratives.

**The “real world issues” and an intersectional analytic disposition.**

In order to develop this expertise, I propose music therapists adopt a critical lens based on anti-oppression. Hess (2013; 2015) who has called for a similar paradigm shift in music education, argues that we must move “from a liberal to a critical framework” (2013, p. 7). While recognising problematic, exclusionary, and marginalising gendered narratives in music is important, music therapists must ensure not to detach gender from other identifiers such as race, sexual orientation, class, and disability. Doing so not only evacuates nuance and misses valuable insights, but has the potential to reify other dominant narratives. Crenshaw (1993) outlines the danger in dislocating gender from other axes of identity:

> Political strategies that challenge only certain subordinating practices while maintaining existing hierarchies not only marginalize those who are subject to multiple systems of subordination but also often result in oppositionalizing race and gender discourses. (p. 112-113)

For example, in this project I examined the staff’s implications that exploring hegemonic masculinity was particularly important for boys who were subjected to “cultural pressures” at home, by locating these attitudes within colonial and assimilatory discourse in Australia. I ground what the young people described as the “real world issues” of gender-based violence as issues that must be examined with intersectionality at the forefront of our minds. However, in drawing on Crenshaw’s (1989) theory, it is imperative we are mindful of tendencies within feminist academia to systematically depoliticise and co-opt these ideas. Such processes have been identified in the literature as ‘whitening’ (Bilge, 2013) and ‘colonizing’ (Tomlinson, 2013) intersectionality. The founding concepts of intersectionality emphasise its analytical and political purposes as a tool and lens from which to foster a radical social justice agenda, which I propose is crucial to exploring the “real world issues”. Grzanka and Miles (2016) have raised the problematics of taking up intersectionality within therapy without rigorous understanding of how identities are co-constituted. They note the
tendencies for therapists to adopt, co-opt, and incorporate the intersection metaphor simply to discuss “multiple or intersecting identities” (p. 371). Translating this to the current context, I believe it would be remiss of me to simply argue that music therapists should explore both gendered oppression and racism. Rather, these structural violences must be explored in how they compound and relate to one another, and how they relate to other forces of power. In doing so, Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) advocate for positioning intersectionality as an ‘analytic disposition’; this is not a way of looking at the intersection of identity, but of structural inequality. This requires not only challenging pervasive neoliberal notions that suggest equality has already been achieved, but also recognising where our own positionality impacts what we are able to see, and the power we feel entitled to.

As an example, were I to have singled Paul out for his ‘problematic’ song choice, and we were to shift the session to critically unpack the ways women are represented in the song’s lyrics, what kind of power dynamics would I be replicating? Positioning and context are crucial considerations here. As a White, non-disabled, middle class person, in a room full of those whose identities and communities are marked as Other, I surmised that to do so in this moment would only serve to patronise, bewilder, isolate, or humiliate Paul. Engaging seriously with our own positioning will assist us to conduct this work in ways that does not replicate postmodern feminism’s failure to attend to structures beyond gender, or colonial processes of ‘settling on’ universal concepts of women’s suffering (Mohanty, 2003).

I propose a critical lens that truly understands oppression as relational and intersecting prepares us to approach this valuable work carefully and reflexively, rather than reinforcing histories of exclusion by thinking simplistically, or being immobilised by the guilt of our privilege. In the first cycle of this project, I documented young people’s explorations of gendered narratives that exist in music videos not only in the most overt, explicit forms, but in more subtle and covert ways (Scrine, 2017a). In this paper, I noted how the participants demonstrated a powerful grasp on certain aspects of gendered subjectivity, and I argued that we must explore ways of expanding acceptable feminine identities from simply ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Reflecting now on the doctoral project in its entirety, I broaden this notion to emphasise how exploring the “real world issues” requires music therapy discourse to expand the ways we identify dominant narratives through dualistic notions of ‘good’ or ‘bad’.

Music therapists have been encouraged to challenge these notions and avoid making simplistic critiques of particular genres, or using clients’ musical preferences to make diagnostic assumptions about what their choices signal about pathology (Hines & McFerran, 2014).
an expertise that sits at the juncture of several agendas. These include understanding the significance of a young person’s relationship with music in the context of their identity, such as what it might mean when they exclaim, “Singing is actually my LIFE!” Next, it requires a unique skillset to foster this relationship with music in collaborative and participatory ways. Finally, it could mean adopting and developing an anti-oppressive lens in order to understand the “real world issues” with an intersectional analytic disposition, and in practice, recognising when and how to work with these issues in a therapeutic space.

Conclusion

Through the findings presented in this chapter, I have argued that it is our responsibility as music therapists to develop a critical lens. This critical lens requires reflexivity when considering the moments that arise in our work, especially when they alert us to young people’s experiences of interpersonal harm and violence. Although individually we can provide sensitive and supportive interactions that structure safety and enable healing, we must recognise that young people may exist under structural conditions which are complex and often unsupportive of their agency or subjectivities. Through exploring these moments, I specifically propose that music therapy as a profession can benefit from further developing our skills in managing disclosures, and shifting our paradigm alongside other approaches that foster survivors’ agency and resistance, to work against the systemic oppression under which trauma occurs (Reynolds, 2010; Richardson & Reynolds, 2014; Ginwright, 2018).

My findings revealed how, within the multifaceted landscape of therapeutic practice, music therapists are especially well placed to do such work, because this paradigm shift aligns with our orientation as an inherently strengths-based practice. This chapter pointed to the unique skillset music therapists hold in working reflexively, flexibly, and creatively, which, alongside a critical lens, are important for practicing in this complex and emerging area. Such work requires drawing on existing skills and at times, expanding current approaches to create new techniques that are nuanced and context-driven. One example of this was ‘Insight-Oriented Narrative Songwriting’, a technique I developed during the project, creating conditions for the boys to extend the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity and musically embody an alternative perspective. Because music is an accessible medium that can be adapted to meet a range of cognitive, emotional, behavioural needs, music therapists’ expertise in assessing and addressing these needs is an important point of advocacy. This is especially pertinent as diversity and inclusion are growing priorities for
schools, and the state-wide mandated curricula that aims to embed gender equity and prevent gender-based violence currently operates as a ‘one size fits all’ model.

In the final section of the chapter, I examined the role of a music therapist to observe how music is valued and related to – not only advocating for its worth and utilities, but also recognising when it is used to reinforce dominant narratives. Just as music therapy discourse problematizes music as ‘magic’ force that acts mechanistically, it is also necessary to problematise the idea that music with misogynistic, or homophobic, ableist, or racist content automatically shapes passive minds. Throughout the thesis, I have noted how rap and hip-hop come under particular scrutiny within discourse on music, gender, and young people. Drawing on scholars in hip-hop feminist pedagogy, I have pointed out how situating these genres as the source of these issues fails to recognise the broader society these genres occur within, and erases the anti-racist, queer, and feminist discourse within these genres. Informed by activist frameworks, the chapter highlighted the importance of confronting the system in which these dominant narratives occur, rather than laying blame on any one genre, or the young people who identify with them. In the following chapter, I overview the project in its entirety, summarising the key findings and contributions from the last four chapters, and tracing the implications for working with young people, gender-based violence prevention, and the music therapy profession.
Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Situating the Project

Occurring within a period of socio-political awakening to gender-based violence, this project drew on a wide range of knowledge and discourse from health, education, music therapy, and youth studies. Across the existing research, young people emerge as a particular focus, given they are identified to have less knowledge and understanding about the gendered drivers of violence (Harris et al., 2015), and are already experiencing violence at higher rates than other age groups (Smith et al., 2014; Cox, 2015). Looking to the gendered drivers of violence, the literature points out key aspects of young people’s lives that shape these issues, such as the gender binary/an assumed link between sex and gender, and the reinforcement of boys’ and girls’ diverging independence, mobility, schooling and domestic responsibilities (Chandra-Mouli et al., 2017). Schools are often referred to as structures of power which formally and informally teach and police gendered norms (Robinson, 2005; Robinson et al., 2014; Woolley, 2017), and in turn, where gender-based violence occurs, and is normalised (Conroy, 2013; Gillander & Stein, 2017; Cole, 2018). Meanwhile, I commenced this project becoming increasingly aware of how this discourse surrounding young people might be problematised or expanded. Firstly, in how it erases the work of young people who are not only leading advocacy and activist efforts towards gender equity (O’Keefe, 2016; Retallack et al., 2016), but who are actually transforming language and practices to create and uphold diverse gender cultures (Bragg et al., 2018). Furthermore, as became a focus of my own study, how discourses of risk emerge with particular groups of young people. Across the literature scholars note how gendered discourses with vulnerable young people can subject their collective identities to moral panics (Martino, 2011), deny their agency (Renold & Ringrose, 2011), and categorise them on the basis of injury and victimhood (Bryan, 2017; Brunulia & Rossi, 2018).

Responding to research which recognises schools not only as key sites of violence, but also as ‘microcosms’ for change and transformation, initiatives have been established globally which seek to address the gendered drivers of violence with young people in schools (Gleeson et al., 2015; Renold, 2016; Chandra-Mouli et al., 2017). Contextualising my research on a local level, during the span of this project, the Respectful Relationships Education curriculum was piloted, evaluated, and in 2018, mandated across all government
schools in the state of Victoria. Across formal reports for exploring gender with young people in schools, best practice recommendations point to the importance of interactive, participatory modalities that are adolescent-oriented and targeted to the contexts young people exist within (Ellsberg et al., 2015; Gleeson et al., 2015). Meanwhile, more activism-oriented efforts recommend approaches that are slower-paced and that create space for emotional transformation through consciousness-raising (IPC, 2014; Martin, 2017; Brown, 2016). In a way combining aspects of these two approaches, the research has revealed the unique and transformative capacity of arts-based methods – allowing young people to experientially engage with these complex issues, and forge interactive spaces of relative safety (Bratich & Brush, 2011; Hickey-Moody, 2013; Renold, 2018).

As a discipline premised on the evocative, participatory, and transformative qualities of creative practice, music therapy is supported by a body of research into the cognitive, emotional, social, and community-oriented benefits of participating in music. These benefits are well documented with young people, with a particular focus on notions of agency and collaboration (McFerran, 2010; Hadley & Veltre, 2012; Bolger, 2015; Bain et al., 2016; Fairchild & McFerran, 2018). Music therapy discourse demonstrates a longstanding interest in feminist approaches (see Curtis, 2012; Rolvsjord & Hadley, 2015; Hadley & Hahna, 2016), as well as key practice frameworks that emphasise clients’ resources (Rolvsjord, 2010), advocate for equal participation (Stige & Aarø, 2012), and seek to politicise people’s ‘personal’ problems (Baines, 2013). Recent years have seen dramatic changes in language and understanding related to issues of gender and power, with growing attention paid to these issues in music therapy (see Hadley, 2013a; Bain et al., 2016; Boggan et al., 2017; Halstead & Rolvsjord, 2017). Indeed, over the course of this project, discourse on these issues has expanded dramatically. Since conducting my initial literature review during my first year of candidature, a wealth of new literature has emerged and crucially informed the paradigm from which I was writing.

Seeking to contribute to the music therapy discipline, and to the emerging discourse related to arts-based methodologies in exploring gender with young people, I designed this project to build knowledge that was rich with context. Critical approaches that were specifically oriented to power dynamics supported the overall qualitative methodology, with a focus on eliciting meaning, and allowing the project to develop based on emerging learnings. Underpinned by the principles of anti-oppressive practice, I centred critical theories throughout, emphasising how people and communities are situated within broader power structures, and seeking to prioritise the agency and embodied knowledge of the
participants. Contextualising these ontologies with the rapidly shifting discourse related to issues of gender and power with young people in schools, I was guided by participatory action research as an overarching methodological orientation. I anchored my research question to the role music therapy could play in this emerging space, and spent the first year of enquiry running participatory group workshops. These workshops provided insight into the issues related to gender that were important to young people, and how music could be used as a medium for exploring them. I dedicated myself to disseminating these findings, and securing a school setting in which I could explore these issues over a longer period of time. I spent the following year at ‘South East College’, a mainstream school in the outer suburbs of Melbourne. Focusing on the project as a critical ethnography, I conducted several group music therapy programs, and incorporated multiple forms of data generation and analysis to represent the participants’ and my own experience.

Having positioned myself to focus on context and think critically about power dynamics, I quickly discovered a range of complexities emerging in the way violence was understood at the school. It became clear that in order to illuminate the role of music therapy, I first had to address the structural conditions and power relations of the setting, which related to the ways violence was (un)seen and (de)legitimised, and how the young people and staff saw and represented one another. The remainder of this chapter overviews each of the four findings chapters, before turning to the implications of the project in its entirety. I delineate these implications into three sections: 1) implications for schools, 2) implications for gender-based violence prevention with young people in schools, and 3) implications for music therapy, which includes a subsection on music therapy with young people. I conclude with the project’s limitations, and questions the research has prompted for future investigation.

Results Overview

Chapter Four: Complex Violences.

I commenced representing the results by unpacking the ways violence was attended to in the school, using narrative to uncover the complexity of seeking to explore gender-based violence, while multiple forms of violence appeared to be occurring simultaneously. In this chapter I delved into the ways girls’ relationships to violence is positioned and characterised: either pathologised, or obscured as “drama”, which was symptomatic of broader narratives about the way teen girls relate to each other (Brown, 2004; Brown et al., 2007). Where responses to teen girls often swing between a dichotomy of either trivialisation and dismissal,
or control and regulation, the ‘Hear Girls’ music group appeared to be a radical alternative. I noted how, particularly for girls with little structural power, having a space within institutions where their emotions are heard, their experiences are believed, and solidarity among them is fostered is not only good for them, but the community around them (Brown, R. N., 2009; Brown, L. M., 2016; Showummi, 2017). I recounted an unanticipated form of violence that arose following an incident in the girls group, when Moana shared her experience of sexual assault. Her allegation was shared between classmates, whose response was to defend the honour of the boy accused, positioning him as the victim, and disputing Moana’s credibility. The young people’s reactions were reflective of a broader culture of questioning women who speak out about their experiences of violence and misogyny. However, the response from staff spoke to a more disturbing (but historically congruent) violence, when they characterised the incident as “more drama”, and sought to shut the girls’ group down.

Next, I examined violence in the form of microaggressions, drawing on the Year Seven Coordinator’s advice to me at the beginning of the project, that “boys like these will not respond to something like music”. I used interview data to examine the ways the boys’ racialised identities shaped how they were positioned in relation to violence and risk, and why the boys’ issues with violence and anger could be understood as posing a threat to the school’s institutional identity as a ‘civilised’ and ‘progressive’ place. This chapter began to introduce the porous and evasive nature of Whiteness in Australia, and its power in allowing structural violence to go unexamined. The final data story in this chapter spoke to the ways young people resist and respond to their positioning in this context. Broadly, the chapter demonstrated engrained patterns in our (un)attendance to violence, and how young people voicing their experiences of violence can be silenced. I asserted that within this context, we may see and seek to examine one form of violence, while other forms of violence continue to occur in complex ways. Next, I sought to uncover the power relations that motivated these complexities.

Chapter Five: Processes of Othering.

In Chapter Five, I used the concept of ‘othering’ to analyse the ways the staff and young people represented one another, and to explain how these relational patterns are deeply embedded in settings where young people are positioned as ‘at risk’. First, I used interview data to reveal the narratives of victimhood, risk, and deprivation through which the staff appeared to understand the young people. Through this, it became evident that blame was directed intensely at their families, home lives, and cultural communities. Drawing on
concepts from decolonial theory, the chapter delved into the colonial and individualising discourses that underpinned perceptions of the young people’s immediate circumstances as having ‘failed’ them. While the staff described students’ homes as sites of trauma, and where (in particular) boys were subject to “cultural pressures” to perform a certain type of masculinity, the school was positioned as an alternative space of neutrality, safety, and benevolence, where they could learn seemingly ‘progressive’ Western values. I explicated how, although the staff genuinely cared for and sought to support the young people, this support could also be understood through overlapping frames of colonial relations and deficit discourse. Such tendencies reflected two narratives in the wider literature. First, how vulnerable communities in Australia are routinely socialised into deficit (Moreton-Robinson, 2009; Vass, 2012; Rudolph, 2016). And second, the idea that schools and their staff are ‘giving young people chances in life’, hence erasing the multiplicity and value of their own communities (Emdin, 2016). Informed by critical education literature, I noted the links here between saviour complexes and neoliberal logic, which not only locate problems within the individual rather than structures, but also position individual professionals as capable of saving marginalised young people from their abject circumstances (Payne, 2008; McLeod, 2012; Brown, A., 2013; Chatelier & Rudolph, 2018).

Unsurprisingly, how the young people chose to represent themselves in the project was strikingly different from the staff’s representations, as they found ways to advocate for their own agency, and represent the strength and resilience of their own communities. Rather than seeking to fault the staff for these tendencies and perpetuate a ‘blame game’ (Pizter, 2014b), this chapter pointed to the existing structural forces which restrict both staff and young people from seeing each other through a full and multidimensional lens. In this context, I explored a tension in how institutions readily position young people as victims, but fail to equip professionals with the time and support necessary to engage in thinking and action that challenges what is readily available to them – deficit discourse. These results particularly echo calls in the literature to reconsider how we represent clients in music therapy literature (Fairchild & Bibb, 2016) and beyond (Renold & Ringrose, 2011; Walter, 2016; Bryan, 2017). Relatedly, the findings in Chapter Five further indicated the urgent need for spaces in which young people feel seen, capable, and in control of their own narratives.

**Chapter Six: The Role of Music.**

Seeking to understand the role music played for young people in navigating these complex structures and subjectivities, I drew on ecological approaches to music and
sociology to elucidate four key themes. First, I described the way music relates to our identity, and how musical identities can be used as a political resource. This emerged as immensely important especially for young people whose agency and identities were often marked as Other, and policed in overt and covert ways. Because music is a site of identity construction, I demonstrated how music can be appropriated for identity exploration and experimentation with young people, and the significance of these affordances in exploring and relaxing rigid and oppressive constructions of gender. Building on the work of Rolvsjord and Halstead (2013; 2017) here, I constructed music as an arena for gender politics and performance. Using a gender lens, I explored the seemingly ‘neutral’ act of a group of adolescent boys singing together, and articulated how these acts of musicking can signify meaningful experimentation with the constraints of masculinity. By positioning the young people as active and agentic participants in these events, rather than passive recipients of music as an elusive object, I explicated key contextual components that enabled such subtle and radical shifts to occur. For example, how 13-year-old Frank’s willingness to demonstrate less traditionally masculine ways of musicking served as a pivotal role model for the other participants, and how experimentation with musical instruments might be easier for boys who are historically encouraged and expected to be instrumentalists, which is not the case for girls.

Throughout the findings, I articulated how the Hear Girls group had arisen from a context of conflict and fractured relationships, and how this proved to be a complex space to experiment with musicking and explore consciousness-raising. However, through the data stories and interview data in Chapter Six, I discovered how in music, the girls appeared to strengthen and repair their relationships while exploring their collective experiences of ‘girlhood’. I examined the findings in relation to musicking as an activity that is relational, dynamic, and recognises each other’s personhood (DeNora, 2000). Rather than participating in a group that focused on their conflict, musicking together was an embodied practice that built connection between the girls through moments of co-subjectivity and inter-subjectivity (Ansdell, 2014). Again, with context in mind, the transformation of the girls’ relationships can be understood as particularly significant, given entrenched gendered narratives in which teen girls are expected to compete against and betray each other, rather than coalesce in solidarity (Brown, 2004).

10 Recognising that these histories of knowledge are based on the Western imperial gender binary, and do not account for other possible experiences and expressions of gender.
During one-on-one interviews, participants such as 14-year-old Amelia reflected on how music just “made things better” and “brings more happiness”, while 13-year-old John reported that music “calms me down easily”, and “felt like freedom”. I sought to examine these statements in context, to better understand these experiences, while also challenging the idea that music was a mechanism which acted passively on the young people. Through rooting these experiences in the young people’s lives, and conditions under which they were situated, I revealed the transformative affordances of music in expressing and validating their emotions, which were so readily dismissed, pathologised, or coded within narratives of victimhood. The significance of emotional validation for these young people drew on Sara Ahmed’s (2004) work on the relationship between emotions and injustice. This section concluded by exploring the political significance of “moving and being moved” in different ways to the dominant narrative (p. 201).

The project also demonstrated how music can afford participation and engagement in ways that have been well-documented across fields such as music therapy, music education, and music psychology, but up until now have not been examined in relation to engaging young people to explore gender. This bears relevance to all young people, but was particularly meaningful for these participants whose experience at school system was often characterised by ‘difficult’ behaviour, complex learning needs, and whose identities and histories were positioned by vulnerability and deficit. As Dani, the Wellbeing Coordinator described in her interview, these were young people who were seen as having “Buckley’s chance” of thriving, or even surviving. I unpacked the complex cognitive, social, and cultural resources that 14-year-olds Ale and Mo drew on in order to learn and record a Fleet Foxes song one afternoon, and the potential this signifies for those seeking to engage and motivate young people in a school context. As 13-year-old Josh described, music can act as a vehicle to interest young people into exploring complex issues: “kind of like fishing”.

I drew on Josh’s metaphor from this point onwards to describe the powerful affordances of music in the context of this project. Drawing on ecological theories of what music offers, this metaphor demonstrates how music can act as a ‘hook’, or perhaps ‘bait’, for young people to use their own agency to move towards. Using music as a medium to explore gender in relation to this metaphor, I highlighted how musicking engages the whole person in context. As we might consider the many factors required for fishing, this chapter explicated how using music to explore gender operates at the intersection of a whole young person in context, and requires considering a range of the personal and institutional factors.
that shape and position them. These include their cognition, their social, cultural and musical identity, and the broader conditions they exist within.

**Chapter Seven: The Role of Music Therapy.**

The final chapter of results detailed the particular role that music therapy as a professional practice can play in fully considering and taking into account such a wide range of factors. My project revealed the importance of reflecting on boundaries, reflexivity, and ethics, given how when we foster safe spaces, complex and unanticipated consequences may arise. Fileborn (2014) has pointed out the likelihood of programs exploring gender to result in disclosures of harm, and the importance (and difficulty) of creating safe spaces in schools.

Echoing this and reflecting on the disclosures that arose in the project, I examined the Respectful Relationships Education curriculum’s advice related to disclosures. Broadly, I was critical of the capacity of the culture and infrastructure currently available in schools, such as for young people who have experienced violence and wish to speak about their experiences at school.

Drawing on decolonial and anti-oppressive scholarship that advocates for a paradigm shift away from trauma being understood as a ‘single catastrophic event’, I highlighted the congruency of specific music therapy frameworks in reframing trauma from these perspectives (Wade, 1997; Ginwright, 2010; Richardson & Reynolds, 2014). I articulated how music therapists who use ecological perspectives that emphasise context and positioning, and align with frameworks that focus on client’s resources and agency, are well positioned to conduct this immensely complex work with young people. Specifically, I proposed that music therapists practicing in schools are likely to be informed and aware of the social context and impacts of harm, while simultaneously less likely to pathologise or position young people only in relation to their trauma. By creating spaces and opportunities for young people to advocate for systemic change, music therapy offers a potential avenue for what Ginwright (2018) advocates in moving beyond trauma-informed care and into ‘healing centred engagement’.

The findings demonstrated the unique skillset music therapists hold that are not only relevant, but integral for exploring gender and power with young people. Chapter Seven explored the importance of approaching this emerging field with the ability to adapt existing approaches in line with current understandings, to explore new techniques, and to locate and engage young people in context. These results again raised notions of equal participation, which are deeply relevant for engaging young people in exploring the underpinnings of
gender-based violence, because there are currently few materials developed to support young people with diverse learning needs in the RRE curriculum (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2018). During the project, I highlighted the young people’s own conceptions of the role of a music therapist exploring gender and power, and unpacked the complexities of their responses which often used their teachers as a disparaging comparison. I used this as an opportunity to reflect upon the broader forces which place unreasonable demands on school staff, and create the conditions described in Chapter Five, where staff and students are positioned against each other.

Within these conditions, I pointed to the value of music therapists using the time, space and expertise available to them to a) support their co-workers, b) engage in the kind of critical thinking that teachers may not always have the space to do, and c) collaborate and share with those who are already engaging in this work. In this chapter, I proposed that the role of a music therapist exploring gender with young people requires adopting a critical lens, anchored by anti-oppressive practice, and recognising the social, economic, and political conditions under which we are seeking change. I concluded the results of the project with a data story exemplifying how power dynamics flow through the ways music is valued and positioned in the contexts we work in, and within music itself.

During interviews, what many of the young people emphasised was most important to them in our program were exploring the “real world issues”. Concluding Chapter Seven, I argue that the “real world issues” of gender-based violence should be considered with an analytic disposition (Cho et al., 2013). In regards to music therapy practice, I noted how exploring gendered power dynamics inherent in music is an important part of this work, but it cannot be undertaken detached from other aspects of identity. The role of a music therapist exploring gender with young people requires critical consideration from multiple directions: recognising the dominant narratives present in musical material; seeking to transform the broader social contexts in which this material arises; and understanding when and how to support young people to negotiate these complex issues within the context of their lives and identities.

**Personal Reflections on Guilt and ‘Burnout’**

Adopting a critical lens requires interrogating one’s own privilege, engaging seriously with our own positioning, and recognising that the ‘status quo’ often means the systemic re-inscription of power. In a settler-colonial context such as Australia, these notions were particularly important to embed, because Indigenous peoples’ over-representation in stories
of risk and need (such as family violence, sexual violence, and incarceration) can be located in the ongoing act and impact of colonisation (Pihama et al., 2016; Walter, 2016). I argued for a shift from a liberal to a critical framework, because liberal notions of ‘equality’ routinely fail to acknowledge the systematic privileging of certain groups. Further, ‘equality’ is often underpinned by false narratives of ‘progress’, which rely on individual competition and the premise of a meritocracy. As scholars have implored in music therapy, it is important to recognise that our tool is not apolitical, and systemic violence arises continually in the contexts in which we practice (Baines, 2013; Hadley, 2013a; Whitehead-Pleaux & Tan, 2017). We can either confront these, or remain complicit in vague notions of equality that are embedded institutionally.

Since concluding the project and navigating ways of re-telling these stories and representing young people including those who disclosed horrific experiences of abuse, it has occurred to me again and again how the realities of their worlds are more than I could ever adequately portray in this dissertation. Undoubtedly, the heaviness of the disclosures of violence that this project brought to light has weighed on me, and shaped the stories I have chosen to re-tell. I feel as though through this project, I opened doors for the young people, and then in some ways, closed them again. Reflecting on such anguish, I am cognisant of the saviour complexes I explored in Chapter Five, and my own tendency to position myself as an individual with the capacity (or right) to ‘rescue’ young people. Meanwhile, their stories, words, songs, and artworks stayed with me each day when I left the school, and remain etched into my mind. The weight of these stories have been explored through the concept of vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue (McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Dunkley & Whelan, 2006), and in the context of music therapy research with young people positioned by risk (Fairchild, 2018).

In navigating these complexities, I centre Reynold’s (2010) ‘justice-doing’ approach. Reynolds (2011) constructs justice-doing as an alternative to the individualising notion of ‘burnout’, which locates the problems within the minds of individuals, rather than in the structures that perpetuate injustices:

I do not deny that as therapists and community workers we can be harmed and experience pain in our work, even to the extent of needing to leave the work, or take time out. What I am contesting is the prescriptive, individualised accusations burnout levies against workers which invisibilise and obscure the contexts of social injustice we work in, and blame clients for the harms we experience. (p. 28)
The notion of ‘vicarious resilience’ (Hernández et al., 2007) has been advocated for in music therapy by Fairchild (2018). I propose the value in extending this concept in music therapy through justice-doing. Central here is the premise of activism, and the call for collective and relational responses that resist neoliberal logics of individualisation and competition.

Implications and Recommendations

Two parallel aims underpinned this research project: 1) to locate music therapy within broader health, education and community contexts as a meaningful and anti-oppressive practice for young people to explore gender and power, and 2) to further develop understandings of gender and power as they relate to music therapy as an anti-oppressive practice. Below, I explore the significance of my contribution to each of these fields of literature and practice, and several implications and recommendations for these spaces. There are a range of points developed to inform specific contexts and practitioners, but there are also key implications that are applicable broadly. These draw on my findings related to the complexities of violence embedded in the Australian school context, and the ways in which young people on the margins negotiate their sense of agency when they are positioned by discourses of risk and victimhood. I argue that anti-oppressive practice is a useful orientation to anchor the ways we approach systemic power imbalances, and to resist the temptation to reduce explorations of gender and power down to dominant narratives of risk or vulnerability.

Implications for schools.

This project has revealed some of the problematic relational patterns that are deeply embedded into school systems, and that arise when working with communities who have experienced structural and interpersonal harm. Deficit discourse emerges easily and readily as an explanatory power in schools, and while positioning young people through their misfortune can appear benevolent in ways, doing so reinforces several dominant narratives which are important to consider. First, in locating failures only in young people’s homes and families, vulnerable young people and marginalised communities are blamed and constructed as the problem, thus obscuring broader forces of structural oppression (Payne, 2008). Next, when we position ourselves or our individual services as having the capacity to save or ‘give young people a life’, we can erase the multiplicity and value of young people’s own
communities (Emdin, 2016). These discourses are rooted in neoliberalism and deficit, placing immense expectations on the power of the individual to work hard and rise out of abject circumstances, rather than addressing the structures that enable inequity. In a settler-colonial context, these narratives should also be considered in relation to their capacity to perpetuate the myth that schools in Australia are and have always been sites of neutrality, benevolence, and a forward-moving trajectory (see Vass, 2012; Moreton-Robinson, 2009, 2015; Rudolph, 2018). I join with several scholars researching in urban and under-resourced settings to suggest that professionals in schools could benefit greatly from developing literacy related to systems of inequality, rather than continuing to locate struggling students as victims of poor parenting, victims of welfare entitlement, or employing a de-racialised approach (Brown, A., 2013; Bettie, 2014; Pizter, 2014b).

It is important to distinguish that doing so is not simply about placing more responsibility on staff working in schools. In order to interrupt the realities of school staff themselves being subject to increasing blame and responsibility, I maintain that understanding the influence of neoliberalism is critical. Within these conditions, cycles of blame rotate between teachers, young people, and their families, rarely settling on the systemic factors that reproduce inequalities. My findings reflected a growing concern regarding the increasingly difficult conditions under which teachers and support staff must prove their value in schools, undermining their genuine care for students, and obligating them to continually evidence their worth (Chatelier & Rudolph, 2018). Indeed, staff in government schools exist within complex social, cultural, and political conditions, and could be better supported in countless cultural, social, and economic ways.

While I wish to avoid placing blame on individuals, I also believe at times their attitudes were representative of broader raced and classed narratives that are important to look closely at, in regards to the ways we see and represent young people and their families. During one-on-one interviews, a Year Level Coordinator described a student’s mother as “utterly hopeless”, while a senior staff member attributed the students’ low academic scores to their family’s “lack of cultural expectations of achievement”. A social worker in the school’s Wellbeing Office criticised how the students have been “bred” with their family’s “sense of entitlement”. Another Year Level Coordinator proposed that the boys I worked with endured “cultural pressures” at home, which meant they had not “actually experienced love”. The colonial and assimilatory underpinnings of these representations were unable to ignore, and led much of my attention and analysis to Whiteness and the settler-colonial context in which the project was based.
As the literature suggests, there exists a tendency for discussions of “cultural issues” to reinforce Whiteness, and replace actual examination of race relations (see Cowlishaw, 2004; Alonso et al., 2009). Indeed, while occasionally racism was clear and overt, I also discovered how the terms “culture” and “cultural” were adopted in place of naming race explicitly, and often used to make covert racialised statements. Within all of this, I was told by a staff member, “I mean, you only have to look at the school. Racism? Well it’s non-existent”. Explicit discussions of race and racism are necessary, but they become deeply problematic when favouring a de-racialised approach, or encouraging surface-level language of ‘tolerance and respect for all’ (Walton, 2018). As Ahmed (2012) has articulated, support of cultural diversity does not replace actual anti-racism. Pointing to a key implication for schools in general, the young people in this project explicitly noted the tensions inherent in being asked to explore gender equality, while their experiences of racism were minimised and unaddressed.

**Implications for gender-based violence prevention in schools.**

This project was not an investigation, evaluation, or reflection on the Respectful Relationships Education in Schools (RRE) program. However, my research has been crucially informed by the literature dedicated to the development and evaluation of RRE (see for example Flood et al., 2009; Gleeson et al., 2015; Jewkes et al., 2015; Ollis, 2018). My engagement with the Partners in Prevention network, multiple professional development trainings and the body of literature built through the primary violence prevention field were each invaluable to this project’s planning, implementation and critical reflection. I was also acutely aware of the decades of work and strategic efforts that have led to the piloting, evaluation, scaling up, and implementation of RRE, which occurred concurrently during the years this project ran (Joyce et al., 2018)

While in practice I approached my work as a Registered Music Therapist, the project was premised on the importance of exploring young people’s attitudes and beliefs related to gender (Harris et al., 2015); being embedded in a community and adopting a whole school approach (Flood et al., 2009); and attending to the role teachers play in exploring gender (Ollis, 2014). Indeed, at times, our sessions drew directly from activities in the Respectful Relationships curriculum itself (Ollis, 2018). I am conscious that my findings may seem inapplicable to many schools, given how the participants in this project were situated on the margins of mainstream education. South East College was a distinctly classed and racialised setting; many students I worked with had intellectual disabilities, language and
developmental disorders; many were surviving systemic poverty and interaction with justice and Child Protection authorities. However, informed by standpoint theory, I adopt the position that we have the most to gain by centring those on the margins (Moreton-Robinson, 2013). This is especially important given primary prevention literature is only just beginning to explore the unique impacts of violence as it is shaped by factors such as colonisation (Our Watch, 2018), heterosexism (Our Watch, 2017), and disability (Didi et al., 2016).

In light of my specialist practice as a music therapist, and the qualitative, context-driven, and participatory nature of my project, I offer some alternative perspectives and insights. Moreover, as a project that has been conducted over this significant period of change in the way gender and power is understood and challenged in schools, I hope to strengthen ongoing critical discussions with learnings that exemplify the complexities of this work. In doing so, three key questions have emerged:

1) In what ways can primary violence prevention in schools reinforce the notion that addressing violence and inequality will occur through changing individual actions, rather than dismantling the structures that enable them?

I consider this question particularly as it pertains to notions of power, and where the responsibility lies to address violence as it occurs interpersonally and structurally. My findings demonstrated how when we place the onus on young people to recognise and challenge these issues, and teachers to support them to do so, we rely on the benevolence and progressiveness of the system. By doing so, I suggest we may obfuscate the violence and structural inequalities of the system itself. There is a very real violence inherent in educating young people about personal respect and responsibility, while they continue to be subject to abuses of power and structural violence within these same institutions. An example of this can be identified in the title of the state-wide package of learning materials for developing healthy relationships, Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships. The emphasis in such a title is unequivocally on personal responsibility, fortitude, and autonomous self-regulation, which squarely locates problems in the individual, rather than societally. These neoliberal ideologies construct and reinforce the normative subject: a citizen who is mentally and emotionally healthy, adaptable, and self-responsible. As has been demonstrated, this ideology has powerful impacts on both young people and staff in education settings (McLeod, 2012; Brunila & Rossi, 2018; Chatelier & Rudolph, 2018).
These implications draw on the findings presented in Chapter Four when the Hear Girls group challenged the culture of acceptability related to sexual assault in the school. Not only were their experiences dismissed, but they were treated by staff simply as “drama”, reifying narratives of blame, minimisation, and delegitimisation related to girls’ experiences, and coding their behaviour as trouble-making rather than important and transformative. Similarly problematic in this sense were the discourses of assimilation which emerged in identifying why particular students were suitable for the music therapy program exploring anger and violence. Ultimately, the question lies in considering how much we expect of young people to challenge and change their individual behaviour. Furthermore, these ideologies are reinforced when locating the problems, as well as the need to change, only in the individual. Especially, as these findings demonstrated, when young people continue to experience multiple forms of violence within these systems.

As Rasmussen et al. (2017) have articulated in relation to addressing homophobia and transphobia in schools, I echo similar questions but for responding to gender-based violence broadly. As Rasmussen et al. argue, that there is a need to locate and understand the injury young people endure in schools, but also to see not only injury (p. 40). And second, that the responsibility to address injury and harm “cannot be located in a specific individual, nor a specific event, place or time” (p. 41). Brunila and Rossi’s (2018) discussion on the ‘ethos of vulnerability’ addresses similar issues, problematising the cultural shift away from social responsibility and onto individual responsibility. They call for more rigorous attention to how these processes shape people to become “more governable and eventually more economically productive subjects” (p. 296). Similar to Rasmussen et al. (2017), Brunila and Rossi (2018) call for a widening of human subjectivity, rather than individually-oriented emotional education and behavioural training (p. 291).

In regard to systemic failures, there is a valid concern for how disclosures of interpersonal violence are actually dealt with by school communities, given that these are likely to occur (Fileborn, 2014; Ollis, 2018). Reflecting on the upscaling and implementation of RRE, Joyce et al., (2018) conducted interviews and focus groups with representatives from community and primary prevention agencies, and the Department of Education and Training. The authors state that across all interviews and focus groups, participants identified the procedures in place to deal with disclosures to be inadequate (p. 6). Meanwhile, programs consistently emphasise the importance of striving for ‘safe spaces’ in exploring these complex issues with young people. As Fileborn (2014) has also noted, I believe this is a significantly more difficult task than it may seem.
What the project illuminates broadly, is the need to expand our understanding of violence and its many forms. For example, the very notion of ‘primary violence prevention’ can be problematised in the context of Australian education, where Whiteness and colonialism remain so profoundly underexamined (Walton, 2018). Ultimately, if we are committed to supporting schools to develop a gender lens that is intersectional, then the violence of racism or ableism, for example, cannot be considered ‘extras’ or ‘add on’ subjects, but as deeply interconnected. Rather than advocating for a more general or de-politicised ‘anti-violence’ lens, I propose that this work can be more explicitly politicised through Cho, Crenshaw and McCall’s (2013) ‘intersectional analytic disposition’. Within this, primary violence prevention in schools must not be positioned only as the responsibility of young people to simply change their own behaviour, or be resilient in the face of very real inequalities. Instead, it could function in solidarity with young people and commit wholeheartedly to dismantling violence in our own systems – indeed, a more complex undertaking.

2) How might gender-based violence prevention work in schools uphold deficit discourse and enable other forms of violence?

Interview data with staff revealed an assertion that young people were most subject to violence, harm, unreasonable expectations, or a lack of expectations in their homes and with their families. Rather than pointing to the structures that reproduce disadvantage, the students themselves were represented as ‘damaged’ by their families and communities, echoing themes articulated in the wider literature (Payne, 2008; Pitzer, 2014). Such narratives reflect a need to attend to the ways young people’s families and homes are discursively constructed in these discussions, especially given gender-based violence is often located primarily as a problem in people’s homes. In this project, stereotypes of poor families as welfare burdens and entitled manipulators arose at many points, and often in the very same breath as when advocating for the importance of gender equality.

A specific implication also arose related to the boys who struggled most with issues of anger and aggression. Often, the boys seemed to understand their emotions using self-pathologising language: “I’m mental”, “I just get angry, for no reason”. Meanwhile, the staff often appeared to attribute the boys’ expressions of toxic masculinity to the “cultural pressures” they endured at home. Implicit here was a narrative that White Australian masculinity is more progressive and expansive. Related to these assumptions, I have
contemplated potentials for gender equality programs in schools beyond this project. Specifically, I am concerned with the possibility that such programs will be used against boys who are marked Other in specifically racialised ways, such as to enable anti-Black, anti-Islamic, and anti-immigration sentiments.

Ultimately, I assert that broad notions of ‘equality’ can very easily assume a transcendence of racial politics, and that this will have specific impacts for specific communities. With these possibilities and my previous question in mind, I believe gender equity in schools should be conscious of the potential to obfuscate the responsibility of the state, and play into the hands of colonial pathologising (see Moreton-Robinson, 2009). Indigenous perspectives should be centred here, especially within contexts where over-representation data can be deployed to serve deficit discourse (see Walter, 2016). As Māori scholars Pihama et al. (2016) argue, family violence “cannot be separated from violence upon and against Indigenous communities” (p. 48, drawing on Erai et al., 2007). Shifting focus in this regard will enable gender-based violence prevention to better recognise and challenge assimilatory and colonial narratives as they emerge, and expand upon our understanding of violence.

3) How can gender-based violence programs in schools adopt more accessible and participatory approaches to enable equal participation?

In seeking to challenge and deconstruct gender norms, I propose that programs and curriculums should attend to diversity in cognitive and physical experience to better incorporate intersections of disability and gender. While Respectful Relationships Education importantly advocates for educators to begin to incorporate a gender lens into their teaching, it is thus far unclear how students with diverse learning needs are included. Although relationships and sexuality are explored within specific organisations and projects, the state-wide school curriculum itself does not provide any detailed alternative for young people. Exploring gender with young people with diverse abilities should also be considered especially in the context of a) a higher likelihood of young people with disabilities experiencing interpersonal violence (Krnjacki et al., 2016), b) ableist and heteronormative narratives of sexuality which have led to perceptions of people with disabilities as asexual (Esmail et al., 2010), and c) the historic failures of disability inclusion movements to recognise and incorporate the history and ongoing impacts of racism (Hollingsworth, 2013). More research is needed to understand and respond to the needs of young people who are
neurodivergent, or have language or developmental disorders engaging in gender-based violence prevention. The intersections of gender, race, class, and disability, are important to consider, especially when interrelated notions of ‘deficit’ and ‘impairment’ come to the fore and we contemplate who is participating in which discussions.

Of course, I anticipate that those working in gender-based violence prevention in schools understand that certain young people will disengage from these discussions, for a number of reasons. Outside of their experience with the school system itself, young people may have difficulties engaging in learning environments due to any combination of hearing impairments, physical impairments, emotional, social or behaviour issues, prior education experiences, issues with attention and concentration, or cognitive and intellectual disabilities. Looking beyond prevention and into the needs of young people already involved in violence, such as those in youth justice contexts, it is important to keep in mind the overrepresentation of young people with developmental disabilities, mental health issues, and exposure to family violence (Stewart, Dennison & Hurren, 2005). As an example, it has been noted that issues with receptive and expressive language are consistently under-identified and unaddressed in adolescence (Hughes et al., 2017; Snow & Woodward, 2016). More generally, communication issues are consistently misunderstood and overlooked in marginalised young people; it is known that at least 50-60% of adolescent boys in youth justice in Victoria have a clinically significant developmental language disorder (Swain, 2017). These questions related to engagement and equal participation emerged as especially important in this project, given that almost all of the young people involved in my research could be identified as having a developmental or cognitive disability, and/or social, emotional or behavioural issues.

**The potential in music therapy.**

I turn now to focus specifically on music therapy as a medium that meets best practice recommendations, and offers immense potential in further research and practice related to gender with young people. As a premise the project departed from, exploring gender with young people in schools requires new and contemporary modalities in spaces that are non-confronting, and approaches that are participatory, engaging, and adolescent targeted (Our Watch, 2015b; Renold, 2016, 2018; VicHealth, 2017; Bragg et al., 2018). In developing these spaces and modalities, it is important to consider ways of engaging young people who have complex and diverse learning and emotional needs, and who have experienced violence and abuse themselves.
In Chapter Six, I introduced Luka, a 14-year-old Samoan boy with a diagnosed language disorder which impacted both his receptive and expressive language. When I asked Luka how he would compare regular class to our music therapy group, he told me, “I could understand what we were doing in our group… in normal class when they’re trying to explain something, I don’t really understand what they’re trying to say”. While we do not know whether Luka truly understood the complex topics we explored together, what he went on to describe was his experience of feeling included and valued in the group, which is relevant given the need for spaces of (relative) safety and containment (Renold, 2018). Through my arguments in Chapter Six, I revealed how music is a space for identity construction; music creates conditions where young people can connect relate to each other; music relaxes physical and psychological boundaries to enable the expression and validation of emotion. It is through these unique affordances that young people are more likely to experience a greater capacity for engagement, and indeed understanding.

This has potential for young people with diverse learning and communication needs, such as Ale and Mo, who engaged in music therapy in ways they did not during class. Both of the boys had an intellectual disability: Mo had a clinically significant expressive language impairment, they had both been engaged with Child Protection authorities, and the teachers predicted they would not “make it” (referring to their probable exit of the school before senior years). However, music enables motivating opportunities for young people to draw on a wide range of complex skills, such as literacy, cognitive flexibility, aural and technical music skills, self-regulation, attention, and planning. Within this, rather than positioning their engagement as ‘miraculous’, we can instead recognise the multiple opportunities music offers for participation, young people’s own agency in using these resources, and the distinct skill set music therapists possess in creating these conditions.

The findings pointed to several new understandings about the specific skillset music therapists possess, further supporting implications for music therapy in contexts exploring gender with young people. For example, by drawing on young people’s significant relationships with music, ‘Insight-Oriented Narrative Songwriting’ was a carefully facilitated songwriting technique which engaged the young people in safe, embodied and multisensory experience to explore serious issues of power and control in relationships. As a guided and supported opportunity for young people to embody and empathise with a different perspective, this was a strengths-based approach. I noted specific therapeutic skills relevant here in developing creative and engaging ways to explore highly complex issues, without
requiring young people to delve into their own personal lives or potential experiences of trauma.

Of course, there are numerous other spaces, methods, and practices that are engaging and meaningful to young people, and can be harnessed in participatory ways. My findings reinforce the emerging body of scholarship which points to the particular opportunities in using arts-based methods for exploring issues related to gender (see for example Brown, 2009; Renold, 2018; Stanger, 2018). In making my contribution and advocating for creative practices when working with young people in schools, I emphasise the need to further develop the following:

1) Anti-oppressive practice as an orientation for understanding the complex and under-recognised forms of violence which occur across interpersonal and structural lines.
2) An orientation to the possibilities of disclosures and impact of (collective, historical, and interpersonal) trauma, and responses which do not reinforce an ethos of vulnerability.
3) Our understanding and responses to the needs of young people with disabilities.

**Implications for music therapy practice.**

As explored in detail in Chapter Seven, this project has demonstrated how music therapists can harness their unique skillset to explore entrenched and emerging issues related to gender and power in their practice. Specifically, music therapists hold valuable expertise in creative and flexible thinking, allowing for the adaptation of existing techniques, the creation of new methods, as well as the capacity to recognise our limitations. Some of the techniques that offer potential for further work include Insight-Oriented Narrative Songwriting, which supported the participants to embody a different gendered perspective. Building on the well-documented benefits of therapeutic songwriting (Baker, 2015), this technique required therapeutic skills in guidance and containment, and enabled the boys to push the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity and express a spectrum of emotions that are usually rigidly policed. Interviews with the boys indicated this was one of the most memorable and significant aspects of the group. Moving forward, I propose this and similar techniques could be further developed and explored in future research, drawing particularly on the queer music therapy model (Bain et al., 2016). Music therapists can also develop further understanding of how music intersects with the politics of emotion, and how emotionality operates in institutional spaces (see Ahmed, 2004). As Chapter Six revealed, music can play an important role in expressing and validating emotions, which is particularly significant for
individuals and entire identity groups whose emotions are routinely pathologised, questioned, and trivialised.

Current research and understanding of the context-driven systemic issues that impact our clients’ lives is helpful not only in reflecting on our work, but in forging new practice spaces and developing new approaches (Baines, 2013). Writing within the settler-colonial Australian context, I sought to centre and make visible the ongoing processes of colonisation that continue to subjugate, incarcerate, and disable First Nations people. I argue that this is not a matter of personal politics, but central to understanding the workings of violence. From an anti-oppressive practice perspective, recognising how our clients’ positioning has shaped the struggles they present to services with is the work of music therapists in every context.

Building on calls in music therapy to think critically about representation, I have worked to challenge the dominant narratives that position the people we work with as victims, specifically highlighting how this plays out through deficit discourse and saviour complexes underpinned by neoliberalism. Music therapy discourse can continue to further challenge notions of representation, and I believe the notion of ‘othering’ may be helpful here. Particularly, how our representations of the Other can be used to shore up our own professional benevolence and position, and actually prevent us from addressing violence and imbalances of power. These findings add weight to Boggan et al.’s (2017) recommendations to think more critically about representation in the music therapy profession, to better incorporate intersectionality, and address the “inadequacy of multicultural training” (p. 385). I would add that in doing so, intersectionality should be approached within therapy with great sensitivity and attendance to its political origins. As Grzanka and Miles (2013) emphasise, intersectionality is not simply a means for therapists to see their clients as multidimensional, or for ‘understanding our differences’. Furthermore, superficial notions of ‘diversity’ will not enact structural change (see Ahmed, 2012; Bilge, 2013). Without engaging seriously with our own positioning, we run the risk of replicating or reinforcing power hierarchies (Mohanty, 2003), and specifically, of co-opting intersectionality without actually undertaking the work to disrupt White supremacy (Collins & Bilge, 2016). I propose that Cho et al.’s (2013) ‘intersectional analytical disposition’ is an important resource here, and the ways music therapists currently understand and incorporate this thinking into their practice are questions that warrant further inquiry.
Music therapists working with young people.

This project departed from the premise that adolescence is a highlighted period of gendered subjectivity, and that music therapists can better recognise the ways gender and sexuality position young people in specific ways (Bain et al., 2016). Over Chapter Six and Seven, I demonstrated how music therapists can harness the affordances of music to create conditions where young people may feel heard, and can engage in important liberatory work to challenge the structures that uphold imbalances of power, violence, exclusion, and trauma. This is especially significant, because young people are less likely to seek help for experiences of trauma or distress due to the ways they are treated by professionals (De Anstiss & Ziaian, 2010).

Importantly, music therapists exploring gender with young people should be prepared for such work to inevitably spark sensitive discussion. Such work may have complex consequences, from disclosures of harm and abuse, to poor responses from within the institution. The critical and therapeutic skills necessary to create a safe and containing space also demand an understanding of what makes spaces unsafe for young people, and responding when this safety is breached. Informed by decolonial and anti-oppressive approaches to trauma, music therapy practice can further develop here by resisting the dominant dichotomy of responses often wielded, in which we either silence or stigmatise young people who disclose their experiences, or believe that as therapists we are entitled to this information (see Richardson & Reynolds, 2014).

I have demonstrated several congruences with music therapy frameworks that are relevant to working therapeutically with young people who have experienced violence. In attending to power dynamics and fostering clients’ agency, Resource-Oriented Music Therapy (Rolvsjord, 2010) aligns well with approaches to re-framing trauma (Richardson & Reynolds, 2014). Underpinned by principles of activism that shift away from individual interventions and clinical goals, Community Music Therapy is congruent with the paradigm shift from trauma-informed care into ‘healing centred engagement’ (Ginwright, 2018). These are only emerging understandings, and ones I frame broadly through Prilleltensky’s (2008) ‘psychopolitical validity’, which incorporates notions of social justice into the ways we construct health and wellbeing. This framework is helpful in seeking to resist the culture of blame apportioned to young people’s families and communities, even when it may appear as though they are being ‘failed’ by them. However, I also recognise the intense difficulties within these conditions, in which to acquire funding and substantiate our value, we draw upon discourses of deficit. For music therapists in schools, I propose we have a distinct
Responsibility to utilise the extra time and space we are afforded, to support staff who can be positioned in opposition to students.

**Limitations and Further Investigation**

This project generated rich and complex data in one school. While this offered opportunities to understand the outcomes, meaning, and complexities of using music to explore gender with young people, the results are deeply tied to this context. The meaning constructed in the project was limited by my own subjective position, especially as the young people had no involvement in the analysis of the data once I had finished running the groups in the school. The absence of young people’s voices in shaping our approaches is important to address in future research, especially given the currently limited contribution that young people themselves have made to the design and evaluation of the Respectful Relationships Education curriculum. It is also worth pointing out that while I advocate for anti-oppressive approaches to this work, my willingness and capacity to do so is shaped inexorably by the privilege I am afforded. For example in continually advocating for the importance of considering racial violence, I recognise that this carries with it a particular subjective position: with Whiteness carries the reality that I am far less likely to confront resistance when centring issues of race. Furthermore, even when I may do so in dominant racialised spaces, resistance will never impact me in the form of racism.

Further investigation can be expanded in multiple directions. With only a very small body of literature which utilises the affordances of music to explore issues related to gender, there are limitless opportunities to build and develop this knowledge in different settings and with different populations. This should include, for example, conducting this work outside of schools, or with young people who openly identify as queer and gender diverse. In regards to music therapists’ practice, the project has invoked questions related to the ways we respond to the norms and dominant narratives present in musical material, during our sessions, and alongside our clients – an area that warrants further investigation.

In relation to further developing music therapy as an anti-oppressive practice, there is immense potential for examining the role we can play in a shifting trauma paradigm. Within this, it is worth developing an understanding of how music therapists currently respond to clients’ disclosures of violence and harm: in relation to the ethics and boundaries within their sessions, and also in relation to the ways they navigate broader institutions and policies. Given the work already being conducted in schools related to gender-based violence, I believe it is also crucial for further research to investigate how staff in schools navigate
disclosures within these complex and shifting conditions. In regards to schools, it is important to extend the work of Rickson and McFerran (2014), in delving further into the ways music therapists can work in solidarity with schools and education staff. Particularly, how music therapists’ approaches can resist forces of neoliberalism to disrupt the ‘blame game’, centre young people’s agency, and develop cultures of collective care and resistance.

**Concluding Statement**

In order to continue building new understandings and modalities for exploring gender, we must develop consciousness of our own identities and how these play into the power we hold as ‘helpers’ with young people, particularly within institutions. For every local context, there are nuanced exclusionary processes that young people face. Practitioners can shift from intervening into young people’s identities, to therapeutic practice as an intervention into the processes that pathologise them. This practice is multifaceted, complex, and always unfinished. Power dynamics are constantly in flow, and in turn, negotiation and reflection is ongoing; there is never a point of arrival. I have no doubt that as new learning emerges, I will reflect on my own suggestions, identify their imperfections, and hopefully, take the steps necessary in order to improve. Recognising the often-immobilising guilt of moving through the world as an adult with significant privilege and access to power, I hope to respond with action, engaging what Reynolds (2013) terms “a hopeful scepticism” (p. 52).

It is important for those who intend to work against power imbalances in educational, therapeutic and creative contexts to recognise what this work requires: beyond giving individuals better skills, emphasising their personal responsibility, or developing more, upscaled resources. In this project, I highlighted how addressing interpersonal gender-based violence with young people can actually reveal broader imbalances of power that impact particularly on specific communities. There is a deeply complicated landscape before us. However, there are approaches we can look to in exploring these complex issues and forms of violence, as they occur interpersonally and structurally. As a music therapist who witnesses transformation in young people and their community through music, this is one approach I advocate for. Music creates conditions where young people can express and experiment with their identities; drawing on their own interests, strengths, and resources. By musicking together, the young people in this project were able to build and repair relationships, which was meaningful within a local and broader structural context which does not always expect or foster collective solidarity.
Music can be drawn upon to engage young people in exploring and expressing their
gendered identities and experiences, because music is situated, interactive, and embodied.
The affordances of music can enable emotionally-transformative experiences, support young
people to develop insight and gain alternative perspectives, and write their own subjective
narratives. These affordances are especially important for young people who are
pathologised, positioned as Other, and who have limited spaces where their emotions and
experiences are identified as valid. It is crucial to continue imagining, developing, and
nuancing spaces and practices that draw on these capacities. Doing so requires us to
acknowledge and confront historical and ongoing systemic violences, and to critically engage
with our own positioning. It is through this ever-ongoing work that we create personal and
structural shifts; forging and supporting opportunities to express, relate, move, and be moved.
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Appendix

Appendix Preface

The following appendices relate to both the pilot project and the primary project. They contain: all approval letters required to undertake the research; Plain Language Statements and consent forms; a sample of raw data and analysis from the pilot project; song lyrics written during the pilot project; an interview guide used in the primary project; and two of the songs from the primary project that are referred to throughout the four findings chapters. Interview transcripts are not included due to the size of the project, and because some of the young people disclosed sensitive and potentially identifiable information about their home lives during interviews. However, selections of raw interview data are included throughout Chapters Four to Eight. I chose not to include many of the artefacts generated through the project in the Appendix, due to the sensitive and personal nature of the material.
Appendix A: Pilot Project Ethics Committee Approval

19 August 2015

Professor K S McFerran
School of Music
The University of Melbourne

Dear Professor McFerran

I am pleased to advise that the Humanities and Applied Sciences Human Ethics Sub-Committee approved the following Project:

Project title: Exploring the ways that young people describe gender equity issues when participating in song based workshops in schools
Researchers: Prof K S McFerran, E Scrine
Ethics ID: 1544197

The Project has been approved for the period: 19-Aug-2015 to 31-Dec-2015

It is your responsibility to ensure that all people associated with the Project are made aware of what has actually been approved.

Research projects are normally approved for 31 December of the year of approval. Projects may be renewed yearly for up to a total of five years upon receipt of a satisfactory annual report. If a project is to continue beyond five years a new application will normally need to be submitted.

Please note that the following conditions apply to your approval. Failure to abide by these conditions may result in suspension or discontinuation of approval and/or disciplinary action.

(a) Limit of Approval: Approval is limited strictly to the research as submitted in your Project application.

(b) Variation to Project: Any subsequent variations or modifications you might wish to make to the Project must be notified formally to the Human Ethics Sub Committee for further consideration and approval. If the Sub Committee considers that the proposed changes are significant, you may be required to submit a new application for approval of the revised Project.

(c) Incidents or adverse effects: Researchers must report immediately to the Sub Committee anything which might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol including adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the Project. Failure to do so may result in suspension or cancellation of approval.

(d) Monitoring: All projects are subject to monitoring at any time by the Human Research Ethics Committee.

(e) Annual Report: Please be aware that the Human Research Ethics Committee requires that researchers submit an annual report on each of their projects at the end of the year, or at the conclusion of a project if it continues for less than this time. Failure to submit an annual report will mean that ethics approval will lapse.

(f) Auditing: All projects may be subject to audit by members of the Sub-Committee.

If you have any queries on these matters, or require additional information, please contact me using the details below.

Please quote the ethics registration number and the title of the Project in any future correspondence.

On behalf of the Sub Committee I wish you well in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Kate Murphy – Acting Secretary
Humanities and Applied Sciences
Phone: 83442073, Email: k.murphy@unimelb.edu.au

RESEARCH INNOVATION & COMMERCIALISATION
Office for Research Ethics and Integrity
The University of Melbourne, Victoria 3010, Australia
Tel: +61 3 8341 1380 (direct) / 8341 2271 (internal) Web: unimelb.edu.au

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Appendix B: Pilot Project Department of Education & Training Approval

Ms Eily Scrine
School of Music Therapy
Melbourne Conservatorium of Music
The University of Melbourne
151 Barry Street
PARKVILLE 3010

Dear Ms Scrine

Thank you for your application of 2 June 2015 in which you request permission to conduct research in Victorian government schools titled Exploring the ways that young people describe gender equity issues when participating in song based workshops in schools.

I am pleased to advise that on the basis of the information you have provided your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the conditions detailed below.

1. The research is conducted in accordance with the final documentation you provided to the Department of Education and Training.

2. Separate approval for the research needs to be sought from school principals. This is to be supported by the Department of Education and Training approved documentation and, if applicable, the letter of approval from a relevant and formally constituted Human Research Ethics Committee.

3. The project is commenced within 12 months of this approval letter and any extensions or variations to your study, including those requested by an ethics committee must be submitted to the Department of Education and Training for its consideration before you proceed.

4. As a matter of courtesy, you advise the relevant Regional Director of the schools or governing body of the early childhood settings that you intend to approach. An outline of your research and a copy of this letter should be provided to the Regional Director or governing body.

5. You acknowledge the support of the Department of Education Training in any publications arising from the research.
6. The Research Agreement conditions, which include the reporting requirements at the conclusion of your study, are upheld. A reminder will be sent for reports not submitted by the study's indicative completion date.

I wish you well with your research. Should you have further questions on this matter, please contact Youla Michaels, Project Support Officer, Insights and Evidence Branch, by telephone on (03) 9637 2707 or by email at michaelsc.youla@edumail.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Eleanor Williams
Acting Director
Insights and Evidence Branch

10/07/2015
Appendix C: Pilot Project Plain Language Statement – Young People

Plain Language Statement for student participants

Exploring the ways that young people describe gender equity issues when participating in song based workshops in schools

Student Researcher:
Elly Scrine – PhD Candidate – Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne
Email: e.scrine@student.unimelb.edu.au

Responsible Researcher:
Professor Katrina Skewes McFerran – Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne
Phone: +61 03 8344 7382 / Email: k.mcferran@unimelb.edu.au

What is the purpose of this project?
This project uses music as way to explore what young people have to say about gender equality. The researchers want to get a good understanding of how adolescents think and feel about issues like gender stereotyping.

How will this happen?
If you're interested, you'll come along to the session and the researchers will explain the whole process to you. If it sounds like something you're still keen to do, you'll come back to participate in the workshop for around an hour. There will be one or two researchers running the group, and both of them are university trained Registered Music Therapists.

During the workshop, we'll chat about gender equality and your thoughts and experiences. We'll use popular music that you might know to get discussion going. Then we'll write a song about what you all think about these issues.

The workshop isn’t about trying to uncover personal information, it’ll be more like the discussions you have during your regular classes at school. We want to prevent anyone becoming upset or uncomfortable. But if you do feel upset, the researchers are there to support you, and you’re totally free to leave the workshop at any time.

What if I don’t want to be involved?
That’s perfectly OK and we are happy for students to say no at any time. The school doesn’t expect you to participate, and there will be no negative consequences if you don’t come. And if you do agree to come but then change your mind, you’re free to go and you won’t have to explain anything to anyone.
Plain Language Statement for student participants

Who will know that I have been involved in this research?
The information we learn during the workshops might be used in publications and presentations, but we won’t ever share your name. We will use a pseudonym (pretend name) whenever we are describing someone’s responses.

The computer files and anything we write down at the workshops will always be kept in a safe place at the University of Melbourne. And after five years it’ll all be destroyed, which is the normal procedure for research.

Who has approved this research?
The Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Melbourne has made sure there’s nothing in the project that is likely to harm you or disadvantage you in any way by participating.

What if I have concerns about this research?
If you or your parents have any concerns about any of this, you are welcome to contact the University of Melbourne. Their details are:

The Executive Officer
Human Research Ethics
The University of Melbourne
Phone: +61 03 8344 2073
Fax: +61 03 9347 6739

Or email Elly Scrine at e.scrine@student.unimelb.edu.au

Thank you for your time reading this.

Sincerely,

Elly Scrine and Professor Katrina Skewes McFerran
Appendix D: Pilot Project Consent Form – Young People

Consent Form
Exploring the ways that young people describe gender equity issues when participating in song based workshops in schools

Student Researcher: Elly Scrine – PhD Candidate
Email: e.scrine@student.unimelb.edu.au
Responsible Researcher: Professor Katrina Skewes McFerran

1. I consent to participate in this project which has been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written plain language statement to keep;

2. I agree that the researchers may use my contributions as described in the plain language statement;

3. I understand that after I sign and return this consent form it will be kept by the student researcher;

4. I understand that my participation in this research project will involve:
   a. Being part of a group music workshop at school
   b. Having parts of the workshop audio recorded

I acknowledge that I have been informed that:

5. This project is for the purposes of research and the possible effects of participating in the research project have been explained to my satisfaction;

6. I am free to withdraw from this study at any point. And I am free to withdraw any of my contributions to the project at any time until the data has been collated and it is no longer possible to separate my contribution to the overall data;

7. While every precaution will be taken to protect my identity if I choose to remain anonymous or be referred to by a pseudonym, the small numbers in this project may mean that I could be identified;

8. The confidentiality of any personal information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;

9. My contributions to this project will appear in the Student Researcher’s dissertation;

10. Outcomes of this research may be published in other forms such as journal articles or conference papers and my contributions will be acknowledged appropriately;

Please tick:
I consent to my contribution to the project being audio-taped □ yes □ no
I wish to receive a copy of the Student Researcher’s dissertation □ yes □ no

Name of participant: ____________________________________________________________
Participant signature: ___________________________________________ Date: __________________________

HREC: 090001 ETHICS APPLICATION ID: 1544197 DATE: 9/6/2015

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Appendix E: Pilot Project Consent Form – Parents

Consent Form
Exploring the ways that young people describe gender equity issues when participating in song based workshops in schools

Student Researcher: Elly Scrine – PhD Candidate
Email: e.scrine@student.unimelb.edu.au

Responsible Researcher: Professor Katrina Skewes McFerran

1. I consent to my child participating in this project which has been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written plain language statement to keep;

2. I agree that the researchers may use my child’s contributions as described in the plain language statement;

3. I understand that after I sign and return this consent form it will be kept by the student researcher;

4. I understand that my child’s participation in this research project will involve:
   a. Being part of a group music workshop at school
   b. Having parts of the workshop audio recorded

I acknowledge that I have been informed that:

5. This project is for the purposes of research and the possible effects of my child participating in the research project have been explained to my satisfaction;

6. I am free to withdraw my child from this study at any point. And I am free to withdraw any of my child’s contributions to the project at any time until the data has been collated and it is no longer possible to separate my contribution to the overall data;

7. While every precaution will be taken to protect my child’s identity if I choose to remain anonymous or be referred to by a pseudonym, the small numbers in this project may mean that I could be identified;

8. The confidentiality of any personal information my child provides will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;

9. My child’s contributions to this project will appear in the Student Researcher’s dissertation;

10. Outcomes of this research may be published in other forms such as journal articles or conference papers and my child’s contributions will be acknowledged appropriately;

Please tick:
I consent to my child’s contribution to the project being audio-taped □ yes □ no
I wish to receive a summary of the project’s findings □ yes □ no

Name of child: ___________________________________________ Name of parent: ___________________________________________

Parent signature: ___________________________________________ Date: __________________

HREC: 090001 ETHICS APPLICATION ID: 1544197 DATE: 9/6/2015
Appendix F: Primary Project Ethics Committee Approval

10 May 2016

Professor K.S. McFerran
Melbourne Conservatorium of Music
The University of Melbourne

Dear Professor McFerran,

I am pleased to advise that the Humanities and Applied Sciences Human Ethics Sub-Committee approved the following Project:

**Project Title:** How do young people choose to co-create and engage in a music therapy program designed to explore gender equity in their secondary school?

*Researchers:* E Scime, Prof K S McFerran

*Ethics ID:* 1646103

The Project has been approved for the period: **10-May-2016 to 31-Dec-2016**

It is your responsibility to ensure that all people associated with the Project are made aware of what has actually been approved.

Research projects are normally approved to 31 December of the year of approval. Projects may be renewed yearly for up to a total of five years upon receipt of a satisfactory annual report. If a project is to continue beyond five years a new application will normally need to be submitted.

Please note that the following conditions apply to your approval. Failure to abide by these conditions may result in suspension or discontinuation of approval and/or disciplinary action.

(a) **Limit of Approvals:** Approval is limited strictly to the research as submitted in your Project application.

(b) **Variation to Projects:** Any subsequent variations or modifications you might wish to make to the Project must be notified formally to the Human Ethics Sub-Committee for further consideration and approval. If the Sub-Committee considers that the proposed changes are significant, you may be required to submit a new application for approval of the revised Project.

(c) **Incidents or adverse effects:** Researchers must report immediately to the Sub-Committee anything which might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol including adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the Project. Failure to do so may result in suspension or cancellation of approval.

(d) **Monitoring:** All projects are subject to monitoring at any time by the Human Research Ethics Committee.

(e) **Annual Reports:** Please be aware that the Human Research Ethics Committee requires that researchers submit an annual report on each of their projects at the end of the year, or at the conclusion of a project if it continues for less than this time. Failure to submit an annual report will mean that ethics approval will lapse.

(f) **Auditing:** All projects may be subject to audit by members of the Sub-Committee.

If you have any queries on these matters, or require additional information, please contact me using the details below.

Please quote the ethics registration number and the title of the Project in any future correspondence.

On behalf of the Sub Committee I wish you well in your research.

Yours sincerely,

McJennifer Hassell - Secretary
Humanities and Applied Sciences HESC
Phone: 93853841, Email: hassell@unimelb.edu.au

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**RESEARCH, INNOVATION & COMMERCIALISATION**
**Office for Research Ethics and Integrity**
The University of Melbourne, Victoria 3050, Australia
T: +61 3 8341 6666 (Internal)  T: 1300 1300 (External)  W: www.unimelb.edu.au
Appendix G: Primary Project Department of Education & Training Approval

2016_003032

Dear Ms Scrine

Thank you for your application of 14 April 2016 in which you request permission to conduct research in Victorian government schools titled Co-creating a music therapy-based gender equity program with young people in high school.

I am pleased to advise that on the basis of the information you have provided your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the conditions detailed below.

1. The research is conducted in accordance with the final documentation you provided to the Department of Education and Training.

2. Separate approval for the research needs to be sought from school principals. This is to be supported by the Department of Education and Training approved documentation and, if applicable, the letter of approval from a relevant and formally constituted Human Research Ethics Committee.

3. The project is commenced within 12 months of this approval letter and any extensions or variations to your study, including those requested by an ethics committee must be submitted to the Department of Education and Training for its consideration before you proceed.

4. As a matter of courtesy, you advise the relevant Regional Director of the schools or governing body of the early childhood settings that you intend to approach. An outline of your research and a copy of this letter should be provided to the Regional Director or governing body.

5. You acknowledge the support of the Department of Education Training in any publications arising from the research.

6. The Research Agreement conditions, which include the reporting requirements at the conclusion of your study, are upheld. A reminder will be sent for reports not submitted by the study’s indicative completion date.

Your detail will be dealt with in accordance with the Public Records Act 1979 and the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2004. Should you have any queries or wish to gain access to your personal information held by this department please contact our Privacy Officer at the above address.
I wish you well with your research. Should you have further questions on this matter, please contact Youla Michaels, Project Support Officer, Insights and Evidence Branch, by telephone on (03) 9637 2707 or by email at michael.s.youla.y@edumail.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Joyce Cleary
Director
Insights and Evidence

26/05/2016
Appendix H: Primary Project Plain Language Statement – Young People

Plain Language Statement for students

How do young people choose to co-create and engage in a music therapy program designed to explore gender equity in their secondary school?

Graduate Researcher:
Elly Scrine – PhD Candidate – Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne
Email: e.scrine@student.unimelb.edu.au

Responsible Researcher:
Professor Katrina Skewes McFerran – Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne
Phone: +61 3 8344 7382
Email: k.mcferran@unimelb.edu.au

What is the purpose of this project?
This project aims to use music as a unique way to explore issues related to gender inequality. We would like to involve students in helping to design the program, so that it addresses the kinds of issues you want to address, and does so in ways that you have chosen.

How will this happen?
The project is happening at [insert location] over a one-year period. It is likely that each year level will participate in the project for one term of the year, and there will be two days a week that you can participate over this term.

The program will be run by the researcher, who is also a music therapist. She is trained in using music in many different ways to explore many different issues. The issues we will explore in the project will be related to gender inequality, so topics might include gender stereotyping, women’s empowerment and equal representation. Some ways we might like to use music in the program is to write songs, record them, make playlists, and analyse your favourite songs and video clips. These will all be up to you to explore and decide.

Data will be collected in various ways for the project, so the researcher will take notes, record how many people attend the groups, and use the songs we write for her research. Every student participating can also be interviewed, if you would like to share your individual perspectives on the program.

The graduate researcher will run all of the group session and interviews. The researcher is a Registered Music Therapist and is completing her PhD under the supervision of Professor Katrina Skewes McFerran, who has conducted and supervised many research projects in schools.
Plain Language Statement for students

When will the groups happen?
Group sessions will happen during lunch periods, and during your health and wellbeing class. You can choose to attend the project, or just attend your normal class. If you do come along but decide you don’t want to be there, you’re free to return to lunch or regular class.

What if I don't want to be involved?
That is perfectly OK. There is no pressure for you to be part of the project and we’re happy for you to say no. The school doesn’t expect you to be involved, and there will be no negative consequences if you decide not to. Your school program will not be affected if you say no, and you can change your mind at any stage.

Who will know that I've been part of the research?
The results from our project will be used in presentations and published in academic journals, but it won't be tied to your name or school. There is no need for us to use your name when we publish the results of this research. We will use a pseudonym (pretend name) whenever we are describing anything you’ve said, done, or talked about as a part of the project.

All paper data collected for the project will be stored in locked filing cabinets, and all digital data will be stored using password protected computer files. At the end of the project, the data will be kept in a secure location in the university department. All of this data will be destroyed after 5 years, which is the normal procedure for research.

Has someone formally approved this research?
The Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Melbourne has reviewed this study to make sure that you aren’t being disadvantaged in any way by this project.

What if I have concerns about this research?
If you have concerns about how this research is being conducted, you are welcome to contact the University of Melbourne to discuss this. Their details are:
The Executive Officer
Human Research Ethics
The University of Melbourne
Phone: +61 03 8344 2073
Fax: +61 03 9347 6739

Or email Elly Scriine at e.scriine@student.unimelb.edu.au

Thank you for your time in reading this information statement.

Sincerely,

HREC PROJECT NUMBER 1646103.1
04/04/16
Plain Language Statement for students

Elly Scrine and Professor Katrina Skewes McFerran
Appendix I: Primary Project Consent Form – Young People

Consent Form

How do young people choose to co-create and engage in a music therapy program designed to explore gender equity in their secondary school?

Student Researcher: Elly Scrine – PhD Candidate
Email: e.scrine@student.unimelb.edu.au

Responsible Researcher: Professor Katrina Skewes McFerran

1. I consent to participate in this project which has been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written plain language statement to keep;

2. I agree that the researchers may use my contributions as described in the plain language statement;

3. I understand that after I sign and return this consent form it will be kept by the student researcher;

4. I understand that my participation in this research project will involve:
   a. Taking part in the music and gender equity program
   b. Have research data generated by the program, such as: written observation notes, recording attendance, musical artifacts (such as songs written in the program) and interviews
   c. Audio recordings being made throughout the program: recording songs written and interviews

I acknowledge that I have been informed that:

5. This project is for the purposes of research and the possible effects of participating in the research project have been explained to my satisfaction;

6. I am free to withdraw from this study at any point. And I am free to withdraw any of my contributions to the project at any time until the data has been collated and it is no longer possible to separate my contribution to the overall data;

7. While every precaution will be taken to protect my identity if I choose to remain anonymous or be referred to by a pseudonym, the small numbers in this project may mean that I could be identified;

8. The confidentiality of any personal information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;

9. My contributions to this project will appear in the Student Researcher’s dissertation;

10. Outcomes of this research may be published in other forms such as journal articles or conference papers and my contributions will be acknowledged appropriately;

Please tick:

I consent to taking part in the program □ yes □ no
I consent to my contribution to the project being audio-recorded □ yes □ no
I want to receive a summary of the project’s findings □ yes □ no

Name of participant: ____________________________________________________________
Participant signature: ____________________________________________ Date: ___________

ETHICS ID: 1646103.1 DATE: 04/04/16
Appendix J: Primary Project Consent Form – Parents

Consent Form
How do young people choose to co-create and engage in a music therapy program designed to explore gender equity in their secondary school?

Student Researcher: Elly Scrine – PhD Candidate
Email: e.scrine@student.unimelb.edu.au
Responsible Researcher: Professor Katrina Skewes McFerran

1. I consent to my child participating in this project which has been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written plain language statement to keep;

2. I agree that the researchers may use my child’s contributions as described in the plain language statement;

3. I understand that after I sign and return this consent form it will be kept by the student researcher;

4. I understand that signing this form indicates my child’s involvement to:
   a. Take part in the music and gender equity program
   b. Have research data generated by the program, such as: written observation notes, recording attendance, musical artifacts (such as songs written in the program) and interviews
   c. Audio recordings being made throughout the program: recording songs written and interviews

I acknowledge that I have been informed that:

5. This project is for the purposes of research and the possible effects of my child participating in the research project have been explained to my satisfaction;

6. I am free to withdraw my child from this study at any point. And I am free to withdraw any of my child’s contributions to the project at any time until the data has been collated and it is no longer possible to separate my contribution to the overall data;

7. While every precaution will be taken to protect my child’s identity if they choose to remain anonymous or be referred to by a pseudonym, the small numbers in this project may mean that they could be identified;

8. The confidentiality of any personal information my child provides will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;

9. My child’s contributions to this project will appear in the Student Researcher’s dissertation;

10. Outcomes of this research may be published in other forms such as journal articles or conference papers and my child’s contributions will be acknowledged appropriately;

Please tick:
I consent to my child taking part in the program □ yes □ no
I consent to my child’s participation being audio-recorded □ yes □ no
I wish to receive a summary of the project’s findings □ yes □ no

Name of child: _______________________________ Name of parent: _______________________________
Parent signature: ___________________________ Date: ______________________________

ETHICS ID: 1646103.1 DATE: 04/04/16
Appendix K: Sample of Pilot Project Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My embodied reactions</th>
<th>Dynamics in Engagement</th>
<th>Transcription of discussion related to gender</th>
<th>Gendered interplay</th>
<th>Key themes in lyrics and video discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>There are points here that I find myself wondering if they think this is what I want to hear, and they’re just feeding it back? But then the girl who previously hasn’t spoken says she believes this notion of ‘judgment’ is much harder for girls, and I find my perspective on how authentically she’s engaging begin to shift.</td>
<td>They are silent when I speak, and eager to answer questions. Often they agree on an answer, and then burst into a disagreement shortly after. One thing they agree on emphatically for our workshop is a rule of “no bitching, no bullying”.</td>
<td>“I feel like quite judged when I’m eating, cos like _____’s my friend and she’s quite small and she’ll be eating more than me, but I’m the one getting judged.” Elly: “Are some people judged more than others do you think?” “Girls!” “People are judged more if they’re gay or lesbian or bisexual and that really doesn’t matter, what you like, or who you like.” “Not feel like you should look like something, just because… like you always have to dress a certain way, otherwise you’ll get judged.” Elly: “What does that judgment relate to, do you think? “Money, and being a girl.” “Yeah money’s a big one I think.” “Yeah like if you’ve not got money to do something.”</td>
<td>There are four or so boys in the group, and one who speaks a lot – he tells the group he is gay and clearly has a lot of friends who agree with him and support his responses. Five or six girls engage passionately in the conversation – asking other girls for their opinion, and trying to involve the other boys who are mostly silent. When I ask one a question about stereotypes about masculinity, the girls are silent, listening intently for the answer. He responds, “Yeah my brother he just thinks that guys should be tough and all, and I’m just like, no, I can cook” – then there is loud, supportive laughter from the group.</td>
<td>Intersections of gender, class, sexuality, age and social status. Adolescence being associated with judgment and expectations based on image. Restrictions that gender expectations place on young people in adolescence. Passion for general notion of ‘equality’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>School 3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I find it much harder to listen back to the recording of this session</td>
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<td>One of the girls brings up consent laws, and wanting to lower the age</td>
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<td>because of how hard it was to engage this group – I remember it feeling</td>
<td></td>
<td>of consent, and goes into a detailed personal story – this throws me a</td>
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<tr>
<td>so chaotic. I remember the girls who were in the room, even though I</td>
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<td>bit and listening back, I can hear how difficult I found it to direct</td>
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<tr>
<td>can’t hear their voices in the recording. I remember one of them getting</td>
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<td>the conversation back. Disengaged and loss of focus when I ask them to</td>
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<tr>
<td>up and walking out half way through, after she was made fun of for one</td>
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<td>close their eyes and imagine a perfect world, they’re playing with each</td>
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<td>of her responses. I feel awful listening to this.</td>
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<td>other and having fun, typical classroom dynamics between friends. They</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>begin to tune in when one students begins to talk Elly: “So what would</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>your perfect world look like, in relation to gender?” “There is no</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>gender! People wear what they want to wear. What they feel comfortable</td>
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<td>in.” When I ask the group how they’d define gender, a boy responds</td>
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<td>immediately, “Gender is what sex you are; whether you’re male or</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>female”, but the girls join together to disagree with him, shouting, “No</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>it’s what you identify YOURSELF Solidarity between girls. Judgment</td>
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<td>in adolescence. Limited roles available within the constraints of</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>femininity: either a ‘lady’ or a ‘slut’.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
about his experience of homophobia.

“All the homophobic people… they…”

“DIE! GO DIE!”

“Yeah, disappear.”

“In my perfect world there’s nobody taking the mickey out of anyone. Like no one getting bullied…

“Because of who they’re attracted to?”

“Yeah.”
as, versus what you’re TOLD you are!”

Passion for LGBTQIA+ rights and celebratory narratives.

Gender fluidity.

| School 4 |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| I wonder how I’ve changed the way I’m facilitating this session, because the shared values of the group seem to align with my own? I can hear a smile in my voice, and I remember feeling excited, to be sitting with them and documenting their thoughts on these issues. | Agreement from four members when student says, “I don’t know how to put it into words”. Further agreement that it’s hard to define. Agreement and emphasis when one student says the only person who can define your gender is you. Disagreement when asked if this is how everyone defines it. This sparks some conversation. | Elly: “So what is gender to you?”

“Gender for me is the way you want to express yourself outwardly to other people and because of the way society has formed it tends to fit into certain binaries sometimes. So you know society has given us the stereotypes of male and female and sometimes the way you want to express fits into those binaries and sometimes it doesn’t. It’s just a way of expressing who you are. That’s what it is to me.”

“I don’t know how to put it into words…” (mmmm)

“It’s hard to define, because the only person who can define your gender is you, so it’s one of those | Students who identified as queer and/or trans were the most vocal in arguing against dominant constructions of gender and sexuality. These students fed off each other, and other group members often listened, then extended points or related them to their own experiences. The interplay between members was light and supportive, jokes were received well and members were vocal in their agreement and encouragement of others. | Everyone is the expert in their own gendered experience. Gender fluidity. Abolish gender and sexuality labels. Passion for LGBTQIA+ rights and celebratory narratives. |
things where everyone is going to feel differently about it, but in the end you’re the only one who can make the final decision of what gender you are. And it can be fluid, like you might be identify as one thing one day, and something else the next, or you might think you comfortable identifying with something and all of a sudden discover something that you didn’t even know was a gender and have that click moment of ‘hang on a minute! That’s what I feel like!’”

Elly: “So it’s like a constant process?”

“Yeah!”

**School 5**

| Their hesitation and responses give me the impression that these are not topics they have spoken about much before. I’m a little thrown by the lack of energy in the room – I can hear it in my voice listening back. When I ask about a perfect world, one responds “That’s stupid, a perfect world can’t happen”, and I’m uncomfortable reflecting on how difficult a question like this might be for these young people. | Silent and distracted until one of them says, “There’s a lot of domestic violence these days”, and they all agree emphatically. Agreement about boys being more open about emotions. They seem to be listening intently when the oldest member of the group describes her experience in year 12. I try to maintain their engagement, asking what advice they’d give younger girls. | Elly: “So what would your perfect world look like?”

“I think the idea of a perfect world is stupid. A perfect world doesn’t happen. Nothing changes”.

“I’d like boys to be more open about their emotions. There’s a lot of domestic violence these days.”

“Yes”

“Mmm”.

“I think that if they talked about it more (others “Yeah!”), they would be, you know, less angry.” | There is interesting interplay between these girls - at times they seem passive aggressive and irritated, but there are also moments of calling on each other for support and assistance. At several points, one of them asks another to finish off their thought, something I have not witnessed between boys in any of the groups. | Toxic masculinity.

Gender-based violence.

Judgment among girls specifically.

Openness to difference.

**School 6**
I ask the students about stereotypes and one of the students raises an example that’s Islamophobic, and they all laugh. It’s uncomfortable listening back to this recording. We move to gender stereotypes and begin discussing emotional responses – guys not crying and being told to “man up”, girls being “sooks”. I ask if these are true and there are mixed responses. I feel confused and a little lost as to whether this is meaningful data.

Agreement on stereotypically masculine activities – rugby, fishing etc.

Agreement and discussion about stereotypes being dangerous, as they pressure people to conform to them. This seems to be something they’re all able to identify with, so I continue to draw out the conversation, transitioning it into the idea of the perfect world, and what they would change.

“I’d like a world where guys don’t get frowned upon for crying.”

“I feel like that happens to girls as well. Like they get told so much that they’re over emotional that they can’t express anything.”

“Well they should MAN UP!”

“I want to change how it’s more socially acceptable for guys to be able to wear girls clothes than it is for girls to wear guys clothes. Like girls should be able to put on a hoodie without looking ragged or weird or something.”

“Yeah!”

The entire group seems to be engaged when the discussion focuses on toxic masculinity. It seems important to note that this was a discussion the girls all engaged in, compared to the discussion on the constraints of femininity, which was ignored by the boys – it felt as though that discussion didn’t relate to them. This has been a theme across the groups – often the girls are advocating for change related to boys’ wellbeing, but when it comes to girls’ experiences of gender expectations – this is where many of the boys disengage.

School 7

I ask them about their experiences of gender roles in their families and they describe quite traditional gender roles, but they all agree that this is not because their mothers are forced to. Listening back, I wonder about my choice of question here, given young people will likely feel a sense of protectiveness over their own families.

We talk about gender stereotypes and there begins to be some agreement and engagement with others’ responses. There’s a lot of agreement around masculinity – that boys “don’t show emotion”.

They’re engaged by the concept of ‘real man’. I ask if there’s such a thing and they agree that there is not. There is some laughter here, and agreement when one of the boys responds, “every man is a real man”.

“If a male artist sings about sex or something like that they get praised for it but if a female artist sings about it they get called… you know…”

“Mmmm”

Elly: “So back to our perfect world, who has something else to say?”

“People shouldn’t get hate when they want to be the opposite gender.”

Elly: “So like, acceptance of trans identities?”

There are a range of young people in the group and they all seem engaged. They don’t speak about their own gender identities so I feel uncomfortable analysing the dynamics of this group and assuming their genders.

Supporting and creating space for diversity and expression of individuality.

Young people as the experts of their own experience.

Heteronormativity in schools.

Advocacy for gender and sexual diversity.

Gender equality as linked to all forms of equality.
“And also it goes for gay and lesbian people as well.”

“Yeah I was going to say before, from what I’ve observed, I think that coming out for a male as a homosexual, would be harder than for a female, particularly in the music industry.”

“Yeah - going back to the ‘real man’ thing. Being a real man would not be…”

“It’s hard for people to accept something that’s different than them. That’s why they hate and stuff.”
### Appendix L: Pilot Project Song Lyrics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Song Lyrics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| School 1 | Now we’re in a perfect world  
So don’t judge me for what I’m doing  
I have imperfections and flaws  
And my own opinions  
  Practically the same, but now so different  
When do we lose our innocence  
Boys and girls, men and women  
  Equality is our decision  
  No more all about how you look  
  More about what’s inside  
  No one feels shame no one feels trapped  
  And no one has to hide |
| School 2 | Women are naturally born to care  
  Men aren’t actually always there  
  Women not cat called on the street  
  No more saying chopping fresh meat  
  Men being dominant in a relationship  
  That’s straight bullshit  
  Equality can work both ways  
  Like an unfair share of the pay  
  That’s because society’s in a maze  
  That’s the cost of being lost  
  Oh my days  
  Gender values relationships support  
  All these mistakes we have been taught |
| School 3 | Be free for who you want to be  
  There is no gender – people are comfy  
  Respecting everyone no matter who they’re attracted to  
  Consent is valued for both boys and girls  
  And family accept you for who you are  
  Girls respect each other, it will take you far |
| School 4 | In a perfect world  
  There is so much more to be  
  Than just a guy or a girl  
  I can just be me |
And if you don’t agree
Keep it to yourself
Lock it in a box
And throw away the key

It’s a matter of education
We don’t need your discrimination
We’ll let everyone know who’ll hear
You are who you are
Straight, binary, or queer
You are who you are
Straight, binary, or queer

School 5

In a perfect world for boys violence isn’t a way
If they could show their emotions and not push people away

In a perfect world girls look past the outside
Accepting each other for what’s within
Together share the pride

Be more open with yourselves
And with each other
Open your eyes
And see what you discover
And see what you discover

School 6

In a perfect world
We’re all equal
There’s no judgment on what we’re meant to be

Girls can express for the world to see
And guys don’t hide their pain and misery

People aren’t ashamed of the body they possess
No expectations of who’s best dressed
You’re the only one who can define you
It’s what’s inside that makes others impressed

Gender insults labels judgments
Are a thing of the past
The new era of equality
Is what we’re going to build to last

School 7

What if you stood in someone else’s shoes
Would you win or would you lose?
What if you were the minority?
Would equality be your priority?

Don’t be afraid to express yourself
You know you better than anyone else
| Let’s make stereotypes a thing of the past  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discrimination cannot last</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Acceptance of individuality  
| This should be our reality  
| He or she  
| You or me  
| Choose your own identity |
Appendix M: Primary Project Interview Guide

Start by telling me about yourself: How would you like to be described when I write about you? What do you want people to know about who you are?

What name would you like to use?

How would you describe what I’ve been doing here at school?

Questions related to the group:
- What was our group all about?
- Why were you there?
- What words would you use to describe the group?
- What were we doing there, and in what ways was it important/unimportant to you?

Timeline of the group:
- Construct a timeline
- Was there anything important that happened over that time that we should add in?
- What was the point of that, do you think?

Important moments:
- Can you think about one time in the program that made you think or feel differently about something?
- What was it that made it possible for that “learning” or “feeling different” to happen?
- How did you feel when we were at our music group?
  - How did that compare?
- I remember one week when______ - what was that like for you?
Appendix N: Boys Tune In Song

Manhood Myths

We wrote this rap to see a different side
To start to build our relationships with pride
Here’s a story ‘bout Drake we made up about violence
From the side of someone who has been silenced

RAP:
Ok Drake
Now it’s time for our break
Cos you’re violent and you always come home late
On our first date you swept me off my feet
But then I realized that you’re a dead beat

It’s time for you to go cos your violence is bad
When you threaten me and punch things it always makes me sad
When you tell me what to wear it makes me feel really mad
And now I realise that you won’t make a good dad!

INSTUMENTAL BREAK

So now we’re going to give some of our ideas
For how to make a future that is clear
From myths about what it means to be a man
Myths we can break and take a stand
It’s about listening
It’s about making space
For the feeling underneath the anger
The feelings you can face

So now boys, it’s time to listen up
We’ll teach you a lesson and it’s gonna fill your cup

INSTUMENTAL BREAK

Doesn’t make you a man if you get a lot of girls
Put some love and respect into everybody’s world

Build... your... relationships right
It doesn’t... make you a man to fight

Oh (OOH)
Appendix O: Hear Girls Song

Expected of Girls
(link to recording)

Verse 1

There’s a number of things expected of girls
Don’t sound so fair to me when we’re supposed to run the world
Think I’m a stereotype, like I’m blonde dumb and weak
“Social media addicts” this “attention that I seek”
Like I save my time and energy just for guys?
No we’ve gotta get it straight, cos it’s us who’s on the rise
Don’t make assumptions, expectations, reiterations make it look like
Girls get sad, and girls get mad about things other than, the boys around them

Verse 2

But we’re looked at like we’re just a piece of meat
Told that boys will only like us if our bodies are elite
When we can run or lift something you all act so surprised
But I can do more than just be stared at with these thighs
So stop staring all the time like when I’m at the gym
Cos I’m not judging my body and I’m not looking at him
Do what I like with my body, dress it up or dress it down
Cos we can all have different skin and wear the same crown

Bridge

And I wanna be
A strong woman in the world
Independent and loving, a role model
For my kids if I have them and for all of the girls
I wanna be confident, and fearless
Have the courage to be kind
Not judged for my body, so I will work on
Not judging others I find
Author/s:
Scrine, Elly

Title:
Music therapy as an anti-oppressive practice: critically exploring gender and power with young people in school

Date:
2018

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/225677

File Description:
Music therapy as an anti-oppressive practice: critically exploring gender and power with young people in school

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