Conversations with Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Secondary School Students:

A Sexual Diversity Training Kit for School Communities.

Michael Crowhurst 2001 (slightly revised) 2004
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Cover:
Pink taking up more Space than Green on Red (Crowhurst 2004)

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Conversations
Forward 2004

The conversations that make up the main part of this resource were collected from 1996-1998. In the wake of HIV/AIDS, Foucault, Butler and the beginnings of a poststructurally informed Queer theory there was a growing interest in questions relating to young people, sexualities, gender identities and education. There was a proliferation of academic literature, of activism and of work targeting queer young people at that time both Internationally and in Victoria.

Looking back there seemed to be a number of pre-occupations in that work. Some of those pre-occupations included:

* Documenting the existence of GLBT* young people,
* Documenting that the experiences of this group of young people were often problematic (violence, isolation, HIV/AIDS and suicide prevention),
* Documenting that GLBT young people were often not safe in youth sector settings,
* Theorizing the cultural, or broader factors, that were generating the problems that GLBT young people were experiencing,
* Working on the ground to respond to these concerns,
* Working to establish queer young person’s support groups,
* Working to gain access to deliver sexual diversity, gender diversity and anti-homophobia packages in school classrooms and across whole school communities,
* Working to gain access to deliver sexual diversity, gender diversity and anti-homophobia packages in community settings,
* Working to raise awareness,
* Working to form alliances and networks in field,
* Suggesting and documenting ways forward.

While these preoccupations continue to be very necessary at the present time there seems to be a shift in emphasis taking place. There is now increasing attention being paid to questions of expansion. People are documenting examples of successful work around sexual and gender diversity and recording and theorizing moments where GLBTI young people are living powerfully.

The cultural context within which literature, work and activism relating to queer young people is constructed has shifted and this move has in turn produced a corresponding shift in the type of work that is emerging. As queer people gain more rights, while there are still many problems to address, queer youth literature, queer youth related work and activism seem to be embedded in a new optimism.
If I were beginning this kit of materials at this point in time I imagine that they would probably reflect this move too. Young people would be able to tell me about ‘Minus 18’ for instance and all of the good times that they had experienced there (Minus 18, an under 18 queer disco, didn’t exist in 1996) and I might be more inclined to focus on such moments. I would perhaps draw out more themes relating to expansion, as well as focusing on themes highlighting constraint. Still the materials are generated by my concerns about constraint, and I continue to have such concerns, so maybe the materials wouldn’t be that different at all.

The materials remain largely as they were when I finished them in 2001 and consequently, the conversations, and the report in particular, reflect some of the preoccupations of that time.

**How did the materials come to be?**

As part of my Doctoral work I interviewed 10 young people who identified as same-sex attracted. I audio-taped the conversations. I informed participants that I would like to use the materials that were generated from these interviews as the basis of various publications. Participants were assured that their real names would not be used and that confidentiality would be maintained. I transcribed the conversations and co-edited them with each participant. This process generated 100 000 words of material. Later I edited the materials down further to 30 000 words and produced 10 separate (10-12 page) documents that I self-published for my own use at the end of 1998 (for a more detailed discussion see the research report in this kit).

A couple of years later in mid 2000, Debra Tyler and Helen Stokes from The Australian Youth Research Centre at Melbourne University, asked me to facilitate some sexual diversity training sessions within the Graduate Diploma in Student Welfare course. My aim in those sessions was to raise awareness (rather than develop strategies for instance) and I decided to use the edited transcript conversations in order to do so. I also wanted the workshop sessions to be as active as possible, and so I decided to ask people to read the transcripts aloud like a play script (really just to break the session up somewhat). I found that this type of training methodology worked very effectively.

I have since used the materials with over 2500 people and during that time I have refined the workshop session many times over. The materials generate a great deal of positive and productive dialogue and no two sessions are ever the same. Even though I have used these transcripts for years now I still find new points of interest in them every time I use them. Feel free to download them and use them. I hope you find them useful.

Michael Crowhurst 2004

* GLBT - Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender. Writers have only started including ‘Intersex Young People’ (the ‘I’ in GLBTI) in the last couple of years. Some sections of the materials will reflect this fact – While in other places I have decided to revise and retrospectively include the ‘I’. 
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Part 1

Introduction

In recent times there has been a great deal of writing around sexualities and gender. Some of this has considered the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) young people in schools and other youth sector settings (for a list see Frere, Jukes & Crowhurst 2001: 67-72). This work often focuses on the ways that LGB young people have gone about constructing sexualities within contexts that are often not supportive of sexual diversity, and details the discrimination that they have faced in those settings.

In 'Writing Themselves In', Hillier, Dempsey, Harrison, Beale, Matthews & Rosenthal document that between 8-11% of young people do not identify as unequivocally straight - the label 'same sex attracted' is applied to this group of young people (Hillier, Dempsey, Harrison, Beale, Matthews & Rosenthal 1988: 1). 'Writing Themselves In' identifies 'school' as being the most dangerous place for same-sex attracted young people (SSAY) to be (Hillier et al 1998: 3). Other settings where the experiences of SSAY are problematic are also identified (see also Dyson, Mitchell, Smith, Dowsett, Pitts and Hillier, 2003, Emslie 2002, Crowhurst and Emslie 2003).

While transgender and intersex (TI) young people have not received as much specific attention in the youth literature they are often included in discussions relating to sexualities. While the issues that face TI young people are somewhat different to those that face LGB young people there are many areas of overlap - for instance, TI issues and concerns are often absent from the official school curriculum and TI concerns are often not specifically mentioned in school policy documents.

'Conversations' draws on material provided by young people who identified as same-sex attracted that I collected as part of my Doctoral work (the materials are intended to be read along side my Doctoral thesis - Crowhurst 2001) and therefore, while the materials will be of relevance to people interested in working around issues relating to transgender and intersex young people, sexualites are the key focus and where the materials will be of most relevance. It is worth noting though that one participant ('Hayes') discusses gender 'non-compliance' at length.

There is a need for school communities, and school systems, to work to improve the experiences of their GLBTI students and this kit proceeds from that position. ‘Conversations’ is designed to support school communities (and other settings that target young people) as they work to enhance the wellbeing of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (GLBTI) young people.
It is important to remember however, that while it is indeed necessary for school communities to respond to discrimination in order to provide a safe learning environment for the GLBTI young people in their care, that it is also imperative that sexual and gender diversity be affirmed and fully supported by school communities. The harassment that GLBTI young people often experience in schools, that impacts negatively on their wellbeing (see Leonard 2002), is an effect of, and learnt within, cultural contexts that are not supportive of sexual and gender diversity (see VGLRL 2000). ‘Conversations' therefore proceeds from a position that celebrates and acknowledges sexual and gender diversity, and that unapologetically aims to encourage dialogue with a view to promoting and expanding such diversity.

‘Conversations' is designed to be used in tandem with other kits of materials and professional development programs that are intended to support change across the 'whole school community' (see: Miller and Mahatmi 2000; Ollis and Mitchell 2001; Ollis, Mitchell, Watson, Hillier & Walsh 2001; Witthaus 2002; Seal 2003).

The overriding aim is to make a contribution to raising awareness about some of the issues that GLBTI young people encounter in schools and hopefully by raising awareness levels to support school communities around the development of concrete actions that will promote cultural and individual change.

The Materials

The 'Conversations' materials are comprised of 2 main sections, which are briefly outlined below.

Section 1 - The Case Studies (Workshop Session 1)

There are 10 edited case studies which form the basis of Workshop Session 1. These are about 3000 words each and take approximately 15 minutes to read. Participants are asked to read them aloud (like a play script) in small groups (see Crowhurst and Emslie 2003: 8). The case studies are then discussed, and participants make a list of key themes (these are then worked through in a subsequent workshop session where a list of strategies and interventions is compiled).

While the case studies are primarily intended to be used with teachers, selected sections could also be used with student, or parent groups. A few of the case studies touch on sexual activity, drug taking and there are numerous accounts of homophobic violence so teachers should read the accounts in detail before deciding whether to use them in a classroom situation.

The case study activity (Workshop Session 1) takes about 90-120 minutes.
Section 2 - Report on Key Themes and Initial Development of Interventions (Workshop Session 2)

The remainder of the materials are comprised of a report that serves as background reading for the facilitator and participants, and a series of OverHead Transparencies that form the basis of an interactive presentation that could be delivered by the facilitator.

The aim of Workshop Session 2 is to develop interventions that respond to the key themes that have been identified in Workshop Session 1. The key themes that the report and OHT’s are organized around are not intended to be exhaustive and participants may, and will, develop additional themes.

During Workshop Session 2 participants draw up a list of interventions organized around the key themes. Workshop Session 2 takes about 60-90 minutes.

Whole School Approach

Ideally, 'Conversations' is not intended to be used as a 'one off' sexual diversity workshop session (although I have done so in the past). 'Conversations' is intended to be a part of a 'whole school approach', meaning that it should be one part of a structurally supported school change program that works in multiple ways across the various layers and different segments that make up the school community (see Seal 2003).

'Conversations' is also intended to support change over an extended period of time. The following process is one example of how this might happen:

Week 1

Initial short meeting with staff to discuss the program and to call for interested staff to join a steering committee.

Parents information night where the case study exercise is done and people who might be interested in joining a steering committee are identified. Information about the program is offered and discussed.

Week 2

Staff session where the case study exercise is worked through.

Week 3

Strategy development and key themes presentation session.

Week 4

Early stages of implementation of strategies and discussion.
Week 5

Further development of strategies and so on…

'Conversations' is not written with the intention of offering 'the solution' to the complex and multi-layered work of making cultural change that benefits GLBTI young people across school communities. This collection of materials is offered as one imperfect tool that school communities might use as they go about constructing school cultures that are not only safe and supportive environments for young people who identify as GLBTI but that are safe and supportive for all young people.

References


Conversations
Part 2

Workshop Session 1 – Instructions

...to succeed in shifting the signified a great distance
and in throwing so to speak, the anonymous body of
the actor into my ear...

(Barthes 1990: 66-7)

Part 4 of ‘Conversations’ is a collection of 10 edited case studies. The case studies are a record of interviews that were part of a research project focusing on the school experiences of same-sex attracted young people (Crowhurst 2001).

The interview participants all identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual. The interview participants were all enrolled in Victorian secondary schools at the time that the study was conducted. They were also all connected with various GLBTI youth support groups when the interviews took place. They attended State and Catholic schools and lived in rural and urban areas. The names used by participants are pseudonyms. The interviews were conducted over an 18 month period between 1996-98 (Crowhurst 2001: 76-114).

There are many points of connection that are evident across the 10 interview transcripts. There are clearly complex cultural factors at play that are generating some common experiences for these young people. The following activity is designed to unpack some of these common experiences and to begin to draw out some of the cultural factors that may be generating them.

Running the Workshop

Workshop participants, are divided into groups of 4-6, and are asked to choose a ‘case study’. They are then asked to read that ‘case study’ aloud (like a play script) in small groups. Two participants read and the remainder listen. The participants who are listening are given Butcher's paper and asked to jot down anything that comes to mind and to identify any parts of the materials that they feel a connection with or that stand out for them in any way. Alternatively they may be asked to write observations on a white board. The transcripts take about 15-20 minutes to read. ‘Readers’ and ‘listeners’ are asked to swap roles at 5 minute intervals.
Reading Aloud

The short quote from Roland Barthes above gives some indication as to why the materials are designed to be read aloud. When we speak we make sounds that collide with the air, that set it in motion, and that in turn collide with, and enter, the ears of listeners. Reading aloud connects speakers and listeners.

Participants also seem to connect with the young people whose stories form the basis of the materials that they are reading aloud. As workshop participants re-enact the case study conversations, the young people's words re-emerge and reverberate - their words connect with and move through the workshop participant’s bodies. The power of those conversations is somehow reignited.

When workshop participants read and hear the case studies there is often a connection made with the young person who is the subject of the case study that in my experience doesn't often happen when the materials are read silently and individually.

While the materials function very powerfully as a written text, their persuasiveness and impact seems to increase when they are read aloud - their effect is amplified. The act of reading stories aloud, in my experience, is a very effective and non-confrontational change methodology (or technology) that I would like to promote through this kit of materials (see also Crowhurst and Emslie 2003: 8).

Social Justice

The work of teachers is often informed by notions of 'social justice', and in my experience, teachers often draw on such discourses in order to discuss their work, and indeed such notions are often the driving force of their work. Teachers are far less likely, in my experience, to frame their work or indeed to engage in work simply because of existing policy frameworks. Which is just as well, for while in Victoria there is policy that can be appropriated to support work around sexual and gender diversity in schools (see Seal, I. 2003: pt 3, Gregoriades, Hughes, Piscioneri, Rajit, & Rees, E., 2002; www.policyatschool.org), the Victorian State Education Department, despite the growing body of academic work that has been generated in this state that documents that GLBTI young people often do not feel safe in schools, is yet to provide any specific policy that frames the provision of educative services to GLBTI young people.

These materials are designed so that those that use them might experience some sense of connection with the subject of their case study, and then feel some sense of outrage about the experience of that person and then position this as a social justice issue. This I believe might motivate participants to work for change in their professional capacities.
Discussing the Transcripts

Once the participants have read the case studies they are then discussed further as a whole group. This is done by asking each small group to introduce the subject of their case study to the rest of the room. Groups are also asked at this point to briefly mention something that they connected with or found interesting. Each case study subject’s name is written onto a white board and points of interest are listed.

Development of Key Themes

Workshop participants are then asked to move back into their small groups and to compile a list of key themes. These are listed onto a white board and then further organized into a maximum of 5-6 subheadings. Subheadings might include: Subject Content, Bullying, Support, Isolation or Peers. Different workshop groups will arrive at different themes.

These subheadings (themes) are identified in order to be worked through at a latter date in Workshop Session 2, where a list of strategies and interventions is compiled.

The methodology outlined above is only one way that these materials might be used. Facilitators will find many ways to use them. Similarly while the methodology outlined above focuses on how the transcript materials might be used with teachers, the materials could be used with other groups - youth workers, pre-service teachers and youth workers, or parent groups. Selected sections of the materials could also very easily be used with secondary school student groups.

This workshop activity takes about 90 to 120 minutes. The ‘Case Studies Instruction Sheet’ that follows is included to use as an OHT to guide the activity.

References


Conversations
Part 3

Workshop Session 1
Facilitator’s Instruction Sheet

Move the room (25 people) into groups of 4 or 5 people.

Select 2 people from each small group to begin reading their case study aloud to the rest of the group.

After these 2 people have read 3 pages change readers. Keep doing this until the group has finished the case study.

Remember that it is important that the case study is read aloud as it will bring it to life.

People who are ‘listeners’ should jot down key words, observations, and feelings as the transcript is re-enacted, on butcher’s paper.

Task for Small Groups

Part 1

In your small group, select one extract from the case study that you would like to read to the rest of the groups.

‘Introduce’ the person who is your ‘case study’ (eg. Dante) to the whole room and explain why you have chosen this particular extract to share with everyone.

Share some words, or responses, that the ‘listener scribes’ jotted down on their Butcher’s paper as they listened to the case study.

Part 2

Now back as a small group, having listened to the rest of the groups, analyse your case study and identify 3 or more (5-6) key themes that are evident in it.

Share these key themes with the other small groups.
Part 3

Finally, in your small groups, jot down how you feel having read the case study and discuss this with your group members.

These feelings can be shared with the whole group.
Conversations
Part 4

Workshop Session 1
Transcripts
Conversations
A sexual diversity training kit for schools.

Dante

Michael Crowhurst
Dante

Dante is 17 and attends a Catholic boy's school that has 800 students and caters to students from grade 5 through to year 12. He is in year 12. He describes the school as slightly progressive and multicultural. Dante describes himself as middle class, Anglo-Celtic and Catholic. His father has recently died and he lives with his mother and sisters in a large city outside of Melbourne. He identifies as gay or bi.

When asked about sexuality he said:

D I'm 17 and ummm middle class, male, I said before that I'm Anglo-Celtic ummmm Catholic and gay or bi....

I And so which is the label that you'd prefer? I mean does it matter?

D No it doesn't really matter...I do both so...

I You are attracted to men and women?

D Yeah...

We began the interview by talking about curriculum:

I Maybe we could start with curriculum...When I use the word curriculum what do you think that I mean?

D What the school teaches...How they teach...

I In relation to that did any of the subjects that you studied as a gay or bi young man, (include gay or lesbian perspectives)?

D The only time anything about being gay was ever mentioned...As with any other time that sex is ever mentioned...You learn about anatomy not sex...

I Mmmm

D I was in year 10 and ummmm...Our teacher was talking to us about drugs and...The only thing he goes was: 'Don't start Heroin because you end up selling your bum'...You know 'round 'beats' and stuff and that was all I can remember about our teachers ever walking into a classroom and saying anything about being gay or anything like that...But (I) was never taught anything about it...

I What class was that in?

D That was in RE
I What are your thoughts about that?

D I just laughed...Not all junkies are...Most of them do other things to make their money...They don't need to do that...so...No I just thought that it was a pretty stupid thing to say...He just made a generalisation that junkies were gay or not by choice they only did it for money...Not directly saying it but...People who were gay only do it because they don't have the money for drugs...

I Can you remember a time when you thought (gay and lesbian perspectives) weren't mentioned where you thought that they should have been mentioned or it would have been appropriate to hear about them?

D In year 11 and 12 we have two periods or one period a week of RE...I mean you just go there and watch videos or...and ummm...stuff like that that I think that we should have been watching or at least learning I mean not everyone is going to care but just to change attitudes and stuff like that I thought especially like this year...In year 12 'cause everyone's going out to the real world now...And ummm...Whether or not they're going to be able to cope or not when they get out into the community and discover that there are gay people out there...Even as part of the Sex-Ed thing because our Sex-Ed was pathetic I learnt more in primary school...It was just about anatomy...This is this...and the AIDS parts and it didn't really cover anything...There should have been more depth to it?...Primary school was different because I went to a public primary school...We watched videos about sex and people being born and ummmm...

I So it was a bit superficial in secondary school but in primary school you felt that even though that there was more reality in it, that there was more depth to it

D Mmmmmm

I Why do you reckon that might be the case?

D 'Cause it's a Catholic school and they want to be...they're prudes...

I In what way?

D Sex...Ummmmm...They just don't want to talk about it and they just don't want to encourage it...They feel that if they put some more content into it ummmmm...they'll be encouraging sex and that is something that they don't want to do...It's not that they're not into it...It's not something that every parent wants their kid to go out and get some one pregnant or get a disease or something...

Later in the interview we talked about when Dante 'came out' to his mother:

I Have you talked to anyone in your family about your gayness?
D Ummmm...Dad's dead but mum

I Your dad is dead

D Yeah...Mum knows but doesn't think that I am...I told her I was but she still thinks that I'm not that I'm still confused...No I don't really talk...

I So when you ‘came out’ to her...How did that happen?

D I wrote her a letter...

I Did you post the letter?

D No I just left it on her bed...

I She hasn't really spoken to you about that from what you are saying but did you feel better?

D No...I don't know I just wanted to do it...I can't pin point a reason I just wanted to do it...Well I didn't just write that I wrote other things about drugs and school and other stuff so it was like a confessional

I With drugs and drinking...Do you think that there are any links between (drug use) and gayness?

D I don't think so...No...I've always been drinking and smoking and doing other stuff so it hasn't it's not associated with that...

Later in the interview I asked Dante whether he had any contact with other gay people:

I Do you have any contact with the gay scene?

D No...I've been to Melbourne a few times it was alright but I couldn't be bothered...

I Well at 17 you'd probably get in but it does cost a lot of money...When you were in Melbourne did you know about Youth Groups that were in Melbourne...

D I didn't...At the start of the month one of the youth workers here she took me up to The Gay Men's Health Centre...And introduced me to a bloke there...

The conversation then returned to the letter that Dante had written to his mother:

I You've written a letter to your mother...When did that happen? Was that a long time ago?
D  No it was this year...A little way through the year...What's the eighth month?
I  August
D  Yeah...
I  So a couple of months ago...And so how long before that had you (been aware that you were attracted to men)?
D  Forever
I  Primary school? How do you think that things were different then to now?
D  I suppose a lot of things (are) going on when you're little ummm...You really don't know what gay is or anything...You just know that you're attracted to other guys and you just want to do things with other guys...Ummmm...You don't even know whether you're just a normal kid doing it just experimenting 'cause that's what kids do or is it more important...
I  And in High School can you remember a moment when you first thought, you were aware that you were attracted to (other guys)
D  I always knew but when I was in year 9 ummm...There are ‘beats’ everywhere and I just went to a ‘beat’ one day...That's probably the first time I'd actually ever done anything...But before that I hadn't done anything...
I  And...Were you aware of ‘beats’ (in year 9)...Did you come across them by accident?
D  No a friend of mum's was a copper and he said...He told her: 'Don't let the kids go down to the beach because there are a lot of guys hanging around there all the time...And you just don't want to trust them if they do anything'...Then our next door neighbour, he was gay, he was a fuck'n looney...So ummm...There's a beach down there that way and a beach down there the other way...and our house is sort of in the middle...Ummmm...And I'd seen him down there a few times...But I hated him...
I  The guy who was your neighbour...?
D  Yeah...But I didn't go there
I  Yeah
D  Ummm...I just knew that that was a ‘beat’ and that if you wanted something you could go there...
I So was that a positive experience or a negative experience?

D Ummmm...It was good while I was doing it but then I felt dirty after I'd been there and I thought: ‘Oh well I'm not a faggot because I haven't done this or I haven't done that’...I justified myself as still being straight but just...You can't deny it...

I So you felt bad...But you didn't feel bad enough to stop?

D It's good when you do it but 20 minutes afterwards you feel bad and then you go and do it again...

I Did you ever feel any danger doing that?

D No

I And what time were you doing this?

D It was in the day...About 2 o'clock in the afternoon...

I 'Cause you're quite tall…

D I wasn't back then I was quite a runt...

I So you were quite small?...Alright...

D Yeah I was only 14

I And from your observations and young guys that you have spoken to around (place) would you say that the (use of ‘beats’) is fairly common (for young men)?

D I've never been with anyone at a ‘beat’ that...The youngest has probably been about 25...I've never seen anyone young or the same age as me at a ‘beat’ but I tell you a lot of people...I talk to a lot of people and they say: ‘Oh yeah that they see people all of the time’...

I So most of the people were much older? What ages are we talking about?

D About 50 I suppose

I And did you have any thoughts about that?

D The first time it didn't really worry me because I thought: ‘Just experiment’...I mean I hadn't done it before but after that if I go to a ‘beat’ now and there's an old bloke in there or someone who's middle aged I just walk out...I don't need it...
I The age difference... That was never an issue?

D It never was because I wasn't going to leave without doing it so I just did it... That was what I was talking about before... I'd feel ok until about 20 minutes afterwards and like I was regretting it but ummmmmm... Because you know if I had of waited around longer or... someone else might have come... someone younger might have come...

I Alright... So as a gay guy you've... Sex has been part of your teenage years

D Yeah

I That is interesting because a lot of people that I've interviewed haven't spoken about sex at all

Later in the interview I asked Dante to imagine how his experiences of sex might be different to those of his straight peers:

I Is gayness an important part of the comparison that you make between yourself and peers?

D Ummmm... I don't know I get along with everyone really well... Ummmmmm... It's not a point where I mislead them... A teacher said to me one day: 'Your sexuality is your own (business) don't worry you don't have to tell them if you don't want to... No-one else goes around saying that I had sex with a lady last night... Why should you go round saying I had sex with a guy'... No it's not their business

I The teacher that said that to you?

D She was a teacher but she was also the school counsellor... And ummmm I told her that... That I was gay... And my English teacher... I told her that that I was gay...

I Mmmmm

D My English teacher... She knew everything about me, like drinking and drugs and that... She goes... I was talking to her trying to get an extension for a CAT and that...

I You hadn't done it?

D I hadn't done it because I'd been too busy being a druggo and that... And alcohol... And I said: 'I went out on the weekend' and she said, 'Where did you go?'... I said: 'I went to Melbourne'... She went: 'Where did you go?'... And I said: 'I went to a night club near St. Kilda and St Yarra'... We've had, someone will say
something about being gay in class and she will just start laughing or
something...I do that a lot...One of my friends at school, he knows I'm gay as
well and ummmm...My best friend he knows that I'm gay as well and
ummmm...People will talk about gay things or whatever and like people will just
start laughing...He's not gay but we'll just start laughing and pissing ourselves
laughing...

I So they're straight those other two guys...When did you tell them?

D I told the mate that doesn't go to school the same day that I told my mum...And
about two or three weeks after that I told the kid at school...

I And their reaction was good?

D Ahhhhh...The one that I told at school I sort of was trying to avoid it but I wanted
to tell but I didn't want to...Sort of the same with everyone...You want to tell them
but you don't want to tell them everything about you...When I told him he said: ‘I
thought it was something real bad or something’...He just thought that I'd done
something real bad and got in trouble with the cops or been kicked out of home or
something...

I So gayness wouldn't figure as an issue for him?

D He goes...'Uh is that all, you took me all the way down here'...There's a park and
so I went down and told him and he just started laughing and said, 'I thought
so'...He goes just the way you've been doing things because I've been dropping
hints for about two weeks or something

I Hints?

D I said: ‘I've got something to tell you...And I'm real wrapped because I've read Ian
Robert's book’...And I said: 'I'm so happy I'm so happy I don't need a fix
tonight...I've just read this book that's real happy' and he said, 'What's the book
called?'...and I said...

The conversation then turned to a discussion of Ian Robert's Biography written by Paul
Freeman. I was interested where he had found the book and how it had influenced him.
This then led onto a discussion of what was happening in Dante's life outside of school
and how what was happening outside of school influenced him to ‘come out’:

I Ian Robert's book…

D That was one of the things that made me want to ‘come out’...If he can do it and
like he had everything to lose...

I Where did you get the book?
D  Shit, fucking no place (here) sells the book...I've been to all the shops...And I've been in there so many times and none of them sell it...I've never been to a bookshop that sells it yet...

I  But there must have been other things that were leading you to...

D  Oh...I was going to ‘beats’ more and more I started...There's the Botanical Gardens and they're like 5 k's away so I'd run to the Botanical Gardens and then there are three ‘beats’ there and ummmm...Go there and then I'd run home...Fuck it was good because I was getting what I wanted but I was running as well and I needed to be fit for my sport, if I (went there I could kill) two birds with one stone...

I  So you could go for runs and have sex...So what I'm hearing you say is that you were getting more and more into the sex and you weren't feeling bad about that...Well you were feeling a bit guilty but it was...

D  I was feeling guilty because it was with people that I really didn't want to be with...

I  How do you reckon your experience of that would be different to your straight friends or straight guys?

Here the conversation returned to the issue that I had asked Dante about earlier. Namely, how did he think that his experiences of sex were different to the experiences that he imagined his straight peers were having:

D  Oh well I see...Ummmm...One good thing about being gay is that you can get a head job in five minutes...Go anywhere and hey...I mean straight people can't just walk into a shop or like public toilets and like have sex with someone...

I  Mmmmm

D  It's a lot different for them (straight guys)

I  You would see that as being very different than it is for straight guys?

D  But like a lot of straight guys they're like going out and rooting girls on the weekend and stuff but for a lot of gay people...Their availability is different to ours whereas they can go and have sex and they can feel good about it whereas we feel guilty because we have to go to a ‘beat’ but we can get it regular...

I  So...From your perspective...For straight young men there would be the possibility of sex but not as much sex and so it's more open but there's less of it but for gay guys it's less open but there's more of it?
D Less open there's more of it but it's like a different kind of sex...You don't...well (here)...You don't go into a public toilet and have full on sex you just go in there and you know masturbate and stuff like that and that's like a fair bit different to what straight people would...If you got caught going home sleeping with a girl or that then your dad would go ‘you're a hero’, your mum would be pissed off and the girl would be a real slut but if you got caught with a guy then ummmm you’d be out the door, told to piss off...

I And what about Safe Sex?

D Yeah...Shit, look (cupboard) that thing over there there's condoms and lube and there are summer sex packs, condoms out front

I You just take them...

D Yeah

I Good...And that would be your feeling for other (young guys)...On ‘beats’?

D On ‘beats’ no-one rips out a condom

I They don't...And why do you reckon that is?

D Ummmm...I suppose most of them are married men...So...

I Mmmmm

D And they think put on a condom and then they'll think: ‘Oh I am gay’...Why should I concern myself with gay issues that aren't really (my) issues...

I What percentage do you reckon would be married?

D About 75%

The conversation then turned to school again. Dante spoke about the harassment that ‘effeminate’ guys endured in the school that he attended:

D There's a group of kids that get called gay all the time because they're ‘effeminate’ and I don't know if they're gay or not but I can only think that they're gay...I sort of think that they are because ummmm...I'm friends with them and I talk with them and I just feel that they...Well I drop hints to them and they drop hints to me...About things

I So what sort of hints would you drop?
D There's one guy and I just talk to him and he's pretty worried about looking (like) gay things...He doesn't want to look like he's gay...He's into stereotyping rubbish...

I So with looking gay...This is an issue?...Would you say that you looked gay?

D No

I Well what's that based on?

D Based on stereotypes...Ummmmm...Someone who looks gay...They are a full on fashion freak...Hair different colour every time and ummmm...Earrings everywhere and like the clothes they wear and like the colours and styles and the way they talk...And wear make up...Stuff like that...

I How do you feel about that?

D I'd never wear make up...

I Has make up really got anything to do with gayness though?

D You can be transgendered without being gay

Later in the interview on a similar theme Dante said:

D Gay people are usually rich, smart and well dressed, compared to like you know a normal bloke who would just wear red tag Levi's...You know 501's...or something and a dole shirt and an Adidas jumper and a gay person will really spend a bit of time making themselves look good...Like they would go for Calvin Kline or Armani or...They'll buy designer stuff like Najee or whatever to make themselves look better...

I And so what do you reckon that's about?

D Just appearance...Yeah...In Europe the fashion is so much different to Australia and America like it...They'd (gay men would) fit in in Europe but in Australia you'd be called a poof...

I So do you think straight boys (would read someone) who dressed well and spent a lot of time on their appearance, as being gay?...Who do you think has the big interest in appearance then?

D I think just gay people...They care about the way they look much more than a straight person...
In a school...People will say he's a poof because he looks a particular way...He's go pink hair or whatever...So what type of effect do you think that that has on the way that you carry yourself in a school?...

Well to tell you the truth I want to get a...I want to change the colour of my hair...I'm not sure what colour but I would never have done this at school...Like I'm finishing school now so it will happen soon but I would never have done it while I was at school because you just don't want to bring attention...

Bring attention?

Yeah like I want to do mine to make it look a blondie colour...an ash colour...But if I did my hair and wore the clothes that I wanted to wear then I'd be a poof because

Because of the way you look?

Yeah

We then started to talk in more depth about 'the way that you look':

Now just looking at you now...Your stance...The way you sit...All of those sort of things...You wouldn't read to me as gay...And I know that I'm right into stereotypes there but....I'm just wondering whether you are aware of that and whether you reckon that the fact that you would pass as straight fairly easily...What effect do you think that that has had on your school experience?

Ummmm...I'm just very lucky...Because all of the kids who are 'effeminate' they are just branded straight away...So...No-one ever did that...Ummmm...I've been called a poof like heaps of times in school but...Not because they think I'm gay but because you call somebody a poof...But the 'effeminate' people they get called a poof because you know they reckon that they're a poof because they're (really poofs)...You're a poof as in you're gay or you're a poof as in you're a dickhead, or a fuck'n idiot or something like that....

And what is the difference in the way that that...

I suppose more emphasis on the P...(Harsher sound)

Later in the interview Dante made some very interesting comments about how being labelled a poof, because of the way that a person walked or talked, had influenced his behaviour and the way that he thought about himself:

But what is the effect of it (being labelled)? If it is said with intent...
D Oh...Inferiority complex I suppose Ummmm...You're either going to start being a poof because everyone thinks that you are a poof or you're going to try to...I must change my voice, I must change the way I move, talk to people I must change the clothes I wear and stuff like that....

I The voices and...I must change my voice and the way I move and stuff like that...Have you ever been aware of anything like that happening with you?

D Yeah...In the sport I play this bloke he was imitating me and I thought fuck'n that doesn't sound like me and ummmm...And I could never work out why he'd say it but then I was listening to ummmm...I was recording a message on the answering machine and I actually listened to myself and I thought: ‘Fuck that does sound pretty gay’...And like I wasn't happy with it because that's not the way I want to sound...I just prefer a deeper voice because I reckon it sounds better...

I Yeah

D Rather than an ‘effeminate’ voice so...I don't think it has change dramatically but it is deeper...

I So you...Your voice would get deeper because you are getting older and bigger as well but....You...

D Yeah...I was consciously making my voice deeper...

I Making your voice drop...And why?

D Yeah it's an authority thing...More people will take you seriously...They won't fuck with you....Ummmm...If you go (high voice) 'Oh do you want a punch in the head' or if you say (deep voice) 'Do you want a fuck'n smash in the head'...they're going to (take notice) if you're more aggressive...

I Do you feel that you are different in school, in terms of bodies and voices and all that, compared to here?

D With people who are more ‘effeminate’ ummmm...I'll be leaning towards being more ‘effeminate’ because sometimes it's fun just to laugh and carry on and have a joke but it's not something that I want to carry on 24 hours a day...

I Are you conscious of it while you are doing it?

D No...I just sort of slip into it and then I sort of think...You know when you're drunk and you sort of think 'Oh shit, What am I doing?' It's a bit like that...Yeah you're a bit more relaxed I think…
I So would you be more relaxed when you're like that or more relaxed when you are not like that?

D I'm not really sure...I suppose when I do it I'm being relaxed

I You're not aware of it?

D Yeah...You're just kind of blending in...Camouflaging into the new surroundings...

I To the different surroundings...That's interesting...

Later in the interview I asked Dante if being secretive about his sexuality at school made him feel less comfortable:

I I mean being in...Having to choose who you tell when in all other sorts of ways...(does that make you feel uncomfortable)?

D No it doesn't...It's my business...I don't tell the kids at school many things...I don't tell them that I shot up last night or that I've been drunk every day for the last three weeks or stoned off my head or...I don't think it's any of their business I'll tell who I want to tell...

I Do you reckon sexuality is the same as drugs though?

D Yeah...It's your own business...I just sit there watching other people and I'm rock'n I'm having fun they're just normal and straight...

I So when you're in a school...You'd position yourself or you'd see yourself as on the edge of...That's interesting to think of in terms of gayness because on the one hand there is a pressure from gayness but on the other there is like a pleasure from gayness in that it can be charged and exciting to be on the edge…

D Mmmmm

I And I suppose...risk and drugs and alcohol and all that sort of stuff...Is that important in terms of gayness for you?

D Ummmm...I don't know

I Or just generally

D I love to have fun to just do things and like stupid things...
Later in the interview we talked about teacher’s attitudes and during that conversation Dante told an interesting story about being suspended from school for harassing another student suspected of being gay:

I To focus on teachers attitudes...Have you got any thoughts on that?

D I don't know or have ever suspected any of my teachers of being gay...When I was in Year 10, I got suspended from school for calling a kid a poof out of a bus window, and he was an ‘effeminate’ kid, so ummm...Because he was ‘effeminate’ and because he'd been called gay so many times he went and dobbed and I got suspended and ummm...I though that was really good...At the time I thought it was fucking ridiculous...Now I think that that's good and I was walking with an ‘effeminate’ kid and ummm...the other day at school and this little kid goes (high voice) 'Hi Nick'...'Cause his name is Nick...So I turned around and smashed him in the guts and winded him and told him off and said: ‘Why are you doing that for?’...And I've done that a few times now...They don't do it to me and that might piss me off because then I haven't got the opportunity to just turn around and kick someone's head in but ummm...At the same time I do it to stick up for them because I've called that many people poofs because I've thought they were gay over the years and...

I And so when you call other people poof...What are you...?

D Trying to save yourself because I'm gay and they won't think I'm gay because I'll give them a hard time. Just detracts attention from yourself and puts it onto someone else...

When I asked Dante about the schools response to the harassment of ‘effeminate’ students he replied that he had been suspended but he also indicated that he was aware of the limits of such responses as they don’t address the structural nature of such harassment:

I And what...With the ‘effeminate’ guys...What sort of response does the school have to (the harassment that they endure)?

D Detention maybe...My example I got suspended...And ummmm...But they are doing it and they think that they are doing the right thing but they really haven't addressed being gay in the school at all before so like making an example of me is really stupid...'Cause they haven't taught anything about being gay or (tried to) change attitudes or anything else previously

I So picking out an individual doesn't really do anything because it's bigger than the individual...From your observation in schools what do you think are the things in schools that...Fuel that sort of...?
D In my school it's a big boys club...If you don't play footy or cricket you might as well not go there...

I So how do you feel about football?

D (Groan)...I've got no time for it....I couldn't care less about it...It just pisses me off that my sport, not just my sport...People can play for Australia and they don't get any recognition but someone can kick a goal in a dingy little club match in their town and kick a goal and win a game and that deserves a mention...

I Mmmmm...So you haven't got a lot of time for football?

D Just because it's a boy's club...You have to be a real big man and macho and...All men play footy and all men play cricket and ummmm...Basketball used to be a girl's sport but now it's a real man's sport...

I So there's a real hierarchy of sports?

D Yeah unless you're ‘rough and tough’ and into ‘rough and tough’ and if you're not...Into rough sports...Then you're just gay...

I How is (your sport) different to the football?

D My sport is a ‘girl’s sport’ too...

I And so what do you like about (your sport)?

D Ummmm...I'm good at it so...A reason for living...If I wasn't that I'd just be a clapped out junkie. It gives me something to live for...Because I'm good at it and because I represent the State...

I asked Dante whether he had any suggestions about what might improve schools for gay and lesbian students:

I I'm interested in the areas that you would suggest that schools might work on to make school better for young lesbian and gay people...

D The ‘effeminate’ people will always be called gay...Because they just always will because everyone thinks you're a girl, your mixed up...That's probably the biggest tip off...Being called gay and like being victimised and harassed ostracised every day for nearly every day when you're at High School you know for six years doesn't you know give you much reason to you know keep on going

I And you would identify with that or?
D  No not me but...

I  Yeah...So just that constant harassment can really wear people down...And dampen them

D  Yeah

I  And that's something that gay people have got to work against?

D  You've got to bounce back

I  What could schools do to support young lesbian and gay people (to bounce back)? What would you have liked to have happened to have made school a better experience?

D  I don't know just educate people...I mean there is a thing up there in that drawer about myths and stereotypes and

I  stereotypes and

D  Yeah...Not all gay people are paedophiles and stuff like that...Not all gay people paint their fingernails, not all gay people or lesbians want to be guys

I  So the main thing that you'd say in schools...

D  I reckon the best thing in schools...They always have a social worker and the social worker is always older because they reckon that it's better to have someone who's experienced life but I reckon it's crap you're better to have a student because I'd love to be a fuck'n social worker...Because you're more inclined to tell someone who's young and like old people are always going to sit and pass judgement but they'll sit and talk as though they don't but they do...You're better off having someone young

I  Like peer support

D  You know ‘Heart Break High’...(at this point the tape ran out).........
Conversations
A sexual diversity training kit for schools.

Hayes

Michael Crowhurst
Hayes

Hayes is 15 and of Greek, Aboriginal, Irish and English decent. Hayes is homeless. He was Greek Orthodox but is no longer. He attends a multi-campus State co-educational secondary school with an enrolment of 1,400 students. Hayes is in year 10. He has problems with labels but is happy to describe himself as gay.

Hayes started the interview by mentioning that he was homeless:

H Yeah...I used to be middle class but I don't live with them no more so...I haven't got an income...My family just didn't like gay kids...So I haven't got a home no more...

The conversation then turned to labels. Hayes explained why he didn't like the label gay:

H Gay is just such a blahh word I wish they'd have a different label but you could call me a gay male...

I So you're not entirely happy with that label?

H Yeah I know what I am...I'm totally one way...But I just don't like ‘I'm Gay’...You know how they do that in the TV things...

I So in terms of attraction...Who would you be attracted to?

H Only guys...No interest...Best of friends with girls but nothing more...

I Would you like to say anything else about labels?

H Most of the labels I don't like to use...

I Why is that?

H Personally me I find them offensive...It's just you see a guy and a girl walking down the street and you don't start yelling out: ‘Uhhhh You're Straight...You're Heterosexual’...You just don't do that and I don't feel that it should be done to me and people like me...

The conversation then moved onto school. I asked Hayes about the school that he attended and he began to discuss some of his experiences there:

H It's a Public School...It's very hard to go to school at times...I nearly got kicked out of school...A girl that used the same line of hair products that I used and had green hair when I had pink hair and I got sent home and I had no money because
I'd just been kicked out of home to change my hair and I had to go like without an education for like three weeks...

I Because of your hair colour?

H Yeah I wouldn't go to a school if it wasn't co-ed...And the teachers are very homophobic

I In what way?

H I think I was walking down the corridors...Painting my nails...A friend of mine bought this really ‘rad’ nail polish into the school...and this teacher just looks at me like I was the scum of the earth or something and I thought you're a teacher...You're supposed to deal with students who do this not do it yourself...

I Students?...

H Students who basically discriminate but the teachers are doing it themselves...How can they find what students are doing is wrong if they believe it's right themselves...Yeah...Do you want to know what recess is like now...I'm dying to tell you what recess is like...

Hayes began to discuss his school experiences initially by speaking about when he 'came out':

H The school has known I was gay for about...Just over a year now...

I So you 'came out' when you were 14 or?

H 'Came Out' into the public when I was 14...I've always had that type of feeling that it's me...I'm the type of person that knows what I want and knows how to get it and I'd say I'd call myself a strong person...I stand up for what I believe in...I threw away most of my clothes...My lifestyle...everything just for what I believe in...Ummm...I've always known in me...Just a feeling...

I And that would go back to Primary School?

H Yes...You know how they line up at school in two lines...One line for the guys and the other for the girls...I felt like I didn't fit into any of those lines...And I used to think 'What am I doing here?...Is this what my life is all going to be about? Am I going to be nothing am I going to feel really out of place?’...I wonder what it is that's making me feel out of place...I knew I used to like...I used to like guys back there too though...

I But not in the same kind of...
H The same way but I didn't recognize it...

I Mmmm

H (I used to think) No...Like all kids think about things like that but you've got to deal with it in the end...So at the end of Grade 6 I dealt with it and I thought 'Yes this is what I am'...And then at school one day I thought 'This is enough I'm going to be me and me alone'...People used to call me gay back then...

I So people were

H Being spat at...I've been stoned...There...30 students at my school stoned me and the principal said he didn't see it...They followed me around the whole campus...The principal said he didn't see it...And yeah I've been picked up and thrown against the wall...Stuff like that...And

I So there's been a lot of physical harassment and abuse and verbal harassment and abuse.

H I had cuts and bruises

I What sort of effect do you think that's had?

H Umm...I used to get really depressed and I slit my wrists and I had my stomach pumped in hospital...It sort of made me more...I don't know sort of crawl away from people...I've left home three times...

I You're not going to go back?

H No this is the last time...Why should I...

I And how is home different to school?

H Not much actually

I In what way?

H Both places I get abused and yelled at and I've done nothing wrong...both places don't listen to me...and both (are) places I should feel safe in...

The conversation then turned to abuse that Hayes had endured in Primary School. I asked Hayes what he believed the harassment was based on:

H I wouldn't call myself a masculine person at all...Football, cricket they can go out the window...Ummm...I get along well with girls just sitting down having
When I was younger I debated about whether I wanted to be a woman or not but I'm happy being a guy as long as I've got my stiletto's and wigs and dresses.

You said that you didn't feel that you were masculine...

I think it's rubbish actually...I was talking to this Christian who was laying the tiles in my house and he was telling me that I was going to die...He goes 'God didn't make males to wear nail polish'...I goes 'Really did they have nail polish back in them days did they?'...He goes...'But but'...I go 'No buts...Hurry up and finish your tiles'...

So what point were you making when you said all that?

Masculinity and Femininity it's rubbish...People just keep adding to it...

And what do you mean by that?

Fashion...Umm...Male and female are two totally different body shapes I reckon they had to make a stereotype to keep them different and I reckon that's what they've gone and done...Fair enough...A guys masculine I'm not sure whether that's because of all the stereotyping that they've done...It might be or it might be part of them...I've never really understood that fully but I believe that.

A lot of people haven't understood that fully...

Hayes then spoke about an incident with a girl at school. Hayes spoke briefly about his perception that people were fascinated with him:

The girls don't tend to have a go at me that much even though one flashed her snatch at me the other day...

What do you reckon that was about?

I don't know what she did that for...I don't know...I think they find me fascinating...They...Seeing as the girls don't have much of a problem with it I reckon that they're stronger within themselves...

Later in the interview Hayes spoke about why wearing nail polish and eye shadow was important to him:

I love my hair colour and my eye shadows I just love it to death...

Why?
H It's a part of me...I went down to the shop and they didn't recognize me they thought I was a girl...How you going love?...'I thought if you only knew you'd get out of the car and have a go at me...I'd be too iffy to do it again in 'suburb' but I'd go to Melbourne...

I How do you feel when you do that?

H Expressing me...The core of me...I am a guy but like I explained to people...Clowns were originally male or female they dress up what's wrong with that...people accept that...I'm just another clown...

I Clown is an interesting word

H Not the word clown...like you fool

I It's certainly not a thing that you do foolishly...You'd be aware that if you do wear nail polish that...there is 'stick' to be had...so what makes it worth...?

H That agro

I Why would you wear nail polish?...And that's a very different statement to your teacher saying 'Don't wear nail polish'...I'm just interested in what's the pay off for you in doing that?

H It's part of me...I won't stop fighting 'till I get what I deserve...I deserve to be treated like a normal human being and I will get that...And I wont accept nothing less...

I And how does wearing nail polish bring that about though?...

H It's what I like...It's not saying: 'Ha...I can wear nail polish and see how I get away with it'...I like nail polish and hair and I want to go to the Melbourne College of Hair and Beauty and I really like it and guys love their footy and they can talk non stop about their footy wear their football jumpers and their Adidas clothes why can't I wear my nail polish and stiletto's?...

The conversation then moved on to consider how Hayes felt in relation to other students at his school.

H I'll be around most 15 year olds and I'm thinking 'bored...I'm bored'...And I just wish...Most of my friends are in their 20's and I just wish one of them could be driving past the school and pick me up...And just go somewhere different...Even with the year 10's which I'm supposed to be in...Ummmm...I just don't fit in...The conversations... I think how juvenile is that...

I What type of things do they talk about?
Kids will say: 'My mother only gave me $5 today...What a fucking bitch'...And I'll be like thinking to myself...I'll always be nice to everyone though and I'll think, I've got no money you know...like when you're gay and you're ‘out’ you have to grow up really fast or else you'll hit rock bottom...

What do you mean grow up really fast?

Be really aware...There's all little traps and catches out there...If you don't watch it you're gone...Don't trust people...Be very wary of people...and just tell people what you have to really unless you can safely say you can trust them.

I'm interested that you said that you're nice to them...

I have to be nice to everyone...

Because on the one level there is a feeling that 'I don't care what you think’...But on

Another level there is...

But everyone is like that...

With me something I feel that I've got the right to do ...If I've got the right to wear what I want I'll wear it...but I don't have the right to tell someone just 'cause I don't like what they think, to tell them to get fucked...I've got no right, I'd be exactly like the people who tell me...

I asked Hayes what he thought his peers thought about gay and lesbian people:

They think that we've all got a terminal illness and that they'll catch it just by touching us...And it just does something to me when someone says I've got AIDS...I'll be straight over there...I mightn't be physically strong but mentally and with my mouth I can hold myself in an argument, I can look after myself...

How have you cultivated that? How do you use it?

In the last 4 weeks I've been bashed in ‘suburb’ twice...Knocked unconscious once...But the next day I always come back into the Mall...That's where the rough ones hang but you know...I still keep coming back...

I then asked Hayes if he was aware of any other gay or lesbian students at his school:

Yes...They tease the shit out of me...There's one

At you?
H Yes but I'll never blow the whistle on them...

I And why do you reckon they might do that?

H They're not comfortable with themselves and so they've got to have a go at me to make themselves feel assured that they're not (gay or lesbian) and to their peers that they're not (gay or lesbian) too...

I then asked Hayes what the difference between being harassed by someone who was straight was from being harassed by someone who was gay or lesbian:

H One is harassment trying to fit in and (the) other is harassment due to pure ignorance...

Hayes then spoke about experiences around the school:

H Well when I walk down the corridor the reasons behind it aren't good (bums to the wall) but at least I get to walk through the cracks in the corridor...

I So how do you feel when they do that?

H Sometimes I can be very hurt but I just...I'll only get annoyed and really hurt once a month...Really...And then I'll just have my cry and I'll say look it's not your fault...

I Is there a teacher at school that you think is supportive?

H He was being really supportive but then I told him that I was being spat at and stoned and I said what am I going to do?...He said 'Keep your head down Hayes'...and I said: ‘Thanks...I can't keep my head down’...And the principal even told me 'Be a mushroom'...’Cause he can't ensure my safety around the school...

I Meaning stay in the dark

H Yeah stay in the Library and go to the canteen...And I'm not going to hide...around

I How do you feel about that advice?

H I'm insulted I really am...

I Why?

H Basically their needs are more important than my needs...

I The harassers needs?
Hayes then spoke to the limits of policy to solve an issue as complex as the homophobia that he was experiencing:

H But how can I go on a school camp?

I But how would you feel you were excluded from that?

H The guys change rooms...I would feel uncomfortable there...

I Why?

H They would tease the shit out of me and I would feel really uncomfortable...Yes them or...having their eye on me within themselves ...They cannot physically say but within themselves...

I Having their eye on you?

H It makes me feel uncomfortable...

I To what extent are you aware of them having their eye(s) on you?...Can you talk about that?

H They'll ignore...Even at a sport thing they'll ignore me...They'll really hide away from me...Like they'll all take turns getting changed in the toilets and...ummm...even at the refuge where I am they won't put another guy in my room and they wont put me in a girl's room...The girl's corridor...I was sitting with my head around the corner and they went ballistic at me...'You shouldn't be there'...I don't fit in...I feel like their trying to lock me away in some little cupboard...

I And how do you feel about that?

H I'm really disappointed...

Later Hayes spoke about a situation where he had been suspended from school. In the process he suggests that there is a need for schools to state clearly that they are opposed to discrimination on the basis of sexuality and to act when discrimination occurs:
H  Every Tuesday we have an assembly they've never once even addressed the issue of leaving me alone...I've asked...

I  Would you like them to do that?

H  Yes...Publicly...To say anyone who harasses any student (is in trouble)...There was this disabled girl who was at my school and my friend who (was) actually stirring the shit out of her, the poor thing, and I said nothing (and) I got suspended...I got told if anyone harasses another student well they'll be instantly suspended...Where's my justice...If they were going to suspend people for harassing me they'd have no class sizes...But you know they're aware of that...that's why they won't suspend them...

I  'Cause they know it's such an entrenched problem...

H  Yes...
Conversations
A sexual diversity training kit for schools.

James

Michael Crowhurst
James

James is 15, Catholic, describes himself as being middle to lower class, and as an 'Australian' (Anglo-Celtic). He attends an inner-city, co-educational State school that he estimates has an enrolment of 450 students. James is in year 10 and identifies as gay.

Initially I asked him whether he had encountered any gay or lesbian subject content in the courses that he had done or was currently doing at school:

J None of the subjects have any gay topics. I don't think any subjects really do touch on gay and lesbian students or experiences at all...but...I have brought the topic up but the teachers said: 'No we don't want to discuss it because there's just not enough gay and lesbian students’...

I So who did you bring that up with?

J I brought it up twice with my History teacher last year and he said: ‘We can't because we don't have enough time to talk about it or even touch on the subject’...

I And so when he said: ‘There's not enough gay and lesbian students’...

J I think he was getting into the percentage of gay and lesbian people in society since there's only about 10%...He's didn't think that percentage was enough...

I How did you feel about that? Where you happy about that?

J I'm not happy about that at all I think that we should be studying gay and lesbian subjects or that we should be touching on homosexual subjects within each subject or...

Later in the conversation about subject content James spoke about ‘coming out’ to teachers:

I And have you said similar things (about wanting gay and lesbian content included in subjects) to other teachers?

J No I don't think so but I have told them that I am gay...But I haven't exactly told them that I want to study stuff in the classroom

I And what were the other teachers reactions when you...told them that you were gay?
J They were fine about it...it was really weird...I don't know why but I thought that they wouldn't take it very well...Saying: ‘You've got to get out of the school now’...but anyway they didn’t do that so I'm still in there it's fine...

I Thinking back to the first teacher that you told...Can you tell me about that?...Did you tell them all (the others) at the same time?...

J Well I don't really go out and just tell people tell the teachers that I'm gay I expect them to know...I have ‘come out’ to a few teachers telling them that I am going to be on TV for a particular subject I was going to do on 'Bent TV' sometime...

I You would expect them to know?...

J Yeah

I Now what's that expectation based on?

J Ummmm...Because I am so camp I feel you could be blind and still see it...so I just expect people to know...

Later the conversation turned to the time when James ‘came out’ to his parents and to his participation in a youth support group:

J I wasn't planning on ‘coming out’ to my parents at all but I eventually ‘came out’ to them because I had to go to the gay group...

I Where was that?

J (Service Provider) (The group that James attended runs for 6 weeks and is a discussion/support group for young men who are attracted the same sex.)

I And what was your experience of that?

J That was great for me because that was the first ever experience of the gay community at all and it was really great experience

I Explain how it ran...

J Well it runs for six weeks and they talk about different topics each week like relationships, self esteem...sex, safe-sex...so you can educate yourself

I Can you speak about how you felt doing those things?...

J Once we got some dildo's and we had to put a condom on them and put some lube and it was very messy...it was really embarrassing
I So how did you find that (material) or those parts?

J I felt a bit out of place at the start 'cause everyone was so much older than me...I did feel a bit out of place because I hadn't experienced sex at all so it was very new to me as well...But I got over it pretty quickly

James then made a few comments the themes of which he returned to later in the interview:

I It was your first experience of being in a group of other gay people...How did you feel?

J Well I was very nervous on the first time...The first night that I went there but when you get to know them...They're very good guys, very friendly and stuff...ummm...I actually feel more comfortable with older gay guys than I do with younger gay guys which...I don't know is maybe weird too...but...

I Comfort in what sense?

J Just ummm...that they don't embarrass you as...

I How would you be embarrassed by other young people?

J Just they're being childish...

(Later in this section of the conversation James spoke about why he felt uncomfortable seeing two guys his own age holding hands)

J Well I haven't actually seen two guys my own age actually holding hands...(and so I felt uncomfortable but)...When I went to ‘Diversity’ it was fine gay guys kissing in public it was wonderful...

I then asked James if he could draw any connections between the gay group that he was attending and any subject that he was doing at school:

I Now getting back to the curriculum...I would say that the (provider) course that you go to (is a type of curriculum)...If you were to think of school is there a subject that comes close to what they do at (provider)?

J Ummm...Probably just ‘Health and Human Relations’...Just talking about bodies and stuff, safe-sex and just about relationships...

I If you were going to compare and contrast 'the group' with ‘Health and Human Relations’ how are they the same and how are they different?
J Ummm...Well at school they don't talk about the gay stuff at all...And at 'the group' everything is based around being gay and being safe...

I And in terms of how you feel in the group...Say you were talking about relationships...Do you contribute differently to (conversations at the gay group) than you would to conversations at school? Is there a difference in those groups?

J I probably would say more at school because I'd probably gather more attention on myself...but...At the 'gay group' I'm still very wary of getting embarrassed by other guys...The younger guys I mean...Because on Saturday we were talking about relationships and I didn't want to say anything at all...'Cause of this other guy and my ex-boyfriend...

I You seem to be saying that talking about relationships and personal things in a context like the 'gay group' may be more challenging than talking about (those things in other contexts)...?

J Sometimes...Yeah...'Cause the embarrassment and stuff...I really do like the group and meeting other gay guys but...

I So how long have you been going?

J For this 18 and under group that I went to on Saturday that was my fourth time...

I So about 4 months...How did you find out about that group?

J Probably through 'JOY Melbourne'...The radio station...

I And how did you find out about ‘JOY Melbourne’?

J Ummm...When ‘JOY’ first started which was about 2 years ago...I just remembered the name ‘JOY’ and it was on the news...Then another year and a half later I remember ‘JOY’...And this is when I was starting to get to the sexuality phase and stuff...And I just went through ‘JOY’...Gay...And then I just looked up in the Yellow Pages...and...I really like ‘JOY’

I So what...did you get out of ‘JOY’?

J I got the number for all...they have heaps of ads for...(community groups)...Ring (name) at (service provider) stuff...So one day I popped up enough courage to call (worker)...(and we) Just talked for ages and ages...

I So it was an information point for you...JOY...?

J Yeah
The experience at the ‘gay group’ had been very positive for James and I asked him whether he thought his involvement in that group was having an effect on his school experience. This then lead onto a discussion about there being no other ‘out’ gay students at James’ school and about ‘walks and talks’:

I Do you think your experience at ‘the group’ is changing your school experience?

J It could be very slowly...Mmmm...I just wish some other people would ‘come out’ as well.

I So there's no-one else at the school?

J No-one has ‘come out’ or come up to me and said: ‘Can I talk to you about something?’...Or...Yeah...But there's a few people that have like the ‘gay voice’ or ‘gay walk’ or whatever...Ummm...But...I already know that they've said that they're straight...

I So with the ‘gay voice’ and the ‘gay walk’...’Cause this is another theme that has come up in a number of interviews...

J Stereotype

I What do you understand stereotypes to be?

J Ummm...It's making your sexuality very obvious to others...I think...But some people just have a 'girlie' voice and they're not gay...So you can't hold that against them...

I So you can't generalise...

J But it does help when you're looking at the cute guys...That one's gay...That one's gay too yeah...

I So you'd go on walks and voices a little

J Yeah

Later in the conversation James spoke about bullying and harassment that he had endured at school. He referred earlier in the interview to his relationship with the Equal Opportunity Co-Ordinator at the school. He had told her that he was gay and she had responded by telling James that he could talk to her whenever he wanted to. His relationship with and trust in the EO co-ordinator meant that he was able to tell her about the bullying that he was enduring and put a stop to it.
J: I am scared of some of the straight guys at school as well and that doesn't help but I can't help it...

I: So in what respect?

J: I'm probably most scared of them saying something or coming up to me and starting bashing me...

I: Have you seen any examples of that?

J: No...But there was these two kids...they're kids even though they're in Year 12...Ummmm...They were just saying things like when I was walking past: ‘Look at the poofter, faggot, You fucking cunt and stuff’...Ummmm...So that was going on for about since about last year...

I: Year 9?

J: Yeah the middle of year 9...And it wouldn't stop...

I: And was it the same two people all the time?

J: Yeah

I: What did you do to deal with that?

J: Well...I told my Equal Opportunity Officer...and she just went up to them and said: ‘I don't want this to happen any more’...And he said: ‘That I really don't like gays at all’...That something happened between him and his uncle or something and that's why he has so much hatred or...

I: And then what happened after that...as a result of that?

J: Well he said he wouldn't do it ever again...

I: So he stopped doing it?

J: But that doesn't stop me being scared of that...

I: No...but you've used the structures that are there to (stop him)...

J: Yeah

I: So was it important that there were structures (in place)?...Because a lot of people wouldn't go up and actually say that to the Equal Opportunity Person...What do you think contributed to you being able to go up and speak...and actually make that complaint?
James spoke about peers and in the context of this part of the interview he described how he came to be 'out' at school:

J Ummm...Well...Most of the girls are very supportive...But I don't have many guy/straight friends...Straight guy friends...Yeah...They're very scared I think they don't know what to do...They think that you're going to come onto them in some way...and you know why would you want to come onto a straight guy!...

I Would your peers say that you were gay?

J Yeah

I And how long have they said that for?

J Since the start of the year 9...Yeah when I first went to that school...

I And so what happened in year 9?...

J I think I just...People just asked me if I was gay or not...First I denied it and then I said after they came up to me and asked me again I said: ‘Yeah’...Sometimes I wonder why I did that...But now I think who cares...

I So you ‘came out’ to them in response to their questions. When did you come to your own idea that you were gay?

J Ummm...I first thought about it...It must have been September '93 or '94 when I saw 'The Sum of Us' and 'Priscilla: The Queen of the Desert'...Yeah that's when I just thought: ‘God it's me’...(James would have been 10 or 11)

I And what was it about those movies 'cause they're very different...the portrayals of gay...?

J Yeah...Priscilla is more stereotypically gay...ummm...It just felt normal I think...

I Just something that you could identify with up there?

J Yeah...I've never had a girlfriend as such...and just didn't feel that attraction towards them...although I identify myself as being gay I don't want to rule out an intimate relationship with a woman...So I don't know if that's weird either but that's how I feel...'Cause I don't want to identify myself as being bi-sexual either because otherwise I'd be like half and half...Like half would be men and half would be women...
Later in the interview James briefly stated why boys at his school might not want to mix with him and why girls might be more inclined to mix with him than boys:

I  You said that you didn't hang around with a lot of boys (that) you hung around with a lot of girls...Where do straight guys sit with you? How do you feel about them?

J  I just don't like them at all...Yeah...But since they don't like me why should I like them anyway...

I  Are there any particular guys?

J  There are a couple of straight guys that don't mind my company...ummmm...

The conversation then turned to why James believed that straight guys might not want to mix with him:

J  Ummmm...Probably because if they were to be my friend they wouldn't want others to be calling them gay or fag or poof or something...

I  So it's to do with guilt by association?

J  Mmmm...

I  And what's the difference with the young women or girls in the class or in the school? How are relations with them different?

J  Ummmm...Just because they're girls and (I'm) gay and I won't be attracted to them and so they're not scared around me...They feel comfortable around me and they probably know that I'm not going to do anything...

I  You said scared...Because you mentioned that before with the boys as well...You said they were frightened...Can you speak to that...What would they be frightened of?

J  Well I know the guys might be frightened of a gay guy coming up to them and hugging them or kissing them...

I  And how does that make you feel?

J  It's totally untrue...You're not going to do that...they're totally gone...

Later the conversation returned to stereotypes.
Before when you were talking about stereotypes...you were saying that you didn't know any other gay kids in the school but you would guess (based on the way a person walked or talked)

You can just tell...

Do you reckon that...is a good thing or...?

Well it probably makes you feel a bit better...Knowing that if you do look at someone and you can just tell if they are gay...It's fine

Maybe you don't feel as isolated...How does it impact on you though? Does it have an impact on you?

Ummmm...Most of the time I can gather attention from it from other girls and stuff...Like if I'm on the street and I say: 'That guys gay', and they say, 'How do you know?'

The conversation then turned to attention:

So...Is attention an important thing?

Yeah...Sometimes...

Can you speak to that?

Well I think the attention sometimes is to get people to laugh at you and stuff...

Laughing?

Yeah...When you start doing the hand movements to 'I will Survive' people just laugh at you anyway...

It's not a negative experience...It doesn't sound like it is...?

No sometimes I really like doing it...

And why? What do you think you get from that?

Ummmm...Just people that look at you turn their head in shame...and you just have to laugh at them...So if they laugh at you, you just laugh back...

So you are using humour...aren't you...In a way...And when people turn their head in shame what do they do after they've dome that?

Ummmm...They just don't look back...Yeah...
I How do you feel in relation to them though?

J Usually when I do it I don't really care what they think...I just do it...

I So it's quite a powerful thing

J Yeah...

I And it's attention...You're seen...

J The more the better...(later)...People just sometimes look at you like right up and down just look at you really scarily...Probably because they've never seen it before...Sometimes I just get up on the table and just do hand movements and stuff...

Later the conversation turned to what might be done to improve the school experiences of students:

J Probably offer more gay and lesbian topics and staff...

I In subjects?

J Or in a subject that was related like 'Health and Human Relations'...Just like one day just talk about Homosexuality...Yeah...

I And within a subject like that...What would you be interested in hearing?

J Ummm...Probably that gay people are just like anybody...Like anybody else...and that gays don't spread AIDS and stuff...And the stupid things they say...

James then spoke about how he ‘came out’ to his parents. During this part of the conversation he again spoke about their response in terms of them already suspecting that he was gay:

J Yeah...I think I'm nearly ‘out’ to everyone...I find it very easy because I think that most of my family already know...Or think that I'm gay so all I have to do now is confirm it...I doubt I will anyway...

I Them knowing...What would that be based on?

J I don't know? After I ‘came out’ to my parents I asked my mum: 'How did you know?'...Because when I ‘came out’ they said it's about time you ‘came out’ to us...
I: And how old were you when you did that?

J: Just turned 15...

I: So that's like 4 months ago

J: 6 months...And they said they already know a year before...

I: What made you ‘come out’ to them?

J: What made me ‘come out’ to them is that I had a group at (service provider)...I went up to ask dad: 'How long will it take me to get to (suburb) from (suburb)?' and he said: 'What's this group about?'... and I said: 'It's a Young and Gay Group...Dad I'm gay!'...So then he came out with it's about time you told us...

I: So what did they do then?...Did they drive you to the group or...?

J: Yeah...

I: So they drove you over there...

J: Dad did

I: And how have they reacted? They sound pretty good

J: Well I'm surprised...Mum's fine she's becoming like a fag hag...But dad hasn't said anything at all about the gay thing at all...

I: He's just been very quiet about it?...He's not stopping you from going to the group (though) is he...

J: No...

The conversation then returned to improvements:

I: Any other things apart from curriculum that might be (useful)?

J: Maybe just a gay group or something at school...But

I: There are problems with gay groups at school...How is it a problem?

J: Yeah...Then other people would assume that you're going along to the group you must be gay...

I: So how could they be overcome?
J: Just have a teacher... Who does gay stuff...

I: A designated teacher... Maybe not a gay and lesbian officer but someone like the Equal Opportunity Officer...

J: Yeah

I: And how would people find out about that?

J: Well you could just put it up on the noticeboard or something... If it was just a normal teacher then there wouldn't be problems and stuff...

The conversation then turned to support groups outside of the school. James spoke about the group that he had attended:

I: How helpful has that group been?

J: It's been great... Meeting other gay people... Yeah... Getting to know other gay people as well not being surrounded by straight people as well it's totally different...

I: And it's just freer...

J: You can act how you want to act and be who you want to be and they don't care...

I: So it's not an issue... If that group was run in the school that you attend...

J: I'd probably still go anyway... 'Cause since I'm out I don't care what people say at the moment... So it's just fine with me... Mmmm

I: So... Some sort of service beyond the school or within the school... A contact person...

J: Maybe phone numbers for gay kids... Gay teenagers

I: On a poster or something

J: Because there's nothing at my school at all...

I: And that's really cheap to do that sort of thing...

J: It's easy... And I know they've got books about gay stuff... But it's OK... Yeah... I've looked at them it's just they look really crap anyway... So... I'm not really bothered taking them out...

I: But is it good that they're there?
J  Yeah...

I  Just to round off...If you were going to make a general statement about how your school experience has been so far as a gay or lesbian person...

J  Well I really like being gay at school if I wasn't I'd probably be even more depressed with myself so it's been really good for me I think and having the support of that one teacher is very helpful...
Conversations
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Kelvin

Michael Crowhurst
Kelvin

Kelvin is 15, and is 'Australian' (Anglo-Celtic). In relation to class he describes himself and his family as 'average'. He doesn't follow any religion. He is in Year 9 at an outer suburban, 7-12, co-educational State school with an enrolment of 1,200 students. Kelvin identifies as gay and the interview was conducted in the family home.

The interview started with a conversation about subject content:

I In any of the subjects (that you do) is there any gay or lesbian content or any mention of gay or lesbian experience?

K No none at all...

I So can you remember any instance at all either in your primary school or your secondary school where gay and lesbian content...?

K No...Oh...Just recently we had this Student Welfare Program or something

I And what was that all about?

K They came to the school and they discussed anger management and stuff like that and they had one thing in relation to gays and lesbians and it was just: 'Can you tell a gay or lesbian just by looking at them?' and everyone thought 'Yes'...

I The whole class (laugh)?

K Yes (laugh) and that's all...That's it...

I The people who said that you could recognise a gay or lesbian person by just looking at them I mean what sort of things were they saying there did they specify what they meant by that?

K No they just said it...

I So there wasn't a lot of discussion about it?

K No

I That was this year?

K Yeah

I How long was the gay and lesbian part of that?
K Ummm...About 5 seconds

I Just 5 seconds...So that would be the only mention of gay and lesbian people that you've heard of in subject content?

K Yeah

I Well how do you feel about that?

K Ummmm...Depressed...Just alone, annoyed, I don't know really...

I Annoyed about?

K Just because they're not doing anything about it there is just nothing there's no education about it at school there's just nothing...I mean how are straight people supposed to know what it's about...

I Then where do you think in subjects that you have done in the past that there should have been gay and lesbian content and there wasn't?

K Ummm...I suppose in Social or...Perhaps in English I don't know...There was a Sex-Ed I did that in year 7 but there wasn't anything to do with sexuality...

I So what was it do with...Sex-Ed if it wasn't to do with sexuality...What did they actually do in there?

K Ummm...Well I suppose it was straight sex...

The conversation then considered how Kelvin had felt listening to such conversations and whether in Year 7 he was listening to them as a gay student:

I When you were listening to that in Year 7 were you listening to that as a gay young person?...When did you decide that you were going to call yourself gay?

K I guess I knew at the start of High School...

I Year 7?

K Yeah

I What was that based on?

K Ummm...It's just something that I knew...I knew about gay people and beforehand and I just knew that I was one of them in Year 7
I So where did you get your information? How did you know about that? How did you know what that meant?”...Did you think you were like anyone else?

K Ummmm...For a while I did think that I was the only one out there...But you mainly just find out all the information from the TV or from kids at school...

I Where did you pick up information about gayness from TV?

K Just shows...There was some comedy show...

I When you thought about calling yourself gay how did you feel about that? Was that something that you were happy to take on as a label?

K Ummm...I don't know like at first you say to yourself: ‘No you're not you're really straight’ and all this but like now I'm proud to be...Yeah I just kept telling myself that I was straight but I really knew that I wasn't

I And how long did that go for?

K Ummm...Probably six months maybe...I realised that I was...

I Was that a comfortable or an uncomfortable time?

K Ummm...A bit of both

I So you would have called yourself gay from year 7 onwards...Did this just happen out of the blue in year 7?

K No...Yeah but I've always liked guys my whole life but I know I sort of woke up to myself in year 7 and realised that I was...

I You felt different in Primary School?

K Yeah

The conversation then turned to Kelvin's thoughts about the Sex-Ed classes that he had taken in Year 7:

I Now in year 7 in that Sex-Ed class as someone who saw himself as gay...You were aware that there was heterosexual content in the Sex-Ed classes that you were doing but no gay material?

K Yeah

I How did that make you feel?
K  Alone...I just felt like I was the only one there...'Cause they didn't discuss anything about it and then everyone was discussing Heterosexuality

I  So you didn’t feel angry about that?

K  I was more annoyed

I  And did you feel very strong at that time?

K  No not really...I think that I was just confused

I  If there had been gay content in the Sex-Ed course do you think that it would have been better or worse?

K  I don't know because it would depend how people would react to it

I  What do you mean by that?

K  Like if they said stuff about gays at our school then the class would go: 'Urrgghh Faggot'...So I think that they need to do work in primary school to teach them that gay people aren't bad before they grow up with it

Later in the interview I asked Kelvin if there were any other gay or lesbian students at his school:

K  Ummm...I've got a few suspicions about one or two and my friend she told me that she knows someone that she thinks is Bi...I'm friends with her sister and she said so and so's sister is

I  So it's the sister of a friend?

K  She's older...She's in Year 11, I think

The conversation then shifted to the gay peer support group that Kelvin was a member of:

K  Ummm...I've made some really good friends from there I've probably got about 5 really good friends from there

I  Do you see them on the weekends?

K  Yeah

I  Do you have phone numbers and things?

K  Yeah
I  Do you ring them up?
K  Yeah
I  Are their parents ok? Do you have to be (secretive) when you ring them?...
K  Well all of my friends either live alone or live without their parents or they're 'out' to their parents so I don't need to worry
I  Are (they) the same age as you?
K  Ummmm...I'm the youngest
I  How old...?
K  Ummmm...The oldest is 23
I  The person who would be the closest to you in age group how old would he be?
K  17
I  Right...So you'd be the only 14 year old there?
K  15
I  There are no other 15 year olds there?
K  There are a few 14 year olds there but we don't hang around together...

I then asked Kelvin to talk about what he thought were the most significant issues for young gay people in schools. He said that 'not having anyone to talk to' and 'the pressure to act straight' were 2 of the most pressing issues for him. We started talking about 'not having anyone to talk to' and the conversation meandered its way through many issues eventually returning to the idea of 'having to act straight':

K  Ummmm...Not being able to talk to anyone about it...Having to act straight...'Coming Out'...Not being able to say anything about guys...
I  Not being able to talk to anyone...?
K  That's probably not the biggest one the biggest one is probably just having to act straight...
I We'll talk about 'acting straight' in a minute but the...Where you can talk to other people...The youth group...Is that a better place to be than a place where you can't talk to people?

K Yeah...I can talk to people at school there are only like a few people that know but usually all people that don't know hang around so I can't usually talk...

I So you can talk to people at school?

K I've told 5 girls and 1 guy

I When?

K A couple of months ago...Yeah all from my year group...

I Did you talk to anyone before hand (about telling peers)?...

K Yeah Mum and stuff

I And what did they say?

K Just make sure you know them well enough so that you know that you can trust them...

I Was that an easy thing to do or a difficult thing to do?

K It wasn't really that easy at first but in the end I decided that I just had to tell somebody...Like at school I told the nicest person first...We went of to an area of the school and I was just talking to her and I was telling her that I had something to tell her and that I thought that she wouldn't like me anymore if I told her and she just said: 'No I wouldn't' and then I told her and she said: 'I don't care so what'...

I Is that (losing a friend) something that you'd be scared of generally?

K Ummmmm...I don't think that I'd tell anyone else at school...

I Why?

K Ummm...'Cause I don't think that there's anyone else that I can really trust to keep it a secret...

I And have the people that you have told kept it a secret?

K Yeah
I  Do you think that things have changed at school since you have told them?

K  Mmmm

I  In what way?

K  Ummm...Well at times in the group it is just us (the people that Kelvin has told) and I can talk to them about things but like I don't always have that chance 'cause others come along...

I  What was it like the day after you told these people and what made you want to tell these people because you could have decided not to?

K  I just felt that I needed one person to talk to at school and I knew that I would sometimes have the chance if they accepted it (difficult to hear)

The conversation then moved on to consider how Kelvin ‘came out’ to his parents:

I  So you needed one person to tell...You said before that you asked your mum before you told these people. When did you tell your mum that you were gay?

K  I didn't they just sort of found out

I  How did they find out if you didn't tell them?

K  Ummmm...My first boyfriend I met over the Internet and I went out one day to visit him and I didn't get home 'till really late...'Cause I told them that I was off with some other friends and they rang them up and of course they had no idea what they were talking about and ummmm I got home and they asked me who I was really with...

I  So you met a boyfriend through the Internet?

K  Mmmmm

I  How ?

K  A chat program

I  And then you arranged to meet this person

K  Yeah

I  Did the person know how old you were?

K  Mmmmm
I So was this person the same age or was he older?

K Oh he was younger

I And so what was it like meeting him because this is the first person that you've ever met who is gay?...

K No I met this other guy, just a friend through the Internet and he was 19 and that was the first time I had met a gay person...

I And they have both been positive experiences

K Yeah

I How old were you when all of this was happening?

K Fourteen

I And so what was that day like...Meeting someone else...I'm interested in the guy your own age here...What was that day like? What did you chat about? Was that a good feeling?

K Yeah

I Did you like each other?

K Yeah

I Was it comfortable?

K Yeah...I felt more comfortable about being around him than I did about being around straight people...

I Was his experience the same as yours?

K Yeah...Except that he was ‘out’ at school...

I Did that encourage you to ‘come out’ to people at school?...

K No...Because he was ‘out’ at school it didn't influence me to ‘come out’ at school

I So was that a bit of a turning point meeting him?

K Mmmm
And are you still in contact with him now?

Yeah

The conversation then moved to 'acting straight':

The second thing that you said was a problem in being gay was having to ‘act straight’...But what does that mean?

Like acting or something macho...like you're out there to impress someone...acting big and tough

So what sort of things do you do to act straight?

Ummmm...Oh even the little things like I don't cross my legs at school or anything like that

You mean like I'm sitting?

Yeah...Ummmm...At times you have to sort of talk differently

How would you talk differently?...

And walk differently

And walk differently if you were straight?

Well like I've had people say to me like you walk so ‘femininely’ and stuff like this...And I've just sort of thought I can't give a stuff anymore but sometimes you have to...You can't really speak like ‘femininely’...like ‘queeny’...

And what's ‘femininely’ or ‘queeny’?'

Like things that straight people say like 'mate' or 'bloody' or 'gooday' or stuff like that

So is there a gay talk?

Like when straight people think of a gay voice they think of like 'Oh Darling' and stuff like that but everyone's not like that...I think gay talk is sort of like just normal straight ‘feminine’ talk

What does that mean?

Like you don't like too much hear females saying 'Gooday Mate' and stuff like that at school...Just...I don't know it's just different
I So it's more about what you say not the tone of how you say it?

K Sometimes you have to make it a deeper voice

I Deeper...Why?

K Because it's more manly or sort of

I Straight boys...Do you think that they 'put on' that deep voice that there is a bit of performance there?

K Yeah I reckon there's a bit of that...I think it's half and half really...Half performance and half just normal

I And so do you think that you can pass as straight with most young people?

K Ummm...yes with some...Sort of it's not confirmed to them or anything

I In relation to all of this that we've been talking about...What do you change about yourself? What don't you change about yourself? Do you change anything about yourself?

K It just depends on the situation...Well sometimes I change my voice...Sometimes you have to change the way that you walk and stuff and not just the tone of your voice but the way that you talk...

I And what is motivating you to do that? Why do you want to do that?

K Ummm...I don't really like it but I just know that I have to because if they find out about me then ummmm what am I going to do I'll have to leave school probably

I So you'd be scared or fearful of the reaction of other people at your school? What would you be fearful of there?

K Ummm...Probably...I know I'd get bashed...

I So physical violence?

K Yeah...Verbal doesn't worry me but I know I'd definitely get bashed up

I How do you know that you'd definitely get bashed?

K Well you just hear the straight guys say: 'Let's go bash him' or and
I Is this in relation to you?

K No but I heard one guy say to this other guy that: ‘There's this guy in Year 7 and he's a real faggot let's go bash him’...Stuff like that

I And would that be widespread or a small group?

K Probably widespread I'd say

I Is it worse in some Years than others?

K Yes

I Which Year levels?

K It's more talked about in Year 9

Kelvin has told the school principal that he is gay:

K Well the Principal knows and he said that if anyone harms me or harasses me in any way that he'll get straight onto them so...No other teachers know and no other teachers need to

I Are you happy that no other teachers know?

K Actually I'd quite like it if they did know...So that when they hear homophobic comments in class they could tell everybody to shut up 'cause they don't usually, it's ok to say ‘fuck’, sorry it's not ok to say ‘fuck’ but it's ok to say ‘faggot’...

I And is that all the time? That people would call out faggot and that it wouldn't be picked up by teachers?

K Yeah yeah...Usually it's just stop shouting across the room and it's not picked up...

I You would think that if the principal shared that information (that you were gay) with other people (teachers) that classroom experience would be better because you'd have teachers telling people not to say those kinds of things?

K Yeah probably...It wouldn't make it any harder...

I That's a good point...It mightn't make it any easier but it might put a brake on things...Those guys that you spoke about before who said: 'There's a faggot in Year 7 lets get him'...From what you were saying it sounded like that might be fairly common, that it was ok to do that sort of thing...?
A lot of the time they say it but they don't really mean it, they don't really mean to know what they are saying, like they say: 'There goes a faggot' but they don't actually mean (that) whereas other times they do.

The difference between a statement and an accusation?

A lot of the time it's just like someone will say he's probably gay and the whole class will laugh and the teacher will too, we were watching a video and I can remember that happened but ummmmm...

And how did you feel when that happened?

Ummmm I was pretty ticked off with the teacher for not doing anything about it... Do you get angry about that or upset about it or?

Ummm...Most of the time you just try to block it out...like in my case it's better to ignore it than to be stirred up by it.

The conversation then turned to not being able to talk to others:

The other thing that you have mentioned in terms of being gay and peers was not being able to talk about guys...What…?

I suppose like sometimes I do around the girls like join in with them and stuff.

So this would be guys who were in magazines, or guys who were pop stars, or guys who were at school or…?

All of those.

So you would feel comfortable enough to say: 'I think he's cute'?

Yeah one of them I'm probably closer to than any of the others but she's always saying to me 'He could be gay do you think he is?' and stuff like that...

People at school?

People at school

And you said before that you think that there are...

Oh yeah...There has to be just I just wish I knew who they were...Ummmm...
I And how do you feel when young straight guys that you are at school with talk about young women?

K I suppose it is annoying how they think that gay people are like sex freaks or that because it's the same as the things that they say about the girls it's unbelievable

I In what sense is it unbelievable?

K Like I may say: 'He's cute' but they'll say something like 'She's got a nice set' or something like that and like we get the blame...I don't really I don't care but I think that it's just that if we said something like that then they'd just go uhhhhh...It's ok for them but it's not ok for us

At one point I asked Kelvin whether he thought there might be any advantages in being straight rather than gay:

K Ummmm...They've got nothing to hide

I Nothing?

K Yeah they can act themselves and be accepted in society

I Do you think that would be true for all of them?

K Ummm...What do you mean?

I For all straight guys...

K Ahhhhh...Unless it's like a straight guy and he's really 'feminine'

I What pressures does hiding put on you?

K Ummmm...Like you can't grow your fingernails long which I've done, you can't shave your legs, which I've done...Ummmm...Stuff like that, stuff that you want to do and you can't do it...Even little things like shape your eyebrows I mean people notice and they hit out at you and stuff like that...Because they just think you're a faggot

I So...Hiding doesn't mean that you are hiding behind what you are or what you look like, hiding means that you can't do with your body what you want to do with it?

K Yeah
I So in terms of putting things onto your body and plucking eyebrows and growing nails and all of that, you want to do all of that?

K Yep

I Do you think that there is a connection between gayness and wanting to do that?

K I suppose that it's different for every gay guy...

I But for you it's important and you would feel like having to hide means that you can't dress the way that you want to dress...

K But I do...Outside school

I How would you dress differently outside school?

K I'm more careful in places close to the school but if I'm near the city then I wear whatever I want

I And do you feel comfortable?

K Yeah...But you still get like stares from people in the city but I don't care

I You don't care...

K I don't know them and if they can't handle it then that's their problem

Kelvin then spoke about an incident in class where a teacher stopped an incident of harassment. A student responds in a manner that suggests that it is acceptable to verbally harass another if there is a strong belief that that person is gay:

K There is one teacher that I have and I'm sure that she is a lesbian and when some rough guys in the class call out 'fag' or whatever she says: ‘Don't say that’, if more teachers were like her it would be good...

I Was that a good moment or not?

K Yeah that was good

I And how did they respond?

K Oohh they just took the mickey out of her the way she talks and stuff

I So she then became ‘a lesbian’, she got a little trouble for doing that?

K Oh they did before that
I Was that based on anything or?

K Ummmm

I I suppose what I'm asking is do they give her a hard time because they think that she is a dyke?

K No it's just her voice but they say she is anyway and when she told them to stop it one guy was saying: ‘Yeah but it's true’...When he was calling the other guy faggot and he said: ‘But it's true anyway’

I asked Kelvin whether he would categorize his school experience as positive or negative and what he might do to improve schools for gay and lesbian students:

K Ummmm...Probably negative...And it's half positive too because I've made some good friends

I If you were going to improve that what would you do?

K Ummmmm...They need to find a way to stop the bullying between students and...Ummm...I think that they need to start in Primary Schools so that they find out that it's natural...They could get or hire ummm gay teachers and bring them into the school...(and) an actual subject, a sexuality subject

I Where people could talk about all sorts of issues, maybe not just lesbian and gay issues but about relationships or difference

K Yeah
Conversations
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Louise

Michael Crowhurst
Louise

Louise is 18, in Year 12, and attends a Catholic, 7-12, co-educational secondary college in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. The school has an enrolment of 1,500. Louise describes her class as 'average'. Louise doesn't describe herself as religious. She 'came out' to her parents 4 months before the interview. She has a gay brother who is 2 years older than her, 2 younger sisters, and she identifies as lesbian. The interview took place in the family home.

I started the interview by asking Louise if she could speak about subject content:

L Well...It's (gay and lesbian perspectives) not really spoken about in any classes or anything...Ummmm...Actually this year in English we did a book and there was a lesbian in it but I haven't actually read the book...So I haven't come up to that part yet so I think it was just mentioned that she was a lesbian...you didn't find out through anything that she did but when the class found out when the teacher pointed it out that she was a lesbian everyone was like: 'Oh gross' uh uh uh but ummm the teacher was like: ‘Come on what's your problem” because there was like one girl in class who just kept on and on about ‘she's a lesbian’ and the teacher was like: ‘Get over it there are lesbians in society move on’ kind of thing...So the teacher was good but

I Was the teacher a woman?

L Yeah...And she was fairly young so...

I And what was the book?

L 'The Handmaids Tale'...I mean the books weird and I haven't finished it and I'm not fully understanding it so I think because she's looking back on her life or something and she's just telling a story about so and so character she was a lesbian or something it didn't go into any kind of details about how she was a lesbian...

I So it is not the main character in the book that is a lesbian?

L No no

I The main character has contact with another character that is a lesbian?

L Yeah

I So when that was spoken about in class there was a reaction but the teacher actually shut them up...
Alright... Are other times where there should have been lesbians spoken about in class but there weren't...?

I guess in Year 7 to Year 9 you have like Sex Ed in school and gay couples are never spoken about I don't recall ever being told that there was such a thing but if like someone mentioned it in the class the teacher would ignore it or something and people would just...

The conversation then moved on to consider when Louise would have first thought that she might be lesbian:

So that brings me to another point, in Year 7, 8 and 9 you were aware that there wasn't any gay or lesbian content so when would you have chosen the label lesbian to define yourself?

Probably Year 8... But I wasn't really comfortable with it but I knew...

What was that knowledge based on?

Probably my feelings towards other girls but (I) just kind of played them down... I knew they were there... I guess I just didn't want anyone else to know... To be different and like being normal was more important in the lower levels when you were a bit younger

You wanted to be 'normal'?... Can you speak to being 'normal' as a year 8 person?

Oh you just go to parties and you'd just have all the friends and you'd all like the same music and you're if just say you didn't like a band but everyone else did you'd be picked on...

So music plays into this?

Oh yeah I mean knowing all the popular bands and stuff... Oh yeah... Like all the girls would like E17 or something back then 'cause the guys were hot or something...

And so when the people spoke about bands that they liked and all... What would the conversation revolve around? The guys in the band?

Oh yeah... I'll just talk about E17... Oh that Brian and Tony were like the lead singers and they were really hot and so like I mean I liked them to start with I liked some of their music but and like I put the posters up too but I never really liked them like everybody else did... They were all drooling over them I was
actually listening to the music...at one stage because one of my friends like really really liked them and like we ended up going to the concert and stuff and she was like passing out...It's really quite pathetic

I  It sounds like there was a focus on bands...And that focus maybe provided a space where other things could be talked about at the same time...Has that type of conversation (changed) and how did you feel as a lesbian in those conversations?

L  In Year 8 I'd go along and I'd say ‘yeah he's really hot’ just agree with them but now no he's not he's really ugly without giving it a second thought but just because it's a guy...But ummm It's kind of awkward when they're all talking about a certain guy or flipping through a magazine and yeah...Turn the page

I  And so the female bands...'cause you like female bands and you're a musician...Do you want to talk a little about your music?

L  I just play guitar and I just play along to the music that I listen to...A lot of the I think it's 'Riot Girl' bands like 'Bikini Kill' or 'Teen Dresch' a lot of them are actually lesbian bands or they have a lesbian member...

I  And what is it about the music?

L  Well the music is really good and the lyrics have a lot of meaning

I  Because they're lesbian or…?

L  Yeah some of them have specifically lesbian themes I just like music and the type of music that I listen to now is different...You've got to listen to it...Listen to what they're saying and just it just brings out emotions and I guess some of it is kind of like therapeutic because they're talking about stuff that other bands wouldn't talk about...

I  Now with peers and the conversations that are happening how are they different and how have they changed from Year 8?

L  Laugh...Not really a lot no...'Cause someone will bring a magazine to school and point out the 'hot' guys...Which is basically what they did in Year 8...Ummmm...They'll either be looking through a magazine or talking about a show or but it's usually that they're talking about a picture or looking at it or talking about how good looking he is it just always comes back to their looks…

The conversation then turned to whether Louise was ‘out’ to anyone at school or not:

I  Are you 'out' to other students?...Do you know any other lesbians?
Well I'm only 'out' to one girl at school and that was pretty recently...But apart from that like apparently there are a few bi-sexual people at school but ummm...

I

Apparantly?

L

Oh well they never told me...It's just rumoured

I

What is the basis of the rumours?

L

Oh well one girl I guess she looks a bit 'butch' or something but ...If someone's different...

I

A bit 'butch'?

L

Winter uniform you can wear a skirt or pants and she always wears pants...You know things like that...You know...I remember during mid-year exams one girl had to sit next to this supposed lesbian and she came out of the classroom and said to all of us: 'Oh I had to sit next to so and so and she's such a Dyke', with a lot of disgust in her voice that she had to sit next to her, not even next to because the desk was separated so...

I

There is an idea circulating about ‘butchness’ and what do you think that is to do with?

L

Oh just stereotyping...The ‘short haired bleached dyke’ sort of thing...Just the appearance...

I

Would the response of the young woman who refused to sit next to a woman that she described as ‘butch’ be typical?

L

Oh yeah

I

How many ‘butch’ girls are there and would they encounter that sort of treatment often?

L

There would be a couple...maybe 2

I

Has that ever happened to you?.

L

No yeah...Occasionally

I

What does it mean to be labelled as ‘butch’?

L

Ummm...

I

Is it a comment about sexuality or is it a comment (about gender)?
It's just a hateful thing...I guess it's about sexuality too it's about: ‘Yuk I don't want to associate with you... Because you're different’…

So if someone was accused of being ‘butch’ it wouldn't mean that they were being accused of being a lesbian it would be an accusation of that they weren't being 'properly feminine'?

Mmmmm...Probably both

The conversation continued around a theme of 'butchness'. Later, I asked Louise if she had ever experienced harassment along similar lines:

And people haven't said those kinds of things to you (made comments about being ‘butch’)…?

Ummmm...Well they have because I actually cut my hair really short at one point (Laughing)...Which was kind of a stupid thing to do and I got kind of comments then…

Based around the haircut or the meanings of the haircut?

The meanings...That could have been drawn from the haircut...

And so those comments...Because you've got longer hair now...To what extent did the comments influence you (to grow your hair back)...Because you said that it was a dumb thing to do...

Yeah I kind of regretted doing it...I did it during the Christmas holidays and once school had finished I cut my hair...and then bleached it…

I then went back to school in the February and it was still blonde and I kind of regretted doing it because it was...The next week the second week into school I had it darkened again like back to it's natural colour...Then it wasn't so bad because it wasn't so blonde...

So it didn't stand out as much because it wasn't blonde...So...the way that bodies look and the things that we put on bodies like the clothes and the haircuts and ideas about them being 'properly feminine' (are important in schools)...Do you think that as a lesbian that that has had an effect on the way you are as a person in school?

I don't wear dresses and stuff because other people want me to...I'm not going to let them dictate what I should or should not be wearing...
The conversation then moved to consider rumours and talk in school. Louise suggested a connection between ‘looking out of the ordinary’ and being talked about:

I I'm interested in 'talk'...Can you speak to that perhaps?

L There's talk if there's something out of the normal or in relation to something that is different to what people would usually see...Just any real difference is picked out and talked about...Rumours start and they spread around the school...It doesn't usually take a lot for them to start

I Rumours...

L I mean earlier this year a girl broke up with her boyfriend and then I don't know how it started but it ended up like there was a party...for another school and some of those people knew people from our school and they started spreading it around that she was a lesbian and that she kissed some other girl at our school just because she had broken up with her boyfriend...And she was seen kissing this girl and I know that it wasn't true because she's just like totally homophobic…

I How important is 'The Boyfriend' in terms of confirming straightness do you think?

L Ummmm...I guess a lot it's pretty important I think 'cause in Year 7 and 8 I went out with a couple of boys just...To make people know that I wasn't a lesbian type of thing...

The conversation then returned to speech, and later to the effects that rumours regarding sexuality might have on a person in school:

I So as a lesbian student in school speech is really important...

L Mmmm

I I mean I don't want to put words into your mouth but there's speech that limits people and speech that expands people...So lesbian speech or speech about lesbians would be an attempt to stop people wearing trousers and dying their hair blonde or to keep girls going out with boys...Is that overstating it or?

L No I think that that is pretty true...People don't want to get spoken about in bad ways so they'll keep doing certain things…

I What effect do you think that that might have on straight people?
It's probably the same amount of pressure or whatever you want to call it to be cool to be popular and for everyone to like you you'll keep doing whatever is the correct thing to do or whatever...

Ok then...What is the threat of being spoken about?

They won’t speak nicely about you and everyone will find out whether it's a lie or not…

Whether it's true or not?

Yeah...And if it's a bad thing then I guess you lose all of your friends because people won’t want to associate with you or associate with people that do associate with you…

Right...So...You would say to be identified as a lesbian in school

Would be a bad thing...Laugh

It's a bad thing but it's not a bad thing of itself?

No...At my school it would be a bad thing to be a lesbian...

It wouldn't be a good time to be a lesbian at your school?

No

If it wouldn't be a good time in school...What else would be a consequence?

Well I think that you would lose the friends you have and just get verbally abused walking through the corridors you would have things said to you...I don’t think that there would be a threat of being beaten up I mean maybe if you're a guy…

A guy beating up a lesbian or?

No someone beating up a gay guy is more likely than beating up a lesbian I’d say…

Are you aware of any gay...?

No but I know a guy who is not gay but he's sort of ‘feminine’...Well not all the time but sometimes he can be and people like there are a couple of guys that are really homophobic and they just walk past him in the corridor and say things and I think if he was actually gay or ‘came out’ that they'd have no problem beating him up...If they knew for sure…
They'd 'go' him...And that's different to lesbian experience?...Lesbian experience is based on...?

Just verbal comments and stuff...

And the effects of that would be that you'd feel constrained...

Yeah

Louise mentioned 'the corridor' and the conversation then briefly moved on to discuss 'the corridor':

Our lockers are in the corridor and I don't know who's locker it is but recently within the last two weeks of school someone has written 'fag' on someone's locker and I mean...

If another word was...

It would probably be taken off yeah but they haven't done anything about 'fag'.

Louise then spoke about an essay that she had written that dealt with gay and lesbian issues:

I actually wrote an argumentative essay about legalising gay marriages and she (the teacher) was really helpful without she didn't have any real problems with me writing it or...I'm not sure all the teachers would have been but she was fine...

What sort of signals do you pick up from other teachers that would suggest that they might not be as good?

I've had some male teachers who pick on guys who aren't as tough and pick on guys who aren't tough and...

Alright so...was it good to write something on gay marriages?

Yeah...Like when other students asked me what I was writing and I would tell them they'd kind of look at me funny and like and they'd be like: 'Oh what side are you taking that it can’t be legalised or that it shouldn't be?'...(and I'd go) 'Like no the other side' and they'll go 'Why?'

Did you feel risky doing it?

Yeah a bit…

Yeah it is a risky thing to do...But what made it worth the risk?
I thought it would be easier to write because I don't know it was something that I would want legalised and I couldn't think of anything else to write an essay about that I could put some effort into...

So you felt differently writing that essay...Is that the only piece of work that you have written on gay and lesbian issues?

Yep

And how was that experience different to other work?...Did you get a better mark for example?

Well I haven't got the mark…

It was a CAT?

Yeah

Do you feel that it was a good piece of writing?

Yeah and my teacher was fairly helpful too...

I suppose in terms of writing about issues that are of relevance to you…

It's easier to write about

And why do you think that is?

'Cause if you can make a connection you try harder and you can understand where the argument is coming from.

The conversation then moved on to consider how the school culture might be improved:

Would you describe your school experience as positive or negative as a lesbian student?

No as a negative one…

What is it within your school or about your school that contributes to (this)?

Ummm...Other students...it's just the students…

And are there any values that underlie their homophobia?

I don't know for them it is just ‘gross’...They can't really justify their hatred…
I It's just a gut feeling...So you would call it hatred?

L Yeah

I Well in terms of improvement then...If you had unlimited money and power...

L Laugh

I What would you do?

L Ummm...I guess just at the beginning of high school when you do the Sex Ed in RE to discuss everything not just like the Catholic way or what the Catholic religion teaches is right or wrong...

I A broader approach?

L Yeah they don't want to talk about us but they should because as much as they don't like it, (we're) there...And it's their responsibility to teach (us) but they don't

Louise then spoke about a strategy that she had employed that offered her a sense of being powerful as a lesbian, that might be able to be appropriated by other young people.

L On the last day of school my brother has like the dice necklace and he has one that spells queer and so I wore that one to school and I had my collar open and like people saw it and they didn't talk to me and they just stayed away...

I Well you won't get that reaction for much longer...

L I mean I didn't care what they thought...

I What sort of support would be effective for students? What could schools put in place?

L I don't know...Our guidance counsellor is a nun and I don't think that she would be the best person to go and talk to about this...Cause I'm sure she'd try to guide that person towards God's view I don't know but ummm I'm sure it wouldn't be the most helpful thing...

I No perhaps not you might not be encouraged...

L I guess the only improvement I can think of is not actually having guidance counsellors but when they (teachers) see that people are being harassed to step in and do something (because) I don't think that they really do that...
I  So you would like to see action on the part of teachers when people are harassed...?

L  Oh just like seeing ‘fag’ on the lockers...If it were anything else they would have got rid of it...
Conversations

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Max

Michael Crowhurst
Max

Max is 16 and female. She describes herself as ‘not religious’ and identifies as lesbian. She attends a co-educational, 7-12, State school in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne that she describes as very upper middle class and very conservative. Her mother's side of the family is from Sri Lanka and apart from that she describes her background as including ‘a bit of everything’ - Italian, Dutch and Welsh. She is in year 11.

Max started the interview by talking about her sexuality:

M It's pretty much all girls, there's a couple of guys that I will find attractive and I'll fall for quite badly but it's just a little bit...

I So there's a little bit of attraction to guys there but more around young women?

M Yeah

I But you are happy with the label lesbian?

M Yeah

I (Later)...You were saying that it's like there are some guys that you are attracted to but more girls...Is it a constant part of yourself that is attracted to guys or not?

M No not really...I'm attracted to girls but occasionally I just notice guys

I Do you want to expand on that?

M No no ummm

The conversation then considered subject content:

I Do any of the subjects that you have studied have lesbian and gay content?

M Ummm...The school has a Sex-Ed program over years 7, 8 and 9...They tell you about sex and what goes on and contraception, like here's this and this and this but they don't actually go into gays and lesbians much they just sort of brush over it...You know they said a few little sentences maybe that I picked up on because I'd thought about it, but other than that it's not really brought up at all...

I So you had Sex-Ed and there was not a lot of gay and lesbian content in that?

M No...And I also did a Health class...Which goes into drugs and like they do sexuality in that which is like it's an optional subject and you can choose
between a couple of classes and they did cover it a lot in that...It was a female class I mean there was just one guy in there and he was gay and so they'd have discussions about him...I mean he became the central focus because he was 'out' and he probably got a lot of abuse for it and that but it actually meant that these people discussed it...

I I'd like to come back to that gay guy...Not that I want to do an interview with a young woman focusing on a young man but it is interesting...Ok so there is a Health class and there is coverage of lesbian and gay issues because that gay guy is in there...

M Yeah they'd normally just brush over it...The class would normally be all girls and they just wouldn't talk about it but because he was there (it) meant that the subject was bought up in detail that like there are gays and lesbians out there and like these people were exposed to it because they're not really exposed to it at all...Only through peers and stuff which means that they are all closed minded and stuff...And the class by the end of the year were very open minded about it because they had to stop and think about it...

I By the end of the year

M Initially they were like: 'No, how can you' and like they were very closed minded

Later in the interview the conversation turned to the role that rumour, naming and questioning had played in encouraging the young gay student to ‘come out’:

I I'm interested in that gay guy in the class as far as curriculum goes...Have you ever seen another person ‘come out’ in class?

M Ummmm...no...

I You're not ‘out’ in school?

M Ummmm...Sort of people just clue in and I've had that since primary school

I But you haven't made a statement?

M No...He'd already been ‘out’ for about a year before that and you'd hear people (talking about him) you'd hear rumours and stuff...It's when people actually went up to him and asked him: 'Are you?’ that he actually said: 'Yeah I am'...People just I don't know, they form opinions already

I Yeah

M You know based on your behaviour...(later)...They sort of heard rumours and stuff but when they actually asked him and stuff they said: ‘Oh look’...and he was like:
‘Yeah’ and they like asked questions...They were actually curious and they don't get exposed to anything like that in schools...Where they can actually ask about it and this meant that they were actually getting answers to questions...

I So when he ‘came out’ in class there was tension around the fact that he was gay...And that lead to questions?

M Yeah and there was like a lot of abuse like: ‘Oh how could you' and ‘Uhhhhh' and that I imagine would have affected him quite badly...

I I'm interested too in the effect that had on you...How did you feel when he ‘came out' and when all of this was happening?

M It was sort of like: ‘Ok they're going to be negative about it’...It was very threatening...

I And how did you feel when that was happening?

M I can't remember really...I sort of removed myself from the conversation...I listened to them but I didn't join in...I kept myself distant I was very I didn't particularly want to ‘come out’ at that stage...

Later Max compared the experience of being asked questions in class to being asked questions outside of class:

M In class you’ve got a teacher there who will control them and who will make sure that they don't say anything really nasty about it...They'll actually control themselves and ask sensible questions, whereas if you're out in the corridor it's like 'Yeah' shouted at you and it's much more demeaning because it's sort of an easier environment to harass you and stuff…

The conversation then turned to consider instances where lesbian and gay content should have been mentioned in class when they weren’t. I asked Max how she felt about this and I was particularly interested to find out whether she felt better when there was such content or not:

I What about in other classes? Can you think of any other instances where gay and lesbian content was covered, or where it should have been covered?

M No not really...There's a little bit in English and stuff but it's again brushed over very lightly, or just mentioned in passing...

I Like if it comes up…

M Yeah they almost change the subject when it does
I And how do you feel when it does come up in those other classes?...When it does come up outside of Health classes?

M Ummmm...I don't know...I wouldn't participate in the discussion when it comes up because it's just easier...

I So you wouldn't participate in the discussion...But do you think that it's better that it's mentioned or worse?...

M It doesn't really make a difference I don't think...Like it's not mentioned enough, for it to...it should be…

The conversation then returned to the gay guy that had been in the Health class with Max. I was interested to see from her perspective whether his school experience had improved or worsened as a result of him being ‘out’ and as a result of the class becoming more aware of the issues. Max speaks about observing and enduring harassment:

I A mention doesn't really change that much...And that is what I'm interested in as far as that gay guy in the class...Because you said that by the end of the year that things had changed, that things were different as far as attitudes towards gayness were concerned...Could you speak about that?

M They were more open minded, and they sort of knew a bit about it and they sort of accepted him more...

I And did his experiences as a result of that change outside of the classroom?

M Ummm...A bit but again these people would go and talk and back at school there are some particularly abusive guys and...there's him and this other guy who is not sure whether or not he is gay or not and he's got like long hair and he's friends with all of these gay guys and he gets abused too I mean they had to have their lockers moved so that people wouldn't hit them and stuff…

I Because their lockers were in isolated areas?

M They were in the corridor and the lockers are there and just walking through the corridor they get pushed into the lockers...and like last year I'd be going to my locker and this group of guys they're sort of the loud people they'd come storming through and they'd go 'Hey Max ...Are you gay?' and I'd go 'I don't particularly want to tell you in the corridor' and it is, it is very threatening and...

I And what was your response to that? What was your strategy?

M I chose to ignore them and get out of there…

I And you were saying that you had seen people pushed into lockers and the like…
Max then moved on to discuss an experience of harassment:

Yeah...Well with me I was in the scouts and there was a guy there who was in the year above and he would yell abuse like 'Hey you've got balls' and like it was really demeaning you’re just walking along and someone just yells things like that at you...Yeah they'd call me ‘Boy’

And so the term of abuse always circled around some idea that you were not ‘feminine’?

Yeah for me...

Well how do you feel about that? Do you feel that you are 'feminine' or...?

Yeaaaah…

Yeah whatever that means...

Yeah

How do you feel about the idea of ‘butchness’...When you get people saying 'You're butch'?

I have grown up rather ‘boyishly’ myself. Like in Psychology we had a test, ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ play in children, and this is like when they're four or five and ticking it off and my friend next to me he got like four masculine and I got like seventeen or something but that's always been there I was always a tomboy and stuff…

So in primary school who would you hang around with the…?

Hang around with the guys...I never hung around with the girls they were particularly bitchy in primary school, really bitchy…

Later the conversation returned to earlier comments that 'Max had balls':

The comments about ‘balls’ and the like...When did you start feeling pressure about that?
M Not until I got to high school really...When I started scouts it was with the cross
over which was Year 5 to Year 8 and I got exposed to it (prohibitions against
gender non-compliance) even before I got to High School...In High School they
expect girls to act a certain way and guys to act a certain way more...

I What would you be aware of in your own behaviour that has caused comment?

M I don’t know...ummmmm...School’s got clothes, a uniform and I always wear the
pants if I can, that (causes comment), ‘Oh she always wears the pants...She's got
short hair...She must be gay’...And I don't really understand that and like that's
what they’ve done quite a few times and like lots of people will actually say
that...And friends from outside school will say that that's what they’ve heard about
me from people from inside the school, you know about the pants and hair, and
that therefore I'm gay, and I'm like: ‘Ok’

I And you have never told another person in school that you are gay?

M Yes I have there's other gay and bi people at school…

I Yeah

M And I am friends with a lot of them...I only tell people that I am comfortable
telling

I Have you ever censored the way that you look through?

M Not really because of peers sometimes with the attitudes in school I have to...Like
you can't have purple hair in school...So I've had to change that and like free
dress days I'll wear I don't know I'll wear 'normaller' clothes than I would if I was
going out

I And before when you were talking about people talking about short hair and
trousers and the like outside of the school are you aware of that inside the
school?

M No I don't generally hear it...I mean I know that it goes around...

I How do you know that it goes around?

M You'll walk up and someone will stop talking

The conversation then moved onto a discussion of Max's ‘coming out’:

I When did you ‘come out’ to yourself as lesbian?

M Year 7 or 8
I'm just assuming at that stage that you didn't know any other lesbian or gay young people…?

I didn't know about it until year 7 or year 8...I wasn't exposed to it at all…

What were your feelings about that?

Well with that I was exposed to it in the sense that I knew that it was wrong...Well not directly but vaguely...I don't know I'd actually try to present myself as straight and say I like this guy or that guy because that was what was expected of me and that was depressing…

Now what did that ‘presenting yourself as straight’ entail?

Ummmm...I don't know...Just in discussions I'd say: ‘He's cute’ or they'd just sort of not register anything else they'd just say this is me or so yeah…

So they would talk about guys who were at school or?

Yeah guys who were at school or in magazines

There was an informal network of students who identified as queer at Max’s school. I was interested to find out from Max how school was different as a result of that network. Her answer convinced me of the importance of social support groups in schools:

Now how is school different as a result of that network? Do you think that having that network changes your experience of school?

It's more comfortable...I mean you've got somewhere to go

Because school doesn't actually change in a way does it…

No

You still have kids pushing people into lockers and calling out things…

But you've sort of got somewhere else to deal with it and at the same time you have got support...And it's not all on you it's spread...It's more sort of general not direct

And you have an escape from it

Yeah
I Whereas when you were in year 8 and coming to the idea that you might be a lesbian...At that time were you aware of homophobia in the school?

M Yeah

I What was the experience...?

M It felt like it was more directed at you and you'd really take it to heart and it would really hurt and you'd think that there really is something wrong here...It was very demeaning...

I Now does staff know about that network and is it supported by staff?

M Yes...They just think that we are friends but there is E (staff member) and she is good help and support and...

I If people came to her they could talk to her?

M You can talk to her about it and she will if there are problems she will deal with them...She'll take people aside and talk to them and say: ‘Look this is not on’ and she will actually talk to them and find out why (they are being homophobic)...(later)and...Well the school does have a strong anti-bullying policy and they have a system where you can anonymously tell people about things that have happened

I So have you ever used that?

M No...But it's nice knowing that it's there so that if you did have to use it you could

I Now how is that good for a gay or lesbian student?

M Well you don't have to ‘come out’ to use it.

The conversation then shifted briefly to teachers:

I Have you any thoughts about teachers?

M Ummm...For most of them it isn't even an issue like it doesn't make a difference but ummm...Particularly the Art staff are very open minded so if you've got problems you can go to them as well...And there are various groups of teachers around the school...

I So there are points of contact?

M There are also homophobic teachers at school...I've had teachers ignore me when I've tried to talk to them they will just walk past or something.
We then talked about how the school environment might be made better for LGBT students:

I: Well in terms of improvements... What are the things that have happened where you are that have been good and what are the things that you would change?

M: Well there are people that you can talk to, which is good, but I think that this class that they do where they do ‘Drug Ed’ and other things where you learn things that you don't know and that's useful for people... I think that that class should be given to everyone because it's a different atmosphere I mean in Science class you are given a text book and ‘Oh well’ but this class actually has a class discussion, they actually discussed real issues and it was a good way to present issues to do with sexuality and once it's presented it is less sort of taboo.
Conversations
A sexual diversity training kit for schools.

Michael

Michael Crowhurst
Michael

Michael is 17 years old and identifies as gay. He currently attends a co-ed year 7-12 Catholic school and he previously attended a State school for years 7 and 8. The school is in the rural area where he lives. Michael is in Year 12.

Initially in the interview Michael compared his experiences as a student who identified as gay in a State school with his experiences in a Catholic school. He said:

M The public school the students were a lot worse...like they teased you or...

I Yeah...

M And the teachers they sort of went along with the students as well...Like when they were teasing me like in Public school they...you know the teachers didn't sort of worry they sort of went along with it...

I Would they just ignore it or…?

M Yeah they'd ignore it or you'd go up and ask them like for help...and they wouldn't like give it to you...

I When you did go up to them...?

M Like you go up to them and tell them that you've been teased and all that sort of thing but...they didn't worry they sort of shunted you off...um...and said: ‘You'll get over it’...and um...so I sort of went into a shell for 7 and 8 because um...I sort of just attended and I didn't speak to any teachers or students...Of course I got really good marks...but...especially at Public school like I was like suicidal...I felt really terrible about myself...and that was like when I was really coming to terms with my own sexuality...

I So did you tell anyone about that or…?

M Uh...I didn't tell anyone that I was gay of course but I...they could tell anyway they could sense that I was different...and that's when they start teasing and...um...you know...They just gave me a hard time in general like not even talking to me that sort of thing...

I Did you feel different yourself?

M Yeah...Like I'll use an example...like I did the production at school...Yeah...well I believe that there were 2 or 3 gay people in that...but...um if you did that you were sort of different again...so...
I Different in...?

M Well you were sort of like a ‘fairy’ you know that sort of thing...you were 'Girlie'...and then that was another label they gave you so...

Michael covered a lot of ground early on in the interview. We returned to some of the points that he had made to discuss them further. We started by discussing approaching staff:

I In terms of approaching staff...How would you approach them about something like that (bullying)?...

M Well normally I didn't but if you did um...you just had to make an appointment...I mean they were never around when you wanted them...And then when they were they didn't want to talk to you anyway so there was really no point in going up to them...

I What about when you did go up to them?

M Um...They sort of said: ‘You know that you'll get over it...Try and make different friends’...That sort of thing but they didn't like I don't know they didn't offer any help at all really...

M Ignore it...It will go away...Talk to me about the Private school now...

M At my Private school um my Co-ordinator was a man and I think he was really easy to get on with and you know even at the interview before I even went there you could tell that he was more worried about me and that sort of thing...um...and at the Private school there's a lot more people that you can go and see like Student Welfare Officers, even the staff in general you can go up and talk to them, without the fear of them telling everyone else...

I So there was more of a feeling of confidentiality?

M Um yeah...Um compared to Public school the students themselves are (also) a lot different, I don't know they seemed to accept me for who I was rather than you know what I was, they accepted me for who I was, Um...They were more understanding, they could tell that I was different but they sort of accepted me

I And how was that shown?

M They offered to be your friend they were more caring…

I So did you feel less different?
Yeah...I felt as though I was like a student and that I could fit in with everyone else rather than I wasn't just like one person that was so different from everyone else...they sort of accepted me into the school...and they didn't tease me as much as well...I got the occasional you know bit of teasing you know ‘poofter’ whatever...but they didn't say it as much or as frequently as they did at the Public school...

When they did, did you then go to staff?

Yeah...like they didn't do it as often so there wasn't really a...

Wasn't really a need

But like I could have easily gone up to them and talked to them about it much more easy...

What about the feelings of suicide?

I could have...well...At the Public school because I was such an outcast...I mean I didn't fit in and they didn't talk to me I felt really down on myself I mean really depressive...and I did feel like that I wanted to suicide myself actually...I sort of didn't because I knew, I thought that it could get better eventually, that sort of thing...Umm...And my parents didn't know what was going on...Umm I don't know...but, Ummm, I suppose my family were good, I had a good home to go home to, and escape from being such an outcast...Um that's probably how I got out of it...

Because you had a good home background?

Umm...In some instances I'd come home and I'd burst into tears and mum would wonder what was going on and you know I couldn't tell her that I was being teased and then I think she finally knew that you know it was getting to the stage where it was getting very bad so that's when they decided that to shift out of the town.

So you moved?

Yeah we moved out of town 'cause mum and dad they got sick of the town ummm...we shifted, and moved closer to the Private school...It was good shifting...'cause...as well as going to a new school I became like I could accept myself I mean who I was more...um by fitting in and that sort of thing and I felt much better with myself...

We then turned to a discussion of subject content:

Now within those subjects, what about gay and lesbian content?
M Well...In year 11 RE we did cover gay and lesbian...um...I think it was marriage or children or something like that...And um...Everyone did it and they didn't worry they sort of you know agreed with it or disagreed that sort of thing...They weren't biased and like it was around in the media so you could follow things up...um...You could do a folio on like gay or lesbian couples or whatever...Um...for an English Issues folio...

I And what about other subjects?.

M Not really...um...In Literature we did...We did like stories...that type of thing...Um...There's like a lot of books that we did...so...

I Can you give me an example of one?

M Um I've read a book...um it was about a gay couple that met after I think it was about 20 years after being at school...Yeah...And I did that as a book review and that was great...

I So how did you feel doing that?

M Like the students didn't say anything...So

I And what about the teacher?

M They just liked the review...

I How did you feel being able to do that?

M Oh it was like I was confident in doing it and not being yeah...

The conversation then broadened out to consider other aspects of the school curriculum. Michael started talking about sport:

M The school that I go to is very sport oriented and they say when you begin there that you have to do a sport of some sort and like I do debating and that's classified as a sport...But like I fitted in I play tennis...

I So you are good at sport...?

M Yeah...but like I did debating as well as sport

I What is it about sport?...'Cause sport is one thing that comes up (a lot in these interviews)...

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I don't know...Maybe we're a bit more academically minded...We sort of prefer to do debating or something like that...Than play sport...

Do you enjoy the tennis though?

Yeah yeah...a great deal...I don't know...'cause at my school it's like boys play tennis you know girls do but if we go you know play away or whatever it's just with boys...and I think I find it easier to like get along with girls...

At this point in the conversation Michael started to discuss how he was more comfortable mixing with girls rather than boys.

Um...I get along fine with the boys but I don't know it's easier with girls I don't know...

And have you thought why?

Oh...I don't know...I think they...well a lot of my friends are girls of course...I don't know some of them or one in particular came up to me the other day and said: ‘Oh God it's easier to talk to you than anyone else’...I don't know they just feel confident coming up to me and talking that sort of thing...

So it's a two way street...It's not just that you find it easier...?

Yeah yeah they find it easier (too)...

What is it that's less comfortable (with boys)?

Um...Boys want to talk about ‘boys things’...

Which are?

Cars, Sports that sort of thing...Girls talk about just anything...

So it's broader just more interesting conversation?

Yeah Yeah...and boys especially at my age well they're just more immature than girls...and I don't know I think I'm more immature than most boys...More mature sorry...

Why would you say that?

I don't know...Perhaps 'cause mum started working when I was would have been about 12 or 13...And I was more independent than most boys my age...Well in general…
At this point in the conversation Michael started to discuss peers further:

I  Peers...Could you talk more about that?

M  At the Private school...They're accepting of gay people but they sort of say: ‘Well as long as they don't do it near me’ or something like that...I don't know I think where I live as well it's not really out in the country and it's sort of...We talk about it a lot I mean gay people 'cause they don't know that I am...Um one of my friends just ‘came out’ and like told everyone...And the reaction was...I was glad actually that he did because I could see the reaction of everyone else...I mean some people were shocked and ‘it's (that's) disgusting’, and some people said: ‘Ohh they always thought he was you know it's not surprising that's alright’, you know and some people they accepted him, so...um...they sort of say: ‘That as long as he doesn't do it near us’...that sort of thing...

I  So as long as it doesn't impinge on them?

M  Yeah they don't have to really worry as much...

I  And how do you feel about that?

M  Um...I'm not really worried because like they don't say: ‘Well let's go out and bash them all’ or whatever...

I  Does that sort of set up any situations for you or does that put you under any (pressure)?

M  Oh well...I've decide not to tell anyone...

I  Because of that?

M  Especially in a small little country town...Um things...If I told people word might get out...Word does spread fast in a country town...So that's why I've decided not to tell people...

Michael continued on this theme for a while, and then referred to the discomfort that he had felt when he saw two gay guys his own age holding hands:

M  (The other young people in the town would say) Well...They can be gay I suppose but as long as they don't kiss or hold hands or something like that in front of me...

I  And why do you think that is?
M  Umm...Well it's not (indicates parenthesis) ‘normal’ I suppose...to them anyway...

I  To them...

M  Ummm...I suppose it would be pretty confronting, a shock to them as well...Even myself I mean I only came out a month ago and even my going to one of the meetings...ummmm...seeing two boys my own age holding hands that was a surprise to me actually...

I  And how did you feel when you saw that?

M  I was sort of shocked in a way, but then I sort of came to terms with it, I could see their point of view (the others in the town who didn't want to see gay and lesbian people) with them saying that...

I  Who...The others?

M  Well like seeing older men holding hands and that I suppose that didn't really worry me um, but then when I saw someone my own age I thought ‘God’ it was quite surprising...Like the example of Melrose place they're kissing...and that didn't worry me at all It's just that when I saw them holding hands in my same age it was just a surprise...

I  And so do you think that you'll feel like that in the future?

M  No no...

Michael spoke about his awareness of another gay student who was at school with him:

I  You mentioned that there was another gay student at the school...

M  Well actually he left in year 10...And funny enough he got picked on and I think that was quite surprising because you couldn't really tell that he was...

I  Right

M  He didn't like the school because he was bullied but not to the extent that I was at the Public school...um...and he didn't like the school I suppose...But yeah he left because he was picked on...

I  And what form did that take?

M  Oh he came in year 9 the same time as me and then left in year 10...

I  What happened to him?
M  Ummm...Well he ran away from home...

I  You just said that ‘you wouldn't be able to tell’...If they couldn't tell what was it about him that singled him out?

M  He was a bit weaker I suppose and I think actually that his year 10 class was pretty bad...

I  So he had to leave...and he actually left home as well...?

M  Yeah but he came back and he goes to TAFE

I  And he's alright now

M  Yeah

I  And...Do you think that that had any impact on you?

M  Well we didn't know that he was at that time...

I  So you wouldn't have put that down to (gyness)?

M  Yeah, we were wondering why and then when he told us we weren't...

I  Is that when he came back?

M  No he came back...He told us actually about 4 months ago...Because my best friend is his best friend and when we were at school and he told her that he was and she was shocked...ummmm...and then she told me...and eventually we told our friends...

We then discussed the attitudes of teachers:

I  I'm interested in the attitudes of teachers...

M  I...get the feeling...they wouldn't tell everyone else...you know all the other teachers...they wouldn't go and tell everyone else...and I think that if you did tell them that ‘you were’ that they wouldn't go and tell everyone else...

I  So your confidentiality would be maintained...?

M  Yeah that would be a big thing for yourself going up and telling them that you know that you feel confident that they wouldn't tell everyone else…
The conversation then moved on to consider improvements:

I  So...what about improvement?...

M  Well I think if they sort of came out and said you know if you're having problems that sort of thing that they'd be willing to come...Like you know that they're there but they sort of don't tell you to come and see them if you really want to...

I  Could you elaborate on that...?

M  I think make the students more aware that they are there...

I  And that they do have a function in relation to lesbian and gay issues?

M  Yeah that they're there and that you can talk about these things with them...so you feel confident...

I  So that would be like within a Student Welfare set up or...?

M  You know even teachers telling the students if you've got problems you can…

I  So how?

M  I'm not sure...I suppose that they might do an assembly for example...they could come out and tell the students that they're there...They could provide a list of you can see us about this or that...

I  It's almost possible from what you're saying to have quite a successful existence as a gay or lesbian person in a school providing you've got someone…

M  To talk to

I  To talk to in confidential manner...I mean it's not perfect but...That's good...What other things do you think?

M  Well with curriculum they could introduce that more I suppose into the…

I  Can you give an example?

M  I don't know perhaps in RE they could introduce more...but they do focus on social issues...but gay and lesbian issues aren't always umm the main focus so if they made it more those issues more aware in the school I suppose...

At this point in the conversation Michael discussed support services:
I Do you have any (other) ideas about what might be done to improve (gay and lesbian school experiences)?

M Ummm they could even offer a service where you could get together and talk about it I suppose...

I And how might that go?

M Ummm...Like if for example you went up to a teacher and said that you were gay they could like...refer you to them perhaps...

I To a place outside the school?

M Mmmm

I What would be the advantages of that?

M Well you could talk to them about you're own experiences that sort of thing and like help them deal with their own problems or something like that...Or even making them aware of programs in Melbourne like...

The conversation then moved to Michael's ‘coming out’ to his parents:

M Yeah...I told my parents and they were like shocked and they got onto (worker at the Action Centre) and from there I went to the ummmm (a youth group) and they went to PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)…

I How did they find out about PFLAG?

M I think it may have been through (Worker at Family Planning Victoria’s ‘the Action Centre’) but I'm not sure ummm but the Director I think...

I From PFLAG itself?

M Yeah she (President of PFLAG) sent mum a letter...

I Have they got any contact with gay and lesbian people outside of PFLAG?

M Yeah well we show dogs and there are a lot of gay men and lesbian women in dog shows...Ummm and even with me and my mum well we're basically the two that go to dog shows...We've come to terms with them...And that's actually how I came to tell mum that I was gay ummm because I was friends with this man who was about 40 I suppose and ummm I told mum: ‘What do you think of him?’ and like I'd sort of got her reaction from him...like how she thought of him and...then I said: ‘Well I am’ and she said: ‘Oh well you're still the same’ so...Yeah...
contact with other is...with like me and mum it's like frequent but with dad it's not so...

I So how long have you been doing the dogs?

M Oh all my life...

I So when you were 12 or 13...When you first started saying to yourself that (you were gay)...could you talk about that?

M Yeah well we were showing dogs and that's probably one of the reasons why I didn't suicide because we had the dogs and I loved them so much that I didn't want to leave them...And I haven't directly told anyone in dog shows that I am but I sort of associate with the gay man more than like...

I And has that been a positive thing...?

M Yeah actually it has...I don't know not directly but it has helped me to come to terms with being gay...

I How?

M Well by them being there I've sort of come to realise that they're ‘normal’ sort of people ummm (giggle) they're still nice sort of thing...And because there's so many it's sort of nothing...That's why when I told mum well I thought that she'd be fine but she took it much worse than dad...

I And when did you tell them this?

M This is about a month ago...Dad sort of took it inwards he's very (quiet)...He didn't talk about it much...

I Has he started to talk about it much?

M No not really

I No

M He's starting to make the jokes about, you know about nail polish or stuff like that, we thought you were getting your make up on or stuff like that...laughs

I So how do you feel when he does that?

M Oh that's fine, fine you know...He's worried about me suiciding and that sort of thing more than normal...ummmm...He's like worrying about leaving me home that sort of thing by myself...Ummmm...He hasn't talked to me about it a great
deal but I've never been able to really talk to him about well about a lot of things...

I And your mother?...

M She said: ‘Are you sure?’ and she asked me all the questions...Ummmm: ‘So you don't like girls or you've had girlfriends?’...all that sort of thing...Ummmm you know I told her ‘You know I wish I was’ all that sort of thing...crying...but she was quite bad...she cried...you know...but she sort of talked about it more than dad did...

I And do you think that would have had any impact on your school life?

M Yeah look during the first two years as I said the dog shows sort of helped me...And the love for the dogs made me want to keep going…

On choosing the label gay:

I When you were coming to defining yourself as gay...What was that like?

M Well I felt different and I always wished that I wasn't...

I And why did you wish that?

M Oh I just wanted to be ‘normal’ like everyone else. And I don't know but for a while I sort of wondered why I didn't like girls as much as I did boys...ummm...But I still wanted to get a girlfriend...I don't know why...Just to sort of make me ‘normal’ I don't know why...

I At the time then of formulating the idea you might be gay you were saying that it was something that you didn't want to be...But what were your ideas about what it might be like...? What did you think it might be like?

M Well funny enough at the dog shows there are some real strange gay men and I thought: ‘God I don't want to end up like that’...

I Strange?

M Oh you know wearing the hair long...make up...Ummm...I don't know they were a lot stranger than I was so I thought: ‘God I'm going to end up like that...Hair, makeup their voices’...really bad and that's why everybody used to say I ‘was’ because of my voice...Ummmm...I don't know...

I How different do you feel?
M Well I don't feel that different now...Now that I've met the people at the 
group...I've realised that there are people the same as me out there...and I'm not 
going to end up like you know the extremes of wearing make up or long hair or 
whatever...

I No it's a choice...

M Well it wasn't a choice for me as being like gay but...I mean mum said: ‘You don't 
want to do those things like dress up in women's clothing or stuff like that’ and I 
said: ‘Well I'm happy being a man’ and so it didn't really worry me...

I What do you imagine a gay life as being?

M At the dog shows one of my good friends, he's about 40 or something...His life is 
‘normal’ it's no different to ours...Ummm...And that's what I hope my life will be 
like...Yeah...And ummm you know live with a man I suppose...Grow old together 
hopefully...And that's it...

The conversation then turned to a consideration of 'camp' attributes:

M Well yeah....It is a bit of a thing for me like having the limp wrist and the 
voice...That's always been my main concern...My voice...

I But your voice is fine...

M People have always said that I've got a funny voice...I think yeah...I'd much prefer 
to be a manly man and to be gay than a man that looks like a woman or...acts like 
a woman...

I And how important are those ideas in relation to gayness...?

M I don't know I'd just like to stay looking ‘normal’...I'd just like to stay looking like 
a man I suppose...

I So the issues of masculinity are important...?

M Yeah...Well as a younger person I was worried about...Like with my voice I 
thought you know: ‘What is it going to end up like?...Is it going to get really bad 
or?’

I So what did you do? Did you do anything with your voice or…?

M Not really I just sort of left it as it was...

I Is it something that you were aware of?
M I was always worried about it...Like seeing myself on a video or something...You know acting like a 'girl'...was a bit worrying...

I So when was that?

M It would have probably been grade six...You know seeing myself acting you know differently...to the ‘normal’ boy it was just...a bit of a shock...

I So you actually saw that in yourself?

M Mmmmm

I And so what did you do after that? Did you stop...?

M Well in grade six people didn't really worry as we started to get older they sort of started to see, that's when at Public School they started picking...Ummmm...I don't know I think I probably tried to hide it more...than when I was younger...

I Because you were more aware...?

M Yeah I became more aware that I was and I tried not to show anyone that I was...
Conversations
A sexual diversity training kit for schools.

Sam

Michael Crowhurst
Sam

Sam is 16, female and a student in Year 11. She attends a State girl's secondary school in a semi-rural area. She describes herself as 'Australian' (Anglo-Celtic), and as having her own religion. Sam is 'out' to her parents. She identifies as lesbian.

The interview started by focusing on subject content. I asked Sam if any of the subjects that she had studied had included gay or lesbian content:

S  No not at all...There is one subject that you can do in year 11 VCE which is Health and that does go into sexuality but there really isn't anything at all during through Year 7-10 that I have actually been to you know to do with sexuality or that...

I  Can you give an example of when sexuality was mentioned? And how it was mentioned?

S  It was in Year 10 PE...it was a lesson of well you could be gay or lesbian or things like that but it wasn't gone into in depth at all...This is what you could be rah rah...And that was it nothing at all really...

I  How did you feel about that?

S  I wasn't happy...I think it should have been done more in depth...'Cause I know that besides from me there are other people who would be having doubts and would have preferred if it had gone into more depth than it did...

I  Depth?

S  I think it should have been explored or ummm...Different feelings you can have and places you can go if you are feeling that you could be gay...like youth services (here)...

I  So there was no information (about being gay or lesbian) through the (school)...What about Heterosexuality?...Do you think it was different?...

S  It's always different for heterosexuality I think...The Ummm...They look at...That's just the general thing in schools they kind of just think that...most young people will be heterosexual and they don't really look at the gay side of it they just look at the heterosexual stuff...

I  So a heterosexual person if I was asking them the same question they would have a different response do you think?

S  Probably yeah...Yep?
I Do you think it would be an issue for a heterosexual person?

S What having gay information?

I Well having information about heterosexuality?

S I don't think so because I think that it's like a general knowledge of...Heterosexuality it's so common...I mean everywhere you know about it...Where as with homosexuality it's something that it kind of kept in the closet and it's not really talked about because people aren't really comfortable with it...

I So you've never been in a class where gay and lesbian issues have been discussed?

S No...Not at all

I So you're saying that there is an absence...What about in the broader (school) culture...Say in assemblies?...

S No...There's no anything of gay and lesbian...It's just not spoken of very much...No not spoken of at all unless it is brought up by somebody...Otherwise it's pretty much kept quiet...

I And when would it be brought up by somebody?

S Ohhh...well you get the rumours starting at school I would say and things like that and people ask and...but it's mainly rumours and stuff...

The conversation then moved on to consider rumours and gossip and Sam's 'coming out' to others at school:

I So gossip...And how does that work?

S You could say something to a friend and somebody might overhear it and people would start talking or things like that I mean everybody's been saying it about me for the last three years and that because of something that I must have said or...

I Are you ‘out’ to other students?

S Yep...I ‘came out’ earlier this year to a couple of friends and it obviously got around to more people, which doesn't worry me although you do get the hassle of people making up rumours about you and friends and stuff like that...Ummm...But people know and that's alright I don't mind...

I And how long did it take you to work towards that disclosure?
S About three years I've been trying to work it out within myself and then coming into (youth group) and talking to 'L' and also going to another counsellor I learnt to accept myself for who I am and once I came to realize it for myself and was accepting of who I am I felt that I could tell other people...

I And has that been a positive experience?

S Very...Telling people has been a positive experience (with) about 90% of friends...Who have been really really good about it...

I And how have they shown that?

S They've just continued the friendship and they've told me that they'll support me no matter what and that they can see that I haven't changed so that's fine they're not worried about it...

I And negatives...The 10%?...

S You get the rumours and you get people saying stuff as you walk past and stuff like that, but that doesn't affect me at all because it's their problem...So

I The rumours and that...Do you have any thoughts on that?...What are the rumours based on?...

S Ummm...Being a girl's school and them knowing that I had a lesbian friend outside of school and that I spend a lot of time with her...Now that's purely friendship...Things started to get around about her and me which weren't true at all because they'd interpreted things I'd said like...Talking about she said goodbye to me and we'd hugged and people interpret stuff like that as ‘we're in a relationship’...Or ‘we're together’ or something like that...Well gossip always starts with something like that...'cause I guess also I'm a very affectionate person towards my friends...That's just me...and they see you hug somebody and I don't know maybe it's you body language or something but they seem to think that you could be but it's mainly statements that I've made...

I And do you think that's something to do with young women?

S I think you look at young women and we're more affectionate towards each other than young guys are probably because we're more accepting of ourselves...

I So how did you respond?...(to what's been said)...

S My best friends...They let me know what the rumours are, a bit of a giggle...but...I mean obviously some things that they say are going to hurt but, I know that they're not true and the more I get upset about it the more they're going to keep
going...If I ride it out they're going to get bored with it and say well she's not really reacting so...

I And so how did you feel about 'Lesbian' when they were (spreading rumours)?

S When they started about two or three years ago...ummmm...I was scared within myself about what I thought about being gay...

I You were uncertain or?

S No I was just scared because I think I was pretty sure that I was lesbian and I was scared because I hadn't had knowledge about it or anything and...

I So you didn't have any idea about what it meant?

S The rumours spun me out then but now that I've kind of talked to people about it and I know I'm more knowledgeable and...

I So how important do you think that rumour and gossip is in young people's school lives in terms of (sexuality)?

S Oh...Rumour is everywhere...Yeah no matter who you are at school I could guarantee that throughout your school life you would have at least one rumour go around about you...No doubt...

I Is that mostly with girls or boys?

S I think girls...I have had friends who have broken down over rumours because it affects them emotionally when really it shouldn't...

I What function are the rumours having?

S It's kind of trying to single people out...Like looking at the typical female type things and then anybody who is different well that's it gossip, it starts...I mean you get girls who are into Gothic stuff black hair and white faces that's it she's different bang gossip starts...Probably between the generalization of people I mean what everybody thinks is so called 'normal' and then anybody who's out of that actual 'normal' range who's different it starts...

I And that would happen a lot? And is sexuality important (in that)?

S Yeah...Because I've been in it yeah sexuality has become a big one but I'm not really sure I think it's just the way that people look...If somebody came to school with their head shaved it would be like gossip would start because she's got no hair...Just anybody who's different...Out of the ordinary and...
I If you're ‘out of the ordinary’ what's ‘in the ordinary’?

S The stereotypical female...

I Once you step outside of that look (gossip starts)...How does that happen?...Because there's stepping outside and being outside...Would someone who's ‘outside of the look’ because they're black for example have the same experience as somebody who was ‘outside of the look’ because they've shaved their head or...

S No in school...It's not so much racial...A black girl would be no...She'd be treated pretty much the same...It's just...Like with clothes...If people are wearing 501's and Doc's and then you get somebody wearing old jeans and runners you know they'd be saying: ‘Well look what she's wearing’ it's not so much racial...It's petty what they actually gossip about there's no point to it...

I So you're relationship to the gossip is that it doesn't affect you because you don't think it's worth anything as conversation…

S That's right...It's not worth caring about at all...

I And how do you think you've got to that stage because a lot of people do care?

S Just the personality that I am...I am who I am...I'm me but if people aren't accepting of me they can talk all they like I don't really mind either accept me for me or don't that's it...

I So how important is joining in...Would you describe yourself as popular?

S Yeah...Ummm...I more so was before I ‘came out’ I've got a few homophobic friends but they're learning to accept it, which is fine they can take as long as they like, I don't mind...But yeah I've got stacks of friends very well liked around the school and you know being involved in sport, cricket and football, junior football and that so yeah definitely...

The conversation then turned to sport and here Sam suggested that her involvement in Women's Cricket had contributed to rumours circulating about her:

I What would you say about sport?

S Playing football probably would have started and playing women's cricket outside of school...I'd say that would have started as well...

I Started what...Started rumours?

S Yeah
I  Why would that be?

S  Because it's kind of...I think it would be just knowledge that girls that play women's cricket would come out lesbians...Which I mean isn't true but there are cricket teams that do have lesbians in them but hey...There could be a hockey team that could have lesbians in it too...

I  You could have straight people in there too...

S  Yeah scary...But it's just like sport is also a big issue like because I play football...I love getting out and having a kick of the footy and taking 'speckeyes' and stuff...Male dominated sports like footy any girls that try to break that domination which I did by getting a girl's football team together...

I  So that was a deliberate strategy on your part?

S  Yeah I wanted to get over the male domination of footy 'cause I love getting in there and taking 'speckeyes' and stuff and I think: ‘Well hey we can do that’...

I  And what do you like about that?

S  I like rough games...

I  What is it about them that you like?

S  Knocking people out...No...I just like the fact of getting up of getting up and taking a mark it takes a lot to actually get up there and to actually hold the ball and that and it's just a great game...

I  And how is it different to Netball or?

S  'Cause Netball is so...I just don't like it...It's not a contact sport...

I  So there's something about the contact?

S  Yeah hip and shouldering somebody or sticking your knee into their back...I just like contact sport I'm a very physical person...

I  Which isn't there with Netball...for you...I mean it might be for others...

S  (Laughs)...But it's not...

I then asked Sam whether the Football team that she had started at school was encouraged or not:
S Not at all...When we first we would get out onto the tennis court and have a kick of the footy because my friends are mad football supporters and they love having a kick and that's just them...And us being out there in our school dresses was not seen as appropriate and we explained to our school that if they could have it at a boy's school why couldn't they have it at a girl's school? We're not doing anything wrong, and they want us to play sport...There have been comments made that all we do is sit around and do nothing yet here we are getting up doing physical things...

I And they're complaining…?

S I think it was really in a way maybe they were thinking: 'If we say something they might get a game of netball going'...But here we are getting a game of footy going and that wasn't seen as ‘ladylike’...

I And what would the meaning of a girl playing football be?

S Probably that she's gay...

I And how did you feel when you did that? And was that tied up with being a lesbian...at all?

S It was challenging the school...I actually was 'cause the way they were saying ‘No it's not lady like’ and I thought no I actually had a thought that it was (that) you could be portrayed as being gay and I wanted to challenge them to see if they would actually come out and say that but they never did they just kind of ended up saying well yeah you can play and you can have your football team...

I And what was the effect of doing that?

S I just made a point that...My friends they're purely hetero and it just made a point to them that not all girls who want to play football are ‘butch’ or anything but my friends who are the most ‘feminine’ girls you could ever meet playing football because they love the physical aspect of it...

I And you were doing it to make a point that...?

S Not all women who play male dominated sports are gay...

I What did you get out of that and how important do you think it might have been, if at all, to you eventually ‘coming out’...What do you gain from doing things like that?

S Not much except the fact that we got to play football...No it wasn't an issue on sexuality...It was and it wasn't...I just got the satisfaction of us being able to have a girl's football team...
The conversation then turned to teachers:

S My Welfare Co-ordinator she's great...Most teachers seem pretty cool with it I think and if they do have homophobic feelings they don't show it in the classroom...but I'm not sure about the Principal I think that she would be dodgy about it...

I In class for example, if someone called someone a Dyke, would that happen in class?..

S No but if it did I'd say that that student would be pulled up...

I Do you feel supported in the school then?

S Yeah to an extent yes but no...I think that if I asked, you know, some teachers for support I don't think that they'd give it but that would be on personal views but they can't really bring their personal views to a classroom because it would be a discrimination act then...

I Have you spoken to a teacher?

S Yeah...I've spoken to two of my teachers when I was having some hassles and they were great about it they were accepting of me and said: 'Well hey you know you're still you'...My English teacher was very supportive because she has a gay nephew...But there are other teachers who there's no way I would actually talk to them about it...

Sam then spoke about what she might suggest as far as improving schools for gay and lesbian students:

S In Years 7 and 8 they should do something on sexuality like having a youth worker going in to talk to them about it and giving them numbers that they can ring so that they know that if they are having doubts that there is support for them out there...And they shouldn't be afraid to admit to it or anything...

I What is the advantage of an outside contact?

S If you go to a staff member, for example they might have to tell...Or they might say to another staff member and then it can get around but if you're outside it's totally confidential...

I Can you think of any other (suggestions)?

S I think that the whole school should just be more aware...The fact that being a girl's school that there would be a number of lesbians in the school and that they
shouldn't just look at heterosexual things that they should also cater for gay students as well...
Conversations
A sexual diversity training kit for schools.

Veronica

Michael Crowhurst
Veronica

Veronica is nearly 17 and in year 12. She was born in England, lived in Italy with her grandparents and then moved to Australia with her grandmother. She has been in Australia for three years. Veronica describes herself as middle class because her family can afford to go on holidays. She attends a State, single sex secondary college. She identifies as lesbian.

Early in the interview she spoke about the label lesbian:

I When did you first start calling yourself lesbian?

V Well I don't really call myself that...That's what people call you really...I mean...It doesn't really matter if you like a guy or a girl it's just the person that you like and so I've just gone from there and I just haven't liked many guys but I think that it's just putting labels on people like that and...Lesbian yes when people have asked me I guess that I have used it since I started High School

Later Veronica said:

V I actually didn't understand a word to put to myself so but when I reached High School you learn I mean through gossip your friends calling names of other people and from then onwards I guess I had an incident in school and people sort of guessed you know...'What are you a 'lessa' or something?'...And so from then on I understood what the word meant and that I was labelled that…

I So you always felt different and it wasn't until someone called you ‘lesbian’ that you would have adopted that label for yourself?

We returned to this theme later in the interview where Veronica spoke about an experience in a school that she attended in England:

I Now the label lesbian you were saying that came to attach itself to you or you took that up or whatever after an incident and that as a result of or as a response to that incident you were called a lesbian and there was gossip tied in with that…

V Yes

I So could you talk about that?

V Well it was in High School and...I was in year 7 so just starting High School and there was a play put on in our school and it was like an all girl’s Catholic School so of course we didn't have any guys to play the male part of the play so I think it was Pocahontas and the husband of Pocahontas was played by a girl in our school you know a senior and I don't know I was just watching the play and I just noticed
this person behind me, I knew it was a girl but, they had a moustache and beard painted on them and for some reason I just liked them. I just thought: ‘Oh she's so gorgeous, she sings so beautifully’, you know this was sort of like a crush…

I  This was the girl in the play?

V  Yes and so after a while I wrote a fan letter and told her that I admired her and I didn't really understand what was going on. I thought that this was just normal just to say how good you are for doing this and that you're a really good singer and that was the end of it…and then after that people used to view me differently because I used to like talk about her and I can remember in assemblies in the morning and if she was singing I used to sit and stare and some people used to start whispering saying: 'Oh my God look at her, just staring at her, oh she's so obsessed' and then after a while they'd just start saying: 'Why do you like her? You're weird' and I didn't understand what they were saying...(they were saying) ‘You're a lesbian’…Wow what is that?

I  What was it like writing her a letter? And what was your motivation for writing the letter?

V  I don't know I just wanted to get noticed just saying...I don't understand why I wrote it I do such weird things and I just really wanted to write the letter to say: ‘Oh be my friend you know you're such a good singer and I'd really like to be like you 'cause I admire you’ Like a fan letter I guess not too obsessed…

I  You'd like to spend time with that person, to be included in that person’s (life). You like what they're doing and you feel that you have a connection with them…

V  Yes

I  What was her (reaction)?

V  Well I also wrote it to two other girls in the play…

I  Right

V  One was playing a male part and the other was playing Pocahontas, I wrote letters to them and they were very you know they used to talk to me and they just used to be very nice they even wrote back to me...But the other girl...She didn't ignore me but after a while she did...She didn't want anything to do with me...maybe she didn't want to be around a person who liked her in that way…

I  So you think her distancing herself from you in that way was somehow to do with issues of sexuality?

V  Yes
I  How did you feel as a result?

V  I felt sad...Not because we couldn't be friends but if you go down one of the corridors and you say hello to people you'd have to avoid that person you can't say hello to them...'Cause I used to do sports with her and what do you do when the person is around all the time? It is really hard…

Later we talked about gossip. Veronica says that other girls at the school that she attended started to gossip about her when they suspected that she had a 'crush' on another girl:

V  Well from year 7 onwards the gossip stopped because I wasn't having any contact with that girl anymore and I didn't talk to her so it cooled down...Then Year 9 I was very friendly with everybody and used to talk and I don't know one of the girls in my class confronted me and said: 'You know I think that you've got a crush on this girl in our class'...And you know I really didn't understand it…

I  And so this was Year ?

V  Year 9 in England ...And I was puzzled about it but when you reflect upon it ...Like I did but really I was just friends...It was in the back of my mind and I guess the way that I acted with her and talked I guess I was sort of attracted to her but I didn't see that in that way I just sort of acted as friends...Like I can tell now that I was...People didn't start talking about it but they just knew...we grew really good friends 'cause she was a rebel I wasn't exactly a sort of a rebel but I don't know it was so great just being friends with her and we used to do sports together just like being her friend was really just cool and stuff...I liked her...It was just like I'd go to school and...cool she'd be there, like 'Cool hi how are you?...'...

I  Would that type of experience be different to now perhaps?

V  Well now it's a little more difficult I suppose I've had an experience in school (which was) very serious and if people find out it can get pretty messy pretty complicated so you have to actually define if you like them as a friend or if you like them more than a friend so...That bit doesn't get confused it gets muddled up in...

I  (If) other people find out it could become messy and complicated...Do you want to talk to that a little?

V  Well I guess you could say that you can tell if you like a person because you can't stop talking about them...And so like in your group of friends you think that you can trust them so after a while they found out that I was gay, no lesbian, and then they asked me: 'Do you have a crush on her?' and I said, 'Yeah I do' and then from then on I thought I'd just joke around and it was taken from there and the word was passed on to her and then…”
I So you had told them that you were a lesbian?

V Yes

I So we're in Australia here?

V Yes

The conversation then turned to her friends reaction to the news:

I Did it make any difference to them that they knew that you were a lesbian?

V I guess that they couldn't believe it

I Why?

V I mean they think a lesbian she must be really ‘butch’ and...You know all the stereotypes

I You ‘don't look like a lesbian’

V No...You ‘don't look like one’ so you can't be one

I Yeah...What's a lesbian look like?

V Exactly...So they didn't believe it and so at lunch times they would like joke joke joke joke and then finally they actually realized ‘Yes she's telling the truth’...

I Can you understand that at all? I mean where they're coming from?

V Yeah I guess 'cause you if you know a person for so long then finally they tell you but with me it's very strange I have like a sixth sense I can tell gay people...

I A lot of gay people say that...Go on...

V It's just totally amazing...This is going on to a totally different thing but...

I Well it's actually related I think but...

V But for example I had to go to my Year 11 formal and I wanted to take a girl but I didn't' know any girls who would come with me but I took this friend of a friend this guy, now I mean he was cute and everything but for some reason he sent off I mean I never knew a (straight) guy that could sing really good, or that could dance or that was drop dead gorgeous and say he's gay it's just...
I So he was gay...this guy?

V Yes there was just...The way people talk you can tell and that relates back to this girl at school I sort of had a sense from her that she was gay or bi and I thought you could have a chance with her so you just may as well try it...

I Do you see any connection here...To things that you have said before about other girls guessing that you were lesbian or hinting at it?...Could you talk a little more about gay and lesbian people being able to tell other gay and lesbian people...

V Yeah you can't be 100% sure...I don't know it's a feeling or the way that they look...It's so complicated to put this down but it's...Girls are very close to each other and sometimes if there are two girls and they're gay or bi then there's a certain extra closeness that (is there)...Which you're sort of able to relate (to) more...

I You can recognize gay and lesbian people at 20 paces based on a feeling?

V Ummmm...Or even just by looking at them...

I Body language?

V Ok you say that a guy who is gay is sort of really nice and he's also girlish...Like the hand (wrist) and cute voice and all that, and girls are supposed to be really ‘butch’ and all, that but there is always a little bit of the stereotype even across the street and if you can't see that there is an intuition that they sort of give off... And like if they look at you and just how they go about walking past you sometimes...There is a tension or there isn't from ‘normal’ people...not ‘normal’

I Yeah I know what you mean and what you mean by ‘normal’...You were talking about 'cute' voices and you sort of said that there was no real equivalent for lesbians...Which I'm interested in...Are you saying that there is no real lesbian ‘butch’ equivalent to the ‘cute’ (camp) voice?

V Well a deep voice but not all girls have deep voices...It's really the physical appearance I mean like the short cropped hair, men's clothes, like real men's clothes I mean all women wear trousers so ummmm...They try to actually be a man but then that would be going into transsexual and transvestite so...

I Yes that's different...But the look of a body (can) tell you certain things about that body and you would read that as being a lesbian body and you think that you would be right a lot of the time...and this is quite subtle…?

V Yeah
I It is subtle because you used the word intuition and that would imply to me that this recognition happens on different levels...That this recognition is layered that it is in part very subtle...

We continued talking about reading the bodies of other lesbians for a while:

I Reading the bodies of other lesbians...I'm interested in the connections between that and gossip. Can you see any connections between you identifying other lesbians and gossip perhaps?

V Yes...I just see another person in the corridor and I think: ‘Ok she's gay’...I mean you're just assuming that but if some people also recognize it, like other straight people and they figured it out and then they ask you you know what do you think that could actually turn sour and they could actually say: ‘Yes she's gay’ and just start saying straight away you know all of these allegations against them...So I mean usually if I can tell a person is like that you know usually I try to speak to them or something too...And if people who know me, who know what I'm like if they see me then they will try to break it up, try to break me talking to them or they may go: 'Oh my God she's talking to, she likes this girl, beware, beware'...

I It's almost like trying to stop you from spreading...Spreading lesbian-ness...

V Yes exactly...They don't want other people around like you or they (get) jealous for instance there was this girl that I liked at school and after now if there are any new people in school ahhh...she will tell: 'That girl's gay, do not go near her, she'll try to get you or something'...So I can't speak to these new people who are coming into the school she puts like a barrier to stop...

I She puts a barrier around you?...

V Yes because I'm 'out' and visible and I told the truth about assuming that she was gay and...She doesn't want to be associated with me so she will go against me and try to distance from me...If I try to speak to a new girl she will do anything for you not to do that...

I Well that is very interesting...And that has come up in many of the interviews...The role of gossip and that when you ‘come out’ the gossip doesn't hold you in place...(and) That then the focus almost goes away from you and goes on to the people that you hang around with...What is the effect of that?

V Well...One person or another is going to win...In this instance I was the loser...The other girl that I liked she was the winner she got everyone against me...And that's amazing really I don't know how she did it but...People speak to you but they're not going to hang around you...One person will hang around me...But everyone will speak to me they are ok...
I They're ok?

V Yeah they're not: 'Oh hi how are you big hug in the morning' (though) because if somebody sees that then they're in trouble…

I Because they're tainted as possibly a lesbian?

V Yes and gossip can also bring people ‘out’...as well…

The conversation then turned to consider another form of gossip. I asked Veronica some more questions about peers:

I In (relation to) peers would that (gossip) be the main issue...There isn't any physical violence for example...It's around issues of speech?

V Yes speech...And threats it's from...Well with the girl that I sort of went out with, I say I went out with her she says I didn't but, yeah threats from her, I'll bash you up, writing on the wall…

I Where would the writing on the wall be?

V In the toilets, a whole wall…

I About you?

V About me…

I As a lesbian?

V Yes the whole school knows, ummm...Threats, pushing in the corridor, pushing me over by accident, taking your stuff and I mean the threats are pretty serious…

I It's harassment

V Yes it is...Look I'll bash you up if you say this about me’, I'll do this to you...I mean it is scary…

I In response to that type of harassment...How did or do you feel?...How do you feel about the writing on the wall?

V Well at first it was just like, ‘She's gay’ and my response was 'No I'm not'...and then day by day you go in there and you look at the wall and you see whether people are taking your side...So that was a really good way of finding out who's on your side so, I got annoyed after a while because the writing on the wall started also moving onto my locker onto the school mirrors and that really bothered
me...I didn't mind if it was just in the cubicle but when it started spreading about the school, so that literally everyone, the whole school knew, it just bugged me because it was just one thing practically said and just…

The conversation then turned to a discussion of Veronica's experiences in the corridor:

I  (So) you're a big focus of attention?

V  Yeah well...Like there was a young guy in Sydney (Christopher Tsakalos - 60 Minutes) and I was literally him in school it was just...He just ‘came out’ in the news and I was just in school and I was literally the focus of attention…

I  So with the graffiti and getting tripped up in the corridor...Is it always in the corridor?

V  There are lots of girls there and you can't actually see who's doing it but it seems like pretty amazing that I trip over every day and no-one else (does)...sometimes I think I'm going to fall down the stairs and break my neck…

I  So have you ever gone to a teacher about this?

V  I don't know...We have a school counsellor...I've gone to her…

I  And what was the response?

V  Ummmm...Well I'll talk to your friends about it, try to figure it out and well talking well some of your friends won't talk they don't want to speak to a co-ordinator, so from then onwards I have to deal with it myself...(The counsellor said)...'I'm not really capable of counselling you about this I don't really know that much about it'…

I  How did you feel when she said that she wasn't capable of counselling you about this?

V  Well it was just pretty weird...It's just like: ‘I can't counsel you because you're a lesbian, I can't counsel you because you're black’...It's just so...Your counselling me just because I need some help not because I'm gay, I know I'm gay and I've had that problem with another counsellor, 'No you're not, you're going through a confusing time'...I could have killed them…

Later in the interview Veronica spoke about subject content:

V  Yes...For my Year 10 project I did a project on young and gay students, finding out about your sexuality and the language teacher was perfectly happy that I did it, I asked teachers questions and girls in my school and that really helped me understand that our school needed help. Teachers are so ready to say that this
group is against people because they're black and then finally ok they had a gay student, don't discriminate against gay students but they actually need to talk to gay students and I said, ‘I'd be happy to get someone in’ because I wanted people to understand not just say 'you know that girl over there is gay, she's got problems’ because it wasn't my problem and they need to understand you know as well. You know I pushed it back on them for instance...You know a few Indian girls said: ‘You can't be gay’, and then they stopped hanging around me and I said, 'Has anyone ever judged you because you're black?’ and they said ‘No’ (she then went on to say) ’ Because if you ever do then you'll understand what you have just done to me'...So you have to push it back on to them and then they will understand what they are doing…

I So now lets get a little focused on teachers in the classroom...If we focus on one aspect of the classroom...Have you ever encountered any gay and lesbian subject content in the subjects that you take?

V There should be but teachers will not they are scared of saying it so...You know in Psychology and English classes well I sort of put: ‘What about gay and lesbian parents?’ and they understand...but in other classes when they do there is negative feedback on gays and lesbians...

I From whom?

V From English teachers for instance...

I Can you give me an example of that?

V Ummmm...Even if they just talk about it...What was it?...IVF programs, and I brought some articles in about same-sex couples wanting a child and the teacher said 'I really think that that is disgusting...If they want a child why don't they just go with a woman or with a man' and I just got so infuriated at them...

I So the teacher said that?

V Yes...In front of the class…

I And how did you respond seeing as you had brought in the article?

V I just started arguing for it...And then the teacher she still couldn't understand it...They'd never say anything about two white couples adopting a black child but yet when it's same-sex issues, they do not allow it, for God knows what reason, for religion, but religion really has nothing to do with it, from what I've studied...It's no use though...Teachers will not listen if they are…

I Fixed...So you'd say that there have been lots of instances where the content has
not been there when it should have and there have been instances where it has
been in there where the response has been negative...Would that translate to other
students in the classroom? Similar types of issues...?

V Well some students in the classroom will actually discuss it and some others well
they won’t go into it...Actually if a teacher...We were reading 'Brilliant Lies' and
the sister is a lesbian, so whenever somebody took the part and said: ‘Oh she's a
lesbian’, everybody just giggles or you could just feel them, feel their eyes on
you. It's so...Is it that obvious?

I So whenever lesbian content would come up in class…

V I'd be it

I You'd be singled out as ‘the’ lesbian...Would you feel self-conscious about that or
aware that you are being singled out?

V Aware that I'm bring singled out…

I Other people have said that too…

V It's just, I know I'm not the only one in the school but it feels like it…

I So having said that...Is it better to have lesbian's in the courses that you take or
not? Do you feel better when the lesbian is there or worse?

V Well I guess both. It depends on what content it is really…

I What the lesbian is doing?

V Mmmmm...It's like in your life, it's not bad being gay or lesbian but it can be…

I There are aspects that can be a problem, because of the attitudes of other people
often, sometimes because of yourself...

Later Veronica spoke about what she would do that might make schools better places for
gay and lesbian students:

I What do you think schools could do to improve the school experience of gay
and lesbian students?

V Well I've already done one thing...Last year I wrote a letter to 'The Age'
standing up for Christopher Tsakalos and they rang me and they said: ‘Beware
because you might get some negative response’...I didn't get any negative
response and I got a phone call about a CD Rom program being produced and I
was interviewed and I actually ended up on it as ‘the gay teenager’, talking about
my experiences and life and ...So I was in (that) and all schools in Victoria got a copy of it (?)...And I was at the launch and the Minister for Health was there and I had to do a speech and I was really nervous but my social worker from school came to support me and they were given a CD but they said that they couldn't play it in school and they never did because my face was on there, but I agreed I said ‘I want you to put it on...Put it on and see what it does’...They didn't want to put it on...In a way I think that they should 'cause a lot of people could benefit from that…

I Good...So what other things do you think could be done?

V Yeah...More information put out about it and I think actually informing the teachers about it...

I Training for teachers?

V Yes...I don't know because it is real hard...It would be really nice in school if you had someone to go to who would understand…

I Yes...So a contact person in the school…

V Even if the teacher wasn't gay just...

I Someone who is gay friendly

V Yes...Who could talk to you because I've had so many teachers in school that literally you go in class and an incident will happen, like someone will say ‘lezzo’ or something and that will crack me up and I'll want to run out of class but they just won't allow me to do that...

I A contact person in the school then that would be a (good idea)?

V I think now that sometimes you need someone to talk to...The support groups and such are good but sometimes you just need someone to talk to ‘one on one’ contact. Literally that you can pick up the phone and say: ‘Look I just need to speak to you’...

I So really a point of contact...That was advertised in such a way that the person that was doing that job had two or three titles...You know like they could be locker key person and year level co-ordinator and queer officer all in one...

V Yes you would use an excuse to go there

I Or you could ring them up
V  Yeah I think that would be really good...I think that is like the Switchboard (G/L Switchboard)...Most people can get to it but before I literally had to find (it all by myself) even the Social Worker she didn't give me a number

I  What if you couldn't go to the Social Worker...What about something like a poster or something?...

V  Yeah they have posters for everything but they will not...I think it was a poster that came out about being young and gay and they would not put that up…

I  So it is really important that that sort thing goes up...Under glass...With a big phone number splashed all over it that you could read from across the corridor…

V  Yes that would help so many people in school I think...
Conversations

A sexual diversity training kit for schools.

Violet

Michael Crowhurst
Violet

Violet is 16 and describes her class as ‘comfortable’. She is female and has lived most of her life in South Africa. She has been in Australia for 6 years. She doesn't have a religion although she is very interested in how people make meaning of their existence. She identifies as bi-sexual. She describes the school that she attends as conservative and as being in a very conservative area. It is a 7-12, co-educational State school that has just reintroduced uniforms and is competing with Private Schools in the area. Violet describes the school as multicultural and the suburb that it is in as ‘dead at night’.

Violet spoke at some length about how she would define her sexuality:

V And ummm sexuality I would say that I'm bi-sexual because I've had a number of experiences on both sides...Ummmm...It varies in interest to me as to whether I'm with a male or a female...It really does vary amazingly...At the moment I'm with a man purely just because of the personality I wasn't really interested sexually it became sexual after it was a very good established friendship it was definitely the personality so ummmmm...Gender plays little in the role it is mainly the person that it is so I'd say that I'm quite in the middle...(later) There is a stage when I will really be attracted to a woman and it's really different I get different things from being in a relationship with a different gender...

I Can you speak to that difference a little?

V Ummmm...I feel differently...The way I relate to them and the way that I initially attach to them and it's a different intensity but it's actually a different feeling I care for them in a different way it's more say caring or nurturing or ummmmm it will be more like with a female it would be more like we're on the same level we'd share, it would be like another part of me whereas with a male because there is a difference we have our very separate roles and ummmmm...depending on the person of course it can vary with intensity but it means different things to me I expect different things from a relationship with a girl than with a male...I mean I expect honesty from both of them but I expect complete honesty from a female because we are more alike it would be...

Later Violet said:

V Mmmmm...I start off initially with more of an attraction to a female say so ummmmm...It comes from deeper ummmmm I fall easier for females and I connect better so I give more initially so...And with a male I was friends and I needed to stand back and become really good friends and then become go in deeper...(later) and of course it's different with everybody

Later in the interview Violet spoke about feeling more comfortable with older people.
I usually hang around with people who are generally older than I am and I find it much easier to relate to people who are older...I'm not inhibited about talking to somebody just because they're older than me because it's sort of been embedded in me since I was really young...I've always been able to relate to people who are older than me a lot easier because I like to explore the issues and a lot of people my age don't they just a sort of sail along and think about what colour jumper they are going to buy and what they're going to wear to 'The Metro' or whatever but ummm...

Later in the conversation Violet discussed the 'subject content' that she had encountered in school:

Well we have Sex-Ed obviously at school ahhhh which starts about Year 7 or what ever and we watch these cute little 'Where I Come From' cartoons and everyone sits there and moans and thinks I've seen these before...We're split up into males and females so we can't discuss between genders...I mean it goes through puberty and so on but it doesn't bring up sexuality at all it brings up you know going through puberty and finding the (emphasis) opposite sex attractive and that's how the video is...

That's the framework...?

Yeah...Growing up and going through puberty and finding a lovely partner who is the opposite sex (emphasised) from you and getting married and having children and reproduction and blah blah blah...And I think that it is very important to start having different views of sexuality right then because at that age they know about it...But at that age they are still slightly more open minded and it would be a good idea to start some sort of education because at that age some people know that they are different that they are attracted to the same sex and they think: 'Oh no what's going on here'?...I'm going in the wrong way'... I think that's it's very important to have at least some, at least a proper definition...(To know) that this is pretty common really that there are lots of people that are like this (gay, bi or lesbian) to know it's not something (unheard of, it's just that) it's not something that's talked about and so it gives the impression that it's a taboo subject...

You drew a distinction there between sex and sexuality...How is sexuality different to sex?

Sex is just physical sex, sexuality is how you feel about it - your preferences, what it means to you, it is a very personal thing...Sex is sex...It can be done in lots of different ways but it is still sex...

And there is not very much information regarding sexuality?...
V Yeah there might be a few paragraphs on it or whatever but they don't actually bring it in...The main focus is on puberty which would be affecting most of the people at that stage anyway and reproduction and that follows heterosexual issues...And the little cartoons have little males and females running around together and the little male watching the little female's breasts bounce around (reinforcing the idea that this is) 'normal’ (that) this is what should be happening to you, (loudly) this is what WILL be happening to you, you know, if something else is going on, well it's not on this video and so you should think that there is something wrong...

I Wrong...And that would be the message that you would think would be communicated to Year 7 people?

V Yeah...Well if you're sitting there and the information that you're taking in is you're attracted to this and to that and her or him depending on your gender, as long as it's the opposite one, and then you couple up and have babies and then live happily ever after...And that's the message that is sent across by these videos and that's pretty much what you get I mean you get question time and...ummm...People aren't going to go: 'Well what's this about males and females’ (question it)...I heard a joke down the corridor it's not an issue that is brought up by students because they feel inhibited by it because they don't understand it, it's not presented, it's not talked about, it's not discussed so there isn't much (possibility of gaining access to information)...I mean everyone says 'Oh there's always information available' but it's actually very hard for young students to get up the initiative and say 'Where do I go to get this?' (and the effect on the student is for them to think) 'Maybe it's just me being silly you know I'll get over it'...

I Mmmm

V Yeah there are hardly any books about it in our library, like there are a couple of Art books that have two naked females together or something but nothing sexual, it's just bodies and the main sexuality ones are just scientific or there isn't really any exploration of sexuality as such or it's sexuality which is put into the framework as (reproductive and heterosexual)

Later in the conversation Violet spoke about how seeing others harassed had influenced her:

I Did you feel ever feel uncomfortable?...Because a lot of people will say that when they first named themselves as lesbian, bi, gay or whatever that they felt uncomfortable about that...Did you feel that at any time?

V I thought because there were always the childish little jokes around gay and lesbian people, ‘so and so is gay’, and ‘such an English teacher is a faggot’, and I always thought that it was wrong to do that and I always had a problem with that
and then I started thinking well I kind of feel like that...But but but here comes the hang on if they're doing this to them they'll do it to me and so I was sort of I'll be a little bit quiet about it and if it's going to take so much ridicule then maybe I should be a little quiet about it and forget about it because I actually had the attraction for males as well...I could have thought well this is just a silly little thing…

Later the interview moved to consider peers:

V Ummm...I have a very varied social group, varied in age and ummmm so it's not really a problem it's not really an issue...It doesn't matter...I was lucky with the friends that I have because they are really very open minded beyond the usual heterosexual experience...Even if they were straight they'd had some interaction (with gay, lesbian or bisexual people)...(As for) people at school I actually had a relationship with a girl at school and I fell deeply in love with her and so I didn't see the point in hiding it from people at school...And the thing is that I'm lucky because I'm female so it's more of a joke that I'm a dyke kind of...

I So you'd think that it is different for a young woman than it is for a young man?

V Oh definitely

I Mmmmm

V Yeah there's not that huge homophobic (assumption) with a dyke that she's going to race me off and (have) me in the showers there's like a kind of interest...ummmm...My girlfriend...We were in the same class and so the guys would go, 'Go on give her a kiss' and it was just like a joke, like rah rah rah

I But how did you feel when they were doing that?... Because it is like a joke on one level but on another it is tinged with homophobia...

V I felt like...I felt kind of embarrassed, not embarrassed because of what it was but embarrassed because it was plastered up, stuck up in neon lights, saying have a look at (those) two because (they're) weird and it was just it became slightly uncomfortable sometimes because it was just...Because (she) was very uncomfortable with it and it made this tension the whole time, which was not good at all, and so it didn't help that relationship...

I Did the interest in your sexuality play out differently among the young men and the young women?

V Well see I think that it was pretty much evenly matched because all of the guys would think that it was a great laugh and they would say, 'Look out for the blonde one'... and ummmm and 'Her and the other girl well they're dykes they're doing this, this and this', and the other girls because of the fact that the school is quite
conservative, a lot of girls sort of (decided) I just won't speak to them now, and it wasn't like rude, it was this nice little chill and I just thought…

I And what do you reckon that was about, the nice little chill?

V It's sort of like we'll be seen with you but we'll let it be known that we're not that type...We'll be your friend as long as everyone knows that we are all 'normal' and (you're not)…

Violet has described how she was ‘out’ at school. Later in the interview she spoke about how the other students were surprised that she didn't 'look like a dyke'. Later in the interview Violet described how she ‘came out’ to her peers:

V Well a lot of people had a problem because they said 'But you don't look like a dyke'...You look straight. You look like a nice attractive straight girl. You don't look like some sort of butch you know the shaved head sort of butch pierced dyke...

I Yeah

V And because all through the earlier years of schooling, most of my friends were male, like I didn't have many female friends, because I found them too girlie and they used to irritate me…

I What was it about their girliness that irritated you?

V I don't want to sound ‘up myself’ or anything but it just did annoy me a lot of it...I just thought 'Oh God you're pathetic' and they just bandied around a lot and if someone threw some dirt at them they would just go, 'Oooooo'...And have this huge fit about it, and it was just inconsequential as far as anything that I held to be important…

I Mmmmm

V Yeah it just didn't hold any interest for me and I just thought that I'd rather hang around guys because I could have as much fun with them and I didn't have to worry about breaking a nail or getting dirty…

Violet then described how, as a result of questions, that she ‘came out’ to her peers:

V Yes 'cause someone said 'Are you going out with her?' and I said 'Yes'

I And what happened then?

V They just went ‘uhhh’
I And when was that?

V Oh that was about two years ago but then recently about two months ago I was talking to this guy who has recently started going out with a new girlfriend and he said that he wanted to talk about it and there were all of these other girls around and all of these other guys around going ‘OOoooo come on (who is your new girlfriend?)’...and I said, I'll tell you anything you like if you tell me who you are going out with?...and so he said 'Oh all right' and he said that her name was so and so and then he turned around to me and he said, 'So'...and I went 'Oooooo my question my question', he said, 'I want to know about you and 'Sally' - Did you two actually go out?' and I said 'Yes' and that was about two months ago and it is still sort of an 'Ooooo Oooooo' subject...

I Are things different now after making that statement?

V It didn't really affect those people that I hung around with because I wasn't prepared to hang around with people who were narrow minded...

I Are you aware of other gay, bi or lesbian students at your school? And how does being gay, bi or lesbian impact on a person’s experience at school?

V Ohhhh yeah...Mr X he gets bagged all the time and there are just rumours that go around the whole school 'So and so is the biggest faggot' and that sort of it's just strains of abuse without any reasoning it's not that he's an arsehole because he's done this or this or this it's just that he's an arsehole because he's gay...And he's got to have all of these things wrong with him...And there's a lot of bullying in the corridors and when you walk past they'll stand on each side of the corridor and as you walk they'll just push you from this side to that...

I And is that just general bullying?

V Yeah...It's on certain people and then it can be general too...

I And have you ever had any of that?

V I did have some of it last year when I would walk down the corridor and everyone would go 'Ooooo Lesbian'

I So the bullying was to do with their knowledge of you as lesbian?

V Yeah most of it is homophobic but they do it mostly to the guys because they want to actually...Well some of them are actually quite decent guys when you get them on their own...Ummmmmm...Because I'm female I wouldn't threaten them and so they're probably quite decent about it often...

I And has all of that stopped now?
V Yeah

I And how has that happened?

V Well a lot of people know that I've got a boyfriend now and so I'm ok...I'm back on the ‘normal’ track...Plus the girl that I mentioned before, who is really beautiful and ummm she is very popular as well and all of the guys are after her and she's been with a number of them, and so I was quite a good friend of hers and so the 'ultra populars' will come and talk to her and I'll be there and so I'll have a conversation and they'll think, 'Oh she's not bad she's pretty decent actually' and so I'll...Usually I'll walk through corridors with people that they'd consider to be alright because a lot of my friends are verging on the ‘non unpopular’ they're not indifferent they're completely popular they're quite well liked because they are quite decent people...

I So they have a bit of power?

V Yeah there is a big hierarchy at school it goes without saying and ummm I'm actually lucky enough to be friends with a number of people who are up the top so whenever I walk down the corridor with them nothing is going to be said no-one is going to care…

I And do you think that would be different if you 'looked like' a dyke?

V If I looked like a dyke I would get a lot more harassment

I Why?

V Ummm...Well...'M’ looks more like a dyke than I do and so she gets more harassment than I do generally because it's easy for them to say (about me) 'Oh she's got a boyfriend and she looks kind of decent and she looks straight' and like they actually do pick on me because I dress differently…

I Now with the 'She's got a boyfriend' why did that stop things?

V Well it didn't actually stop but most of the girls they were in denial as such and a lot of them had met him and he's very attractive, he's extremely attractive, and so they go 'Wooooo, Violet's got a bit of a sexy boy on her arm' and so it's now alright because I've got a male…

I Do you think that is to do with the fact that you are able to attract a good looking guy?
V  Mmmmm...The fact that I'm with...It doesn't matter how he got there or why he
got there it's the fact that he's there and the fact that I AM WITH A MALE
(emphasis on last 5 words)

The conversation then turned to the classroom again and Violet suggested that there was
a need for teacher's to act in subtle ways when dealing with harassment:

I  Now when there was the problem in the class and the teacher didn't really
respond what do you think should have happened there?

V  It depends on the actual situation and how the students are reacting...If they're
starting to get really out of hand then yes they should be asked to quieten down
but don't sort of be like (making a big fuss about it because a big fuss draws
attention)...If we have teachers looking after us and like favouritism then that is
going to bring more resentment onto us anyway so it is just going to make things
harder...You just need to be aware of the situation in the classroom and you just
need to be aware...If there is something going on and don't make it obvious I
mean if someone is irritating me or something don't say 'Don't irritate those two'
teacher voice) just say 'You're  disrupting the class'...As a whole you shouldn't
isolate the people because then you just get everyone turning around and going
well and look at you...

Violet also followed through this theme somewhat by suggesting that while there may be
limits to the quick fix that nevertheless there was a chance that mentioning gay, bi and
lesbian perspectives might have the effect of slowly changing attitudes:

V  If the adult who is giving the course (mentions it) attention will be paid, they
might sort of laugh it off but they would have got something out of it, they will
have taken something out of it and it will be in their head and they don't have
to...They don't have to admit to a single person that they got something out of
that, I mean even if it cleared up something for them...It just has to be available
for them to see it...Even if a discussion doesn't arise from it because of a certain
situation the subject should still be raised and there should be some information
given...

The conversation then briefly considered other strategies that might improve the school
experiences of same sex attracted young people:

I  In terms of overall strategies...

V  Well generally ummmmm having somebody to talk to was very useful and it was
really it does help...And there should be some punishment for those that are
constantly bullying...For instance in our school a boy was severely picked on and
every time he went to his locker his books were sort of pushed out and he was
pushed around and people would call him names and they'd walk past and bash
his books and he'd fall down and people would just laugh and his stuff would go
everywhere and they'd hit him and or whatever...Whenever he'd walk past and that needs to be dealt with it can't just be ignored it needs to be stated that: ‘This is not acceptable, we will not put up with this’...You have to have some sort of retribution for it because people aren't scared about it so they usually…

I So when people do act in a way that takes away other people's rights there needs to be a consequence that accrues?

V Yeah
Conversations – Part 5

Workshop Session 2
Instructions

Report of Key Themes
and Development of Strategies

Schools are legally charged with a duty of care to provide a safe and supportive environment for all students.

Workshop Session 2 should be facilitated a couple of weeks after Workshop Session 1. It is intended that this session targets ‘interested staff’. The facilitator’s reading material for ‘Workshop Session 2’ is a report that outlines a number of the key themes that emerged from the case study interviews and that works through some of the literature in the area. The report also details suggestions that same-sex attracted young people have made for school communities. The report is intended to be used as background reading material for the facilitator, as is my thesis (Crowhurst 2001). The report is included as Part 7.

Workshop Session 2 - Part 1 – Facilitator Led Workshop Presentation

A presentation based on the report is delivered by the facilitator. This should be done in as interactive a fashion as time allows (i.e. questions and discussion are to be encouraged). The ‘Conversations’ report should be copied and made available to participants to read after the session. The ‘Conversations’ OHT’s provided (part 8) outline some of the main areas to present and discuss.

The presentation and discussion should cover:

Labels
Statistics
Subject Content
Bullying
and Support.

I would suggest that the 'subject content', 'bullying' and 'support' transcript extracts provided be made into OHT's and that these be read aloud by the facilitator and that an fairly unstructured discussion be opened up.

Copies of other key reports, resources and youth supports that are available could also be introduced at this time. A resource table should be assembled for this purpose.
Workshop Session 2 - Part 2 Group Development of Interventions

After participants have listened to the presentation they are required to move into small groups.

The list of key themes developed during Workshop Session 1 are reintroduced at this point.

Participants are required to draw up a list of ‘do-able’ interventions organized around their key themes (bullying, subject content, support, etc). They are also asked to reflect on enablers and constraints and to develop strategies so that their interventions might be successfully implemented across the whole school community.

The facilitator asks each group to report back to the whole group. Small groups speak to one intervention and relate this back to one of the key themes.

The interventions of all small groups are then listed on the whiteboard and discussed.

The whole group is then asked to rank these in order from easiest to hardest and to undertake to do the 3 easiest interventions that have been developed.

Throughout this activity the facilitator stresses:

* That school communities have a duty of care to provide a safe and supportive environment for all students,

* That interventions are required on many different levels,

* That interventions are required across the whole school community,

* That while interventions will generate resistance they will also generate support,

* That forms of discrimination limit everyone's potential.

This activity takes about 60 - 90 minutes.

Workshop Session 2 – Part 3 - Follow up

The facilitator takes the responsibility to type up and circulate a summary of all of the interventions that the whole group develops.

A discussion of how successful participants have been in implementing interventions forms the basis of the next session if 'Conversations' is run over a series of weeks.
A Note on Ongoing Follow Up Sessions

Further follow up sessions (strategy development workshops) should be open to those members of staff who:

* Are interested in sexualities and schools,
* Have expertise in this or a related area,
* Actively support the work,
* Are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex or straight.

Hopefully by this stage in the process supportive and enthusiastic staff will have been identified and they will be eager to take responsibility for and to continue the work. ‘Conversations’ is a kit that is about capacity building and sustainability. Identifying and supporting enthusiastic staff to become aware and active, in the tradition of community development and critical pedagogy work, is one of the aims of this kit of materials and is the main way that change across whole school cultures occurs.
**Workshop Session 2**

**Interventions Activity Work Sheet for Small Groups**

In small groups you have identified key themes that emerged through the case study material that you have encountered. Using the following subheadings you are now asked to develop strategies in response to these key themes. You are also asked to rank your strategies from easiest (1) to hardest. You may find the list of student suggestions (in the report) helpful at this point.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Theme</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Enablers</th>
<th>Constraints</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From all of the strategies that you have devised select the 3 that are easiest to implement.

1

2

3

Hand this in with an email contact to receive a copy of all interventions:

1  Joe Bloggs – J.bloggs@hotmail.com
2
3
4
5
6

The facilitator takes on the responsibility of typing up and distributing (perhaps via email) a summary of all of the interventions that the whole group have developed.
Conversations
Part 6

The Key Concerns of Gay Lesbian and Bisexual Secondary School Students:
A Report to Support ‘Conversations’ Training.

Michael Crowhurst
Nov 2001
(slightly revised 2004)

Michael teaches on a sessional basis through the Australian Youth Research Centre, Department of Education Policy and Management, in the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne, and in the School of Education at RMIT. He is a Visiting Academic at the Australian Youth Research Centre. He also works as a community outreach worker in Aged Care, and with Adults and Young People with Intellectual and Psychiatric disabilities in community settings.

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I’d particularly like to acknowledge and thank the 10 young people who shared their stories with me.
The Key Concerns of Gay Lesbian and Bisexual Secondary School Students:  
A Report to Support ‘Conversations’ Training.  
(2001 slightly revised 2004)

Michael Crowhurst

Introduction

This report accompanies the conversation transcripts that form the basis of Workshop Session 1. The 10 edited transcripts are a record of conversations that I had with young people who identified as same-sex attracted in the mid to late 1990's.

I self-published one copy of these conversations under the ‘in progress’ title: ‘True Stories’ in 2001 and since that time I have used them (in a variety of situations), with over 2500 people. They work very effectively. I have made an earlier version of this report available to people who have participated in the ‘True Stories’ training since 2001. Here I have slightly revised the report and I re-edited the transcripts for a wider readership so that others who work in this area can download and use them.

This report focuses on the key concerns of 10 young people, who at the time the interviews were conducted were enrolled in Victorian Secondary schools. The young people identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual (GLB). I interviewed these young people as part of my Doctoral research (see Crowhurst 2001). I informed participants at the time that the ‘data’ that came out of the interviews would be used for the production of a thesis and for other written materials.

In relation to schools the participants identified three main areas of concern:

Subject content that was not inclusive of GLBT perspectives,
The need for anti-harassment policy,
And the need for support.

Participants also made suggestions, in relation to these areas of concern, that are tabled in this report.

The research project, that this report is based on, was largely informed by feminist and poststructural theory (see Davies 1993; 1994). Some of the main planks of these broad theoretical schools as they relate to research are that it should be: Collaborative: Responsive: And make a contribution to change (Harris 1996: 82).

Consequently, this report is written with the intention of making public the concerns and suggestions of participants, in order that these might be taken up and responded to by teachers and whole school communities in some way.
While the focus of my research was sexualities, and I didn’t set out to interview transgender young people, I did manage to interview one young person who, although he didn’t describe himself as transgender, did his gender in ’non-compliant’ ways (Hayes). This report will therefore also perhaps have some relevance to issues around young transgender (T) people. If I were beginning this work now I would also look for ways to include intersex perspectives (I).

Structure of the Report

The report begins with a brief survey of some demographic and related literature that considers the experiences of GLB or same-sex attracted young people (SSAY) in school and in other youth sector settings (see also Frere Jukes and Crowhurst 2001: 67-72). Following this the methodology that was used to conduct the research that the report is based on is outlined and briefly discussed. Key areas of concern are then identified and some suggestions made by the participants are tabled. Finally, a small number of recommendations are offered.

This report was first written in 2001 and looking at it again in 2004 I note that it focuses very heavily on ‘problems’. This accords with how the experiences of GLBTI young people in youth sector settings are often reported in the literature, and I feel that this is a fairly accurate part of the story of many GLBTI young people. Curran’s (2003) recent work however reminds us of the importance of not only focusing on ‘the negative’.

While there is much in the transcript conversations that is negative there is also a great deal of positive. The young people I interviewed are very powerful and resourceful. What makes them so? What strategies are they constructing to be so? What supports are enabling them to be so? If I was writing this report again from scratch in 2004 I would make sure that these sorts of issues were given more space in the text than they are here. I would make sure that discourses of constraint were balanced with discourses of expansion. This report however is largely how I wrote it in 2001 and I want to leave it that way.

Part 1: How many same-sex attracted young people (SSAY or GLB) are there?

It is difficult to know exactly how many same-sex attracted young people there are in Australia. The Australian Bureau of Statistics doesn't collect such demographic information, and I am unaware of any demographic information collected by an educational bureaucracy across Australia that includes information on sexual preference.

Researchers at La Trobe University's 'Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society' however, who have conducted a great deal of research focusing on sexuality, have routinely offered research participants the opportunity to provide information about sexual preference. They have found that:

'a significant minority of young people are not unequivocally heterosexual, with numbers ranging between 8 and 11%.'
It is interesting for a moment to consider the number of students that this figure represents. In February 2000, for instance, there were 350,917 students enrolled in government and non-government secondary schools across Victoria (Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training, 2000: 17). Using Hillier et al's research findings, this would indicate that in the year 2000 that there could have been between 28,073 - 38,600 same-sex attracted young people enrolled in a secondary school in Victoria (see also Frere, Jukes & Crowhurst, 2001: 21).

School Experiences

There is a growing body of academic literature:

That documents and attempts to theorise the experiences of GLBTI young people,

That considers questions regarding education, sexualities and gender identities,

And that reports on instances of discrimination targeting GLBTI young people in educative and other youth sector settings.

The following brief selection of Australian and International literature is of particular relevance in this regard.

In 1978, The Melbourne Gay Teachers and Students Group (MGTSG), published 'Young Gay and Proud' (MGTSG, 1978a). Gary Jaynes, who was involved in the production of the materials, discusses the circumstances that surrounded the production of the materials and why they were needed. He writes that the MGTSG sought to 'actively oppose heterosexism and sexism in the education system' (Jaynes, 2000: 8). The MGTSG's aim is some indication, in the absence of any research conducted in the 70's, that the school experiences of GLBTI young people in schools, and the tertiary sector during that time were less than satisfactory.


The report considers a wide range of issues relating to secondary schools (NSW ADB 1982: 526-65). The report’s findings are based on the responses of 18 participants who had recently been students (p. 528) and includes the following extracts:

It was just a constant case of bantering and jokes and ridicule. These reactions came from the other kids. It's hard to say how many - the majority of them, I suppose, especially in my form.
The teachers seemed to be unaware of what was going on (p. 529).

I was subject to frequent cat-calls, abusive remarks, direct and indirect jokes. Hundreds of kids took part. I was the most visible homosexual at the school at that time and I was referred to as 'that poofter' (p. 530).

I was one of 3 boys who were set upon by 34 other kids and bashed, while we were supposed to be playing basketball at the gym (p. 530).

The extracts suggest that the school experiences of the respondents in the early 1980's and late 1970's were problematic. What is worrying about these extracts is that the stories that are told here echo those of the young people currently enrolled in Victorian secondary schools as reported in the literature.

In 1994 the Melbourne based activist group 'GLAD' (Gay Men and Lesbians Against Discrimination) produced a report entitled 'Not A Day Goes By'. It is based on a sample of 1002 respondents and provides a snapshot of the nature and extent of discrimination, harassment and violence reported by respondents in the early 1990's (GLAD 1994: 5). One section of the report considers educative settings. The authors report that 28% of lesbians and 25% of gay men had experienced harassment while at school or university (GLAD 1994: 9). The authors also report that there is 'a common theme (that) emerges of respondents being unhappy and uncomfortable during their years of education' (GLAD 1994: 9).

The 1990's has seen a proliferation of academic and other writings focusing on the experiences of GLBT(I) young people in schools and other youth sector settings from within and beyond Australia (see Epstein (ed) 1994; Epstein and Johnson 1998; Epstein and Sears 1999; Harbeck (ed) 1992; Laskey and Beavis (eds) 1996; Mac An Ghaill 1994; Unks (ed) 1995; Wyn (ed) 1999). Many of the themes that emerge in the earlier literature, to do with young people's experiences of discrimination and constraint, continue to be evident in the more contemporary literature. Themes relating to subject content and to broader school cultures that impact in negative ways on same-sex attracted young people also continue to be prevalent. Reports of widespread harassment, bullying and discrimination coupled with a paucity of support services are also frequently referred to and echo earlier times (see Crowhurst 1993; 1999: 2001).

In 1998 researchers at The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, published the groundbreaking 'Writing Themselves In', based on a survey of 750 same-sex attracted young people aged between 14 and 21 (Hillier et al 1988: 1). The research uncovered, (echoing the GLAD report), that one third of the respondents had been discriminated against because of their sexuality with 46% indicating that they had been verbally abused (Hillier et al 1988: 2-3, 33).
'Writing Themselves In' identifies school as being *the* place where young people were most at risk of abuse (Hillier et al 1988: 2, 33). The writers report that:

More young people (70%) were abused at school than anywhere else, with other students being the perpetrators for 60% of abuse cases. Ten percent had been abused by family members. Verbal and physical abuse had a profound effect on these young people. It affected their feelings of safety at home and at school and was related to the use of drugs and a reduction in their sense of well-being. (Hillier at al 1998: 3, 71).

The researchers continue that:

During past research projects, we have observed that many young people display overtly homophobic attitudes. Anyone suspected of being same-sex attracted may be threatened, assaulted and excluded from activities by peers, particularly in the school environment' (Hillier et al 1988: 33).

In a number of articles that have been published drawing on the data from their 1998 study, the authors further highlight the often problematic school experiences of same-sex attracted young people (see Hillier, Dempsey and Harrison, 2000: 15-23; Hillier, Harrison and Dempsey 1999: 59-74).

Ray Misson (1999), Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli (1996) and Wayne Martino (1999) have all written widely about how teachers and school communities might respond to the harassment and discrimination that GLBTI young people often encounter in schools and about how school communities might begin to nurture and support sexual diversity. Their work, over many years, has been and continues to be, an attempt to address the discrimination that they are aware of and that the literature highlights (see also Telford 1997 and Glynn 1999).

In 2000, The ‘Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby’ (VGLRL) published ‘Enough is Enough’, which sought to replicate the GLAD research referred to earlier. This report documents the nature and extent of discrimination and abuse experienced by GLBT people in Victoria in the late 1990's, and contains a section that focuses on education (VGLRL 2000: 46-9). The report draws on data provided by 929 respondents (VGLRL 2000: 1). The writer (Deborah Dempsey) reports that:

* 26% of participants reported discrimination or abuse related to their education,

* Harassment by teachers and other students was the most commonly cited type of incident,
* Men were more likely to report experiences of school-based harassment than women or transgender participants,

* These incidents ranged from non-directive homophobic comments aired in the course of classroom activities to serious verbal or physical assaults sustained over a number of years. In some instances, participants reported that the abuse occurred with the full knowledge, and even the involvement of teachers,

* The invisibility of LGBT issues in the sex education curricula of schools was often raised in the qualitative data as a cause for concern.

\[(\text{VGLRL 2000: 46})\]

(The literature reviewed above offers a selective survey of the literature in this area - for a more detailed account refer to the bibliography where other relevant literature is listed even though it may not be directly cited in this report.)

As indicated above, 'Writing Themselves In' suggests that school is the most dangerous place for a same-sex attracted young person to be. The research that this report is based on supports such findings.

Participants all indicated that they had witnessed homophobic harassment, or experienced it first hand within the schools that they had attended. All of the participants indicated that at school they had to be careful to monitor their sexuality in ways that they did not have to be concerned about elsewhere. School, on the whole, wasn’t a place where they felt safe.

What is so disturbing about all of this, is that even with the explosion of activity and research around sexuality and gender issues that has occurred in Victoria of late, that Educational Bureaucracies in this State are yet to produce a single policy statement that offers specific support for work that might support GLBTI young people in schools (see Gregoriades, Hughes, Piscioneri, Rajit & Rees 2002). While there are indeed broad welfare policy frameworks that can be appropriated to support such work (see for instance Vic Dept Of Education1998; Seal 2003: pt 2) the fact remains that the Department has been very slow to act in relation to sexuality and gender issues in any focused way at all.

The inaction and complacency of Victorian Education Departments, as bureaucratic structures, in this regard, I believe could represent a breach of their duty of care to GLBTI young people and further may demonstrate an instance of systemic discrimination (see also Hillier, Harrison and Dempsey 1998). It is important that Education Departments engage in formal dialogue with GLBTI people (particularly young people -
see Holdsworth 2003; Wierenga et al 2003) to set about developing collaborative responses to issues around gender and sexual diversity (see Crowhurst 2002b).

Oppressive social practices, such as those reported in the literature are not expressions of innate attributes. Forms of abuse, such as homophobic abuse, are enacted by people within contexts that overtly and covertly support such behaviours (see Butler 1998: 80). It is important therefore to reflect on changes that might be made across whole school cultures that might minimize homophobic behaviours, and further to reflect on changes that might encourage the expansion of alternative behaviours, that in turn might enhance the well-being (see Leonard 2002) of GLBTI secondary school students.

It is important to recognize the cultural dimensions of homophobic violence and to work accordingly. Cultural contexts that are not supportive of sexual and gender diversity generate homophobic and transphobic violence. We need to become more aware that cultural contexts that ‘normalize’ those constructed as similar, and that ‘other’ those who are constructed as ‘different’, generate great harm.

Over the longer term it is just as important to work with students and school communities in risky and far more radical ways in order to unpack, critique and rupture, limiting and oppressive social practices as they occur beyond the school. It is important to involve young people and their school communities in radical cultural critique, and to support young people and school communities as they embark on the work of making change, and supporting diversity in the broader culture.

These types of work are need to be unambiguously supported with internally developed Departmental policy and such policy needs to be supported with adequate resources if it is to be effective and sustained over the longer term.

Part 2: Methodology

Research influenced by feminist poststructural theory, in attempting to promote change, seeks to avoid the temptation of being overly prescriptive. And further, such theory suggests that people who experience systems as oppressive should play a central role in working towards change, by guiding the direction that change should take (see Holdsworth 2003; Wierenga et al 2003; WHO 1986). 'Experts' should not impose change on people. Change should happen in a collaborative manner. Change should be an effect of a collaborative process (see Freire 1990).

In this report therefore I will focus on the suggestions and key concerns of participants and the themes that emerged in the interviews in order that they might offer some direction and focus for practitioners as far as how change might proceed in this area. First I will briefly outline the research methodology that was used to arrive at these key concerns.

As with all research conducted at Melbourne University this project was approved by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee (Arts/Education). It was very difficult to
get this research approved through Ethics and this would not have happened I believe without the support of Professor Johanna Wyn and Associate Professor Peter Dwyer.

The ideas that I have briefly elaborated on above led to a research design that was very focused, involving in-depth interviews with a small sample of participants. Pragmatically this was also necessitated because based on experience, I imagined that it would be virtually impossible to access a larger sample of same-sex attracted young people to interview face to face. The research design involved conducting interviews with 10 same-sex attracted young people.

The interviews were conducted during 1996-98. I approached queer youth support services and asked if there were any gay, lesbian or bisexual young people that would be interested in participating in the research project. A number of young people indicated interest. Ten young people who identified as same-sex attracted were interviewed for this project. The participants ranged in ages from 14-18, and all were currently attending a secondary school at the time of the interview. They came from rural, semi-rural and city locations. They attended single-sex and co-educational settings. They attended State and Catholic schools. I informed participants that the ‘data’ that they provided would be used to write a thesis and other publications.

The Sample

It was not possible, at the time of conducting the interviews (1996-8), to access same-sex attracted young people within school settings in a direct manner for a variety of reasons.

As I was in the process of conducting the research however, I was fortunate to make contact with one teacher who had established an informal, and unacknowledged support network within her school (see also Mac an Ghaill 1994: 154). She told the students who attended the group about the research that I was undertaking. Two of the students who attended this support group indicated that they would like to be part of the project. It would appear that there are students within schools who are eager to be a part of such research processes.

The remainder of the participants were all members of queer youth support services that were in operation at the time that the interviews took place; or were the children of parents who attended a support group for the parents of queer young people.

When I began conducting the research there were four queer young people's support groups in operation across Victoria (there are currently many more see www.ssafeschools.org.au). Each of these four groups were funded, and operated, outside of the school system. The group that specifically offered support and counselling to young lesbian women was run by young lesbian volunteers and received no Government funding, support or guidance whatsoever.
This imposed a limit on the number of young people that I could interview within any one service, as workers or volunteers were quite rightfully reluctant to turn the young people who attended their support groups into 'objects' to be researched.

The youth workers who assisted in gathering the ‘data’, via the access to young people that they facilitated, were very supportive of the project and without their assistance accessing same-sex attracted young people would have been impossible at the time that I conducted the interviews. It took 18 months to find 10 young people, who identified as same-sex attracted, and who were currently enrolled in a secondary school in Victoria, to interview face to face.

Face to Face Interviews

Much research in the area of queer school experience has involved:

- The use of adults who have offered retrospective accounts of their school experiences (see Crowhurst 1993),
- The observation of school situations where issues regarding queer sexuality have surfaced as a side issue, by 'accident', or at the instigation of queer students who found themselves within the research (see Walker 1988: 52-5; Mac an Ghaill 1994: 154, 173),
- The collection of written material via the internet or questionnaire (Hillier et al 1998: 11).

While such research has been, and continues to be, very useful indeed, I intentionally set out to interview queer secondary school students face to face, as the main focus of the research. The ‘data’ that forms the basis of this report is as a consequence I believe, quite unusual.

The interviews ranged from 60-90 minutes and were audio taped. Most of the interviews were conducted at Melbourne University or at the youth support service that the young person attended. Two of the interviews were conducted in the family home.

Within a month of the interview, participants were given a transcript and asked to edit the material. I asked them to add to the material if they wanted to further clarify an issue or to mention something that they had forgotten to mention or felt strongly about (on a separate sheet). I also reminded them that they could edit out material that they had disclosed that they subsequently felt uncomfortable about (see Ely, Vinz, Anzul, and Downing 1997: 356-8; Mac an Ghaill 1994: 173-4). Participants were informed that I would then edit the transcript material further and that the edited transcripts would be used as the basis for various publications.

Participants were reminded throughout the process that they were free to withdraw consent at any time prior to publication. Participants were also given a debriefing sheet
that provided information relating to support services should the interview upset them in any way.

The interviews followed a semi-structured interview format (see Crowhurst 1993: 41; Mac an Ghaill 1994: 5). At the beginning of each interview I gave participants a focus question sheet and explained that they could discard this if they chose to, and that there was no obligation to answer any of the questions that were listed. The question focus sheet considered: Subject Information, Curriculum (subject content), Peers, Teachers, School Administration and Suggestions for Improvement.

Using this methodology allowed for open-ended answers to questions and further, for participants to digress from the prepared questions and discuss issues that were of particular relevance to them (for 'open interviews' see Redman 1999: 132-134). I approached the interviewing process as flexibly as I could. I followed the participant's lead and sought clarification where I needed to or where what the participant said interested me (see Redman 1999: 134). This meant that sometimes that the participants would do likewise, that they would also ask me questions (on 'equalizing' the research experience see Ely, Vinz, Anzul, and Downing 1997: 316-20). I attempted to construct an interview process that was as close to a conversational space as possible.

By allowing participants to guide the discussion I also intended to create a space where the 'data' was a record of their experiences rather than a record of answers to questions that would reflect my own preoccupations or values. And in fact, a great deal of what I found to be of the most interest, came about as a result of asides or digression where participants strayed from the pre-structured areas of investigation and spoke about issues that were relevant to them or that they felt angry about. The interview space functioned in a 'dialogic' fashion (Britzman 1995: 1998; Martino 1999; Redman 1999: 148).

The process of conducting the interviews was enjoyable and engaging. The interviews generated 100 000 words of transcript material (the edited form of which makes up part 4 of this resource). This material was so rich in themes, so diverse and complex, that it is surprising to me that I was able to identify 3 key themes through it at all. Nevertheless, there were a number of key themes that emerged through the conversations that were particularly relevant to the work of teaching and that resonated through each of the interviews. I will now turn to consider these themes.

Part 3: Findings - The Key Themes

The Participants identified 3 key issues or areas of concern that are of particular relevance to schools:

* Value Laden Subject Content;

* The Need for Anti-Harassment Policy and Attention to Bullying;

* The Need for Support.
Key Concern 1 - Subject Content

The following extracts are a sample of what participants said about the subject content that they had encountered at secondary school.

Louise is 18, is a VCE student in Year 12 and attends a Catholic school and in relation to subject content she said:

Louise  Well...It's not really spoken about in any classes or anything...Ummmm...Actually this year in English we did a book and there was a lesbian in it but I haven't actually read the book I think that it was just mentioned that she was a lesbian you didn't find out through anything that she did, but when the class found out, when the teacher pointed it out that she was a lesbian everyone was like 'Oh gross'...The teacher was like 'Come on what's your problem' because there was like one girl in class who just kept on and on about 'she's a lesbian' and the teacher was like 'Get over it there are lesbians in society move on'...So the teacher was good but...

Dante is 18, is a VCE student, he is in year 12 and attends a Catholic school. When asked about subject content he said:

Dante  The only time anything about being gay was ever mentioned...As with any other time that sex is ever mentioned you learn about anatomy not about sex(uality)...I was in year 10 and ummmmm...Our teacher was talking to us about drugs and the only thing he goes was: 'Don't start Heroin because you end up selling your bum'...And Ummmm...You know around ‘beats’ and stuff and that was all I can remember about our teachers ever walking into a classroom (and) saying anything about being gay or anything like that...(I) was never taught anything about it...

M.C.  What class was that in?

Dante  That was in RE.
The participant's comments echo findings reported by Hillier et al, which suggest that for many GLBTI young people that queer perspectives are often missing from the sex education (and other) courses that they encounter in school (Hillier et al 1998: 61-6). They also support what I have reported in earlier work (Crowhurst 1993: 46-8).

The participants, as well as identifying absences in subject content, also identify that they were subject to discourses, in the form of subject content, that demeaned same-sex sexualities. They identify that they were subject to discourses that in overt and in covert ways attempted to limit what it was possible for them to be within the context of the school that they attended.

Wayne Martino, drawing on the work of Britzman, describes such discourse as discourse that 'others' (1999: 138-149). He also identifies, perhaps more importantly, that what is also occurring in moments where GLBTI subjects are 'othered', is the simultaneous positioning of heterosexuality as that which is 'not other', as that which is 'normal' or 'natural'. Martino suggests that discourses that 'other' are an effect of obvious and subtle processes (see also Crowhurst 2002a). He suggests that it is important to think about how such discourses work and how they achieve the effects that they do in order to undo them.

Rupturing such discourse requires that we work in 'multiple and in layered' (see Grosz 1988) ways including:

- That subject content is constructed such that it is inclusive of a diversity of sexualities and gender identities,
- That subject contents that position GLBTI subjectivities as 'other' be identified, named and analysed,
- That homophobic discourses that position same-sex sexualities (and transgender subjects) as un-natural or as evil be named as homophobic or transphobic and rejected,
- That heterosexist discourses that privilege heterosexualities be identified and resisted,
- That discourses that subtly construct and position heterosexuality as 'the norm' be identified, named, analysed and interrupted,
- That the cultural factors that govern the production of 'heteroprivilegist' knowledges be analysed and interrupted (see Crowhurst 2001: 30-48, Crowhurst 2002a).

The Participants made many further interesting comments about and suggestions in relation to the subject content that they had encountered in secondary school.
Nine of the ten young people interviewed said that schools should provide young people with information about a diversity of sexualities (see Mac an Ghaill 1994: 158). Young people wanted factual information but they also drew a distinction between information about ‘sex’ and information about ‘sexuality’. Young people wanted to discuss a range of sexualities and they saw ‘sexuality’ as being more complex than ‘sex’.

While they requested more ‘information’ they also called for more ‘education’. The participants indicated that they wanted to discuss and study sexuality and that this should encompass not only information about body parts and puberty and such, but that it should also entail a consideration of a diversity of complex emotions and relationships. Young people indicated that they wanted a more complex sexuality education program than they had been subjected to. And this I believe is what they are drawing attention to by marking out a distinction between 'information' and 'education' (see Mac an Ghaill 1994: 156).

Repeatedly the point was made that where class discussions or content focused on sex or sexuality that such discussions or content invariably focused on or assumed heterosexuality. This was particularly so in Sex Ed classes. Generally, the participants said that there was an absence of any discussion about same-sex sex in Sex Ed classes (see Hillier, Dempsey, Harrison, Beale, Matthews and Rosenthal 1998: 61-5).

Generally, the participants were angry and annoyed about the absence of same-sex perspectives in subject content and suggested specifically that sexuality education needs to be broader in focus and that such education should include non-heterosexual perspectives.

Participants also indicated that when non-heterosexual expressions of sexuality were considered that often the class would become disruptive or the teacher would avoid any detailed discussion. Teachers and school communities needed to reflect on and develop strategies to manage this.

Where participants did have a chance to discuss issues relevant to same-sex sexualities this was often at their own instigation or an effect of their choice to pursue a particular topic or write an assessable piece of work focusing on a queer theme. This was usually a positive experience.
The participants demonstrated an awareness that non-heterosexual perspectives were relevant to include in subject areas other than Sex Ed.

Generally participants suggested that there was an assumption of heterosexuality that framed the subject content that they had encountered in secondary school and that educators needed to rupture this. To this end they suggested:

* The need for subject curricula across the whole school to reflect a diversity of sexualities (and gender identities).

* Many participants suggested that such ‘education’ should start in primary school or in Years 7 or 8.

* Some participants also spoke of the need for more diversity in written texts specifically referring to school library collections.

One theme that emerged through the research in relation to the conscious ‘queering’ of subject content was the active role that participants sometimes took in this regard and the resistance that they sometimes encountered from teachers as they did so. Consider the comments of James (15, Year 10, State School, gay) in this regard:

James: Well I don't think any subjects really do touch on gay or lesbian students or experiences at all...But...I have brought the topic up but they've said: 'No we don't want to talk about it because there's just not enough gay and lesbian students’

M.C: So who did you bring that up with?

James: I brought it up twice with my History teacher last year and yeah he said, ‘We can't or I think we don't have enough time to talk about it or touch on it’ so

M.C: How did you feel about that?

James: I'm not happy about that at all I think that we should be studying gay and lesbian subjects or that we should be touching on homosexual subjects within each subject

Veronica (16, Year 12, State school) also made some very interesting points about consciously actively shaping subject content and the resistance that she had encountered in the process. Consider her comments:
Veronica: Ummmm...What was it?...IVF programs, and I brought some articles in about same-sex couples wanting a child and the teacher said 'I really think that is disgusting...If they want a child why don't they just go with a woman or a man'...And I just got so infuriated at (her)...

I: So the teacher actually said that?

Veronica: Yes...In front of the class

I: And how did you respond seeing as you had brought in the article?

Veronica: I just started arguing for it...And the teacher she still couldn't understand it...They'd never say anything about two white couples adopting a black child but yet when it's same-sex issues, they do not allow it...

James and Veronica have both attempted to consciously 'queer' the subject content that they encountered at school. They have attempted to broaden it and in doing so to expand the subject content choices that all members of the class have the opportunity to make. And in the process they also highlight the importance (in thinking about change), of reflecting on the cultural or contextual factors that govern the production of knowledges in classrooms.

While it is important that teachers do make a conscious effort to say, to include, the words lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex in the classroom, it is also important that school communities consider the factors that are operating within classrooms, and across the school community, that mean that such words are often omitted from subject content in the first place. What is it about classrooms and schooling that means that teachers and students often construct subject contents that erase GLBTI perspectives?

What are the factors that are governing the production of knowledges in classrooms (see Britzman 1998; Butler 1997; Davies 1993; 1994; Foucault 1991) that mean that heterosexuality is often constructed as the (often) unspoken 'norm' and that all other forms of sexuality (and gender identity) are constructed as 'other'? The relative positioning of teachers and students and the way that teachers and school systems often exert control over processes of learning is, I would suggest, one factor that is important to consider in this regard.

The construction of democratic classroom spaces (see AYRC & VDEET 2000) is one crucial element to consider in relation to the construction of school cultures that are affirming of sexual diversity.

Key Concern 2 - Bullying (the need for anti-harassment policy)

Concerns around bullying were also identified by participants as a key concern. The following extracts are a sample of what participants said about bullying and by implication and explicitly about the importance of schools writing anti-harassment policies that are inclusive of sexuality. Kelvin (15, Year 9, State, co-ed, outer suburbs Melbourne, gay) for instance, in the context of a discussion about how sexuality functions, through gender as a series of cultural practices that police the body said:

I In relation to all that we’ve been talking about...What do you change about yourself? What don't you change about yourself? Do you change anything about yourself?

K It just depends on the situation...Well sometimes I change my voice...Sometimes you have to change the way that you walk and stuff and not just the tone of your voice but the way that you talk...

I And what is motivating you to do that? Why do you want to do that?

K Ummm...I don't really like it but I just know that I have to because if they find out about me then ummmm what am I going to do? I'll have to leave school probably…

I So you'd be scared or fearful of the reaction of other people at your school? What would you be fearful of there?

K Ummm...Probably...I know I'd get bashed...

I So physical violence?

K Yeah...Verbal doesn't worry me but I know I'd definitely get bashed up

Kelvin understands the message that has been communicated to him at the school that he attends: ‘Don't be too expansive about the way that you do your gender because if you are that will be interpreted as proof that you are gay and you will then be targeted by homophobic social practices’.
Louise (18, Year 12, Catholic, 7-12, co-ed, outer-suburban school), like all of the other participants, made similar comments. She described a situation where a young woman is discriminated against because the way she looks is an indication that she might be a lesbian. Consider the following extract:

I Are you 'out' to other students?...Do you know any other lesbians?

L Well I'm only 'out' to one girl at school and that was pretty recently...But apart from that like apparently there are a few bi-sexual people at school but ummm...

I Apparently?

L Oh well they never told me...It's just rumoured

I What is the basis of the rumours?

L Oh well one girl I guess she looks a bit 'butch' or something but ...If someone's different...

I A bit 'butch'?

L Winter uniform you can wear a skirt or pants and she always wears pants...You know things like that...You know...I remember during mid-year exams one girl had to sit next to this supposed lesbian and she came out of the classroom and said to all of us: 'Oh I had to sit next to so and so she's such a dyke', with a lot of disgust in her voice that she had to sit next to her, not even next to because the desk was separated so...

I There is an idea circulating about 'butchness' and what do you think that is to do with?

L Oh just stereotyping...The short hair-ed bleached dyke sort of thing...Just the appearance...

I Would the response of the young woman who refused to sit next to a woman that she described as 'butch' be typical?

L Oh yeah

I How many 'butch' girls are there and would they encounter that sort of treatment often?

L There would be a couple...maybe 2
I Has that ever happened to you?

L No yeah...Occasionally

I What does it mean to be labelled as 'butch'?

L Ummm...

I Is it a comment about sexuality or is it a comment (about gender)?

L It's just a hateful thing...I guess it's about sexuality too it's about 'yuk I don't want to associate with you...Because you're different'

All of the participants reported that they were subject to bullying or harassment or that they had witnessed it first hand. All of the participants spoke angrily about what they perceived to be a lack of attention paid to bullying based on sexual orientation or the suspicion of being same-sex attracted. Many participants indicated that bullying or harassment was more likely to occur where the individual concerned was considered to be ‘gender non-compliant’. The participants made the following comments and suggestions about bullying.

* Many participants spoke of the need for anti-harassment policy that was inclusive of sexuality. They were very clear that where an individual was harassed or bullied that they should have recourse to action and that the school, as an institution, should support the victim of such harassment by curbing the actions of perpetrators.

* Some participants indicated however, an awareness of the limits of policy in the absence of any other work to support sexual diversity. Most participants clearly saw the need for schools to work in a structural fashion to promote and facilitate attitudinal change. Most participants were therefore speaking in concert with the academic literature which is also clear regarding the need to work contextually to reduce harassment of whatever kind (see Butler 1998).

* Some participants were very annoyed that where they had been bullied, that they were positioned as the one with ‘the problem’ and sent for counselling. While they were thankful for the support they recognized that the perpetrators of the bullying should also be required to work through their problem with a counsellor.

* One participant suggested the need for such policy to be addressed and for such policy to be advertised formally at a school assembly.
He suggested, that this would lend institutional weight to anti-harassment policies focusing on sexuality and put such policies on the same footing as existing policy dealing with harassment on the basis of gender, ethnicity or religion (see Hillier, Dempsey and Harrison 2000: 22).

* Participants said that where such policy was in place that it should be enforced.

* Many participants also stated that where complaints were made that they should be documented, responded to and taken seriously.

It is important that harassment is addressed and that where it occurs that policy and procedures that aim to stop such behaviours are put in place. GLBTI young people in schools have a right to a safe and supportive environment, free of harassment and schools have a duty of care to ensure that this is so (Hillier et al 1999). There is a need to curb and limit harassment, where it occurs (see Ollis, Mitchell, Watson, Hillier, & Walsh 2001). It is also important to note that such bullying and harassment does not only target GLBTI young people. All young people, whatever their sexuality, are limited by oppressive social practices that target bodies that are positioned (for whatever reason) as different.

As with issues around subject content however there is a need to reflect on the cultural or contextual factors that support bullying and harassment and that mean that it happens in the first instance (see Britzman 1998; Butler 1997; Davies 1993; 1994; Foucault 1991). There is not a simple or single answer to this question but the writings of theorists such as Edelman (1994) bring a degree of clarity to a complex and multilayered problem.

Edelman highlights and draws out the connections that exist between gender and sexuality. We read and do sexuality through categories such as gender (see Crowhurst 2001: 154-68). Young people who are read by others as 'too butch' or 'too camp' run the risk of being bullied because to be read as such is to be read as, or to be suspected of being queer (see also Misson 1996: 124). While it is imperative that schools enact policy that specifically limits the actions of homophobic bullies and names such behaviour as unacceptable there is a need to recognize and unpack the factors that facilitate and fuel such behaviours in the first instance. Unpacking just why it is that we need to be certain about the bodies that we are in relationship with is important work in this regard, and getting used to being uncertain about unfamiliar bodies equally so (see Crowhurst 2001: 169-204).

Work around the gendered meanings of bodies (that takes on the linkages between sexuality and gender) and work that aims to unpack and understand the ways that, and the reasons why, gender is so heavily policed in schools is crucial if school cultures are to become spaces that are affirming of sexual diversity, and spaces where GLBTI young people, or any young person who does their gender in a 'different' way is going to be safe.
It is also imperative that the Victorian Department of Education track and report on whether schools have such policies in place or not and that such information be made available to the public.

**Key Concern 3 - The Need for Support**

The final key concern that I have constructed out of the research is to do with the importance of support. Many participants spoke about the importance of support, and all of the participants were in contact with one form of support or another. When I asked James (15, gay, year 10, co-ed State school) what he would change at his school that might benefit GLBTI young people he said:

I  Any other things apart from curriculum that might be (useful)?

J  Maybe just a gay group or something at school...But...

I  There are problems with gay groups at school...How is it a problem?

J  Yeah...Then other people would assume that you're going along to the group you must be gay...

I  So how could they be overcome?

J  Just have a teacher...Who does gay stuff...

I  A designated teacher...Maybe not a gay and lesbian officer but someone like the Equal Opportunity Officer...?

J  Yeah

I  And how would people find out about that?

J  Well you could just put it up on the notice board or something...If it was just a normal teacher then there wouldn't be problems and stuff...

The conversation then turned to support groups outside of the school. James spoke about the group that he had attended:

I  How helpful has that group been?

J  It's been great...Meeting other gay people...Yeah...Getting to know other gay people as well not being surrounded by straight people as well it's totally different...
I And it's just freer...

J You can act how you want to act and be who you want to be and they don't care...

I So it's not an issue...If that group was run in the school that you attend?

J I'd probably still go anyway...'Cause since I'm 'out' I don't care what people say at the moment...So it's just fine with me...Mmmm

I So...Some sort of service beyond the school or within the school...A contact person...?

J Maybe phone numbers for gay kids...Gay teenagers

I On a poster or something?

J Because there's nothing at my school at all...

Michelle Fine and Corrine Bertram discussing what such spaces often facilitate borrow the label 'free spaces' from Evans and Boyte, and suggest that such spaces are those 'in which historically marginalized youth and adults can reclaim identities...(and)...sculpt real and imaginary spaces for peace, solace, communion, (and) personal and collective work...' (Fine and Bertram 1999: 157-9). Free Spaces are places where we can be and become who we want to be, they are places where we can meet others who are interested in taking up space in the world in expansive ways and where we can offer respect to others and experience being respected ourselves as we go about doing such work. Free spaces function best when they are structurally supported.

Fine and Bertram suggest that 'free spaces' are often not labelled 'youth support group', and that many spaces can serve this function. Teachers and school systems might begin to identify and nurture such spaces within their communities. They might also support queer young people to find and to access spaces that are supportive of and that celebrate sexual and gender diversity beyond the school community (see www.ssafeschools.org.au).

Many other participants spoke of the need for and of the importance of ‘Support’. They often spoke about how beneficial it had been for them to be able ‘to talk to somebody’. Sometimes the support they spoke about was offered in the form of counselling and other times it was offered in the form of a ‘support group’.

The support groups that the participants spoke about functioned in a variety of fashions and in a variety of locations. Some were conducted inside the school and others beyond the school boundary. Support groups are a very important mechanism in relation to
affirming and supporting diversity. The following points highlight some of the main findings about the participants in relation to their access to and use of supports.

* All of the participants were in contact with a support group of one form or another.

* Most of the participants, to varying degrees, were supported by parents. One participant however had been thrown out of home, and was homeless, because he identified as gay.

* One of the support groups was ‘informal’ and operated within a school. The teacher who ran it didn’t advertise it and students who were part of it became aware of it as a result of talking to the teacher that facilitated it. The reason that the group operated in a ‘quiet fashion’ was so that it wouldn’t receive any negative attention that might jeopardise its existence. The students who spoke about this group said that it had been very beneficial in the sense that it had reduced their feelings of isolation and had also contributed to making them feel stronger in the face of homophobic harassment.

* Most participants had disclosed information about their sexuality to a teacher at school. And most of the participants were able to obtain support from that teacher. Participants indicated that this was something that they found to be beneficial.

* The rest of the participants attended support groups that operated beyond the school. Many discussed why they felt this was necessary suggesting that having such a group at the school might mean a greater risk of general levels of harassment, because individuals might be ‘outed’ by attending such a group, and then become the target of such harassment.

* One participant, who was ‘out’ at school said he would attend a support group regardless of whether it ran inside or outside of the school (despite the risk), because of the benefits of attending such a group.

* Another participant said that she felt stronger in the face of homophobic comments as a result of the support group that she attended that operated at her school.

Participants felt that it was very important that queer young people have access to some form of support. To that end participants suggested that:

* Information about support groups should be available to students.
* That this information might be made available in the form of a poster.

* That this poster should be displayed in a prominent, high use area in the school and that it should be under glass to avoid vandalism.

* That the poster should contain a phone number in print large enough to enable it to be read at a distance.

* One participant suggested that the poster could advertise ‘The Gay and Lesbian Switchboard’, where young people might access: free, anonymous phone counselling, information, and where they might be referred to appropriate services.

* One participant suggested that a notice board where students could anonymously ask questions (via a question box for example), and where information could be made available in a written form in response, might be a mechanism of providing information about support services.

* One participant suggested that information about support services might also be made available to students as part of a school assembly at the start of the year (or at various times throughout the year).

* The same participant suggested that information about support services could also be provided to students in a written format by the school at the start of the school year. Perhaps such information could be included on a newsletter which could be distributed to the whole school community. Perhaps a small business card that listed various supports could also be produced.

* Participants also suggested that where a student initiated contact with a school counsellor that confidentiality should be respected and that relevant information should be made available.

* Participants indicated that the availability of ‘one to one’ counselling was important. To this end they suggested that a person within the school should be advertised as being available to talk to about issues relating to sexuality.

* They also suggested that information should be made available for students to contact a person outside of the school, where they didn’t feel comfortable or safe enough to do so inside the school (the aforementioned poster might serve this purpose).
* One participant suggested that schools should seek to hire gay and lesbian teachers because they could act as ‘role models’ and would perhaps appear to be more approachable.

* While participants were in support of ‘one to one’ counselling (to off load and to gain support) and saw the benefits of this, many were clear that the problems that they were encountering were an effect of oppressive social contexts and not an effect of their sexuality per se.

* Participants were particularly clear about this in relation to bullying and harassment. As indicated above they suggested a need for anti-harassment policies but they were also very clear, and in a number of cases very annoyed, that where they had approached staff to complain about harassment or bullying that often the solution offered was that they enter into a series of counselling sessions. Participants quite rightly pointed out that they saw this as inappropriate as they were not the ones who had the problem.

* 'One to one' counselling was seen as being of value in relation to talking through issues and gaining information and contacts but not as a solution to responding to the bullying of others.

Issues around support were identified as crucial by participants in this study. It is imperative that schools and school systems begin to remedy this gap in service provision and begin to provide and advertise such services.

Max (16, Year 11, co-ed State school, lesbian) spoke about how she had benefited from the informal support group (network) that operated at her school. In the process she challenged me to rethink my position on such groups (see Crowhurst 1999). Consider her comments:

I Now how is school different as a result of that network?...Do you think that having that network changes your experience of school?

M It's more comfortable...I mean you've got somewhere to go

I Because school doesn't actually change in a way does it?

M No

I You still have kids pushing people into lockers and calling out things…
But you’ve sort of got somewhere else to deal with it and at the same time you have got support...And it's not all on you it's spread...It's more sort of general not direct

And you have an escape from it…

Yeah

Whereas when you were in Year 8 and coming to the idea that you might be a lesbian...At that time were you aware of homophobia in the school?

Yeah

What was the experience?

It felt like it was more directed at you and you'd really take it to heart and it would really hurt and you'd think that there really is something wrong here...It was very demeaning...

It is imperative that schools begin to take the risk and shoulder the responsibility of constructing such safe spaces within their boundaries. There is a need for teachers to work to create supportive and safe spaces for GLBTI young people within schools, and to support GLBTI young people to create such spaces for themselves. This is so, in light of the benefits that Max and James claim for support groups, and particularly so where such spaces are called for by same-sex attracted students themselves.

Where a GLBTI young person requests that a support group be established within a school, in my opinion, the school is obliged to support the construction of such a space. Schools need to be prepared to follow the lead of young people in this regard.

Again it is imperative that the Victorian Department of Education track and report on whether schools have such supportive spaces in place and that such information be made readily available to the public.

Overall

Cultural contexts are socially constructed in that they come about as a result of the social practices that are enacted by the people who inhabit them. Similarly, in many ways, subjectivity is constructed as subjects go about the enactment of social practices and the construction of cultural contexts. There is a certain circularity about the relationships that exist between people, social practices and cultural contexts. We take shape, as we shape, cultural contexts. It is therefore important to work with school communities in order to unpack and reflect on the cultural dimensions of oppressive practices so that the individuals who comprise the school community might come to understand them and choose not to reproduce them, and in doing so to change the cultural context. It is also
important, and from a radical perspective perhaps more so, to work with school communities in order to reflect on the cultural dimensions that support expansive social practices, so that the individuals who make up the school community might choose to live in expansive ways and in the process to participate in the work of transforming their immediate, and over time, the broader cultural context that they inhabit. It is important that we teach people how to unpack the cultural contexts that they inhabit and the reasons that they might wish to do so. Poststructural methods of analysis can assist us in this task.


Based on my own research and having worked through a great deal of the literature I would like to venture a few suggestions by way of conclusion to this report. I am generally quite reluctant to offer recommendations as I feel that the best recommendations are usually the product of a collaborative process (and this kit is about working through such a process in order to clarify in which direction change might proceed). Collective action, and in this instance collective action involving queer young people and queer professionals, is the best way to generate change and to clarify how such change might best be achieved or proceed. With that caveat in mind however, here are a few suggestions of my own that I have broken down into sub-headings.

Demographic Data

I think it is important:

That educative systems begin to collect demographic data that is GLBTI inclusive.

Support for Sexual and Gender Diversity

I think it is important:

That schools and systems clearly articulate their support for GLBTI people at the level of policy and that work proceed from this base.

That schools and school systems adopt the same standards of practice in this regard that they currently adopt around other categories of ‘difference’ (i.e. gender, ethnicity).

That work that supports sexual and gender diversity in schools be funded and openly supported by government, school administrations and educational bureaucracies.

That schools be supported to reflect on strategies to diversify subject curriculum and to access existing materials.
Theoretical Frameworks

I think it is important:

That work that aims to support sexual and gender diversity in schools be positioned, in line with Departmental policy, as work that should take place across the ‘whole school community’.

That work to address homophobic and transphobic harassment in schools proceed from a place that recognizes that such harassment is an effect of contextual factors, and that therefore these factors need to be addressed if such harassment is to be eradicated in the long term.

Anti-Harassment and Access to Support

I think it is important:

That the ethical and legal responsibilities of schools to provide GLBTI students with a safe and supportive school environment be acknowledged at the level of policy at government department and school community levels.

That schools and systems clearly articulate that homophobic and transphobic harassment are unacceptable at the level of policy.

That specific procedures for dealing with homophobic and transphobic harassment be developed by schools and school systems.

That schools and systems make information about GLBTI support services readily available to students.

Dialogue

I think it is important:

That government, school administrators and educational bureaucracies engage in dialogue with GLBTI young people who are currently enrolled in schools in order to clarify issues and to respond to their immediate and long term concerns.

That government, school administrators and educational bureaucracies engage in dialogue with GLBTI community representatives and GLBTI people with expertise in order to clarify issues and to respond to their immediate and long term concerns.

That government, school administrators and educational bureaucracies engage in dialogue with GLBTI teachers in order to clarify issues and to respond to their immediate and long term concerns (see Crowhurst & Emslie 2003; Evans 2002).
That government, school administrators and educational bureaucracies engage in dialogue with others with expertise and interest in order to clarify issues and to respond to their immediate and long term concerns.

That Education Faculties charged with teacher training, engage in similar dialogue with similar aims.

**Accountability**

I think it is important:

That Victorian Departments of Education (Catholic and State) track and report on school policies and programs that aim to minimize homophobic bullying and that seek to support sexual diversity and that the findings are made available to the public.

**Research**

I think it is important:

That a diversity of long-term research projects be funded.

**By Way of Conclusion**

I’d like to conclude by drawing your attention to Ian Seal’s, ‘Same-Sex Attracted Friendly Environments (ssafe) in Schools’ (2003) resource, that focuses on working around issues of sexual diversity across whole school communities.

The resource outlines supportive policy frameworks, and principles that might guide school communities as they embark on such work, and documents examples of work that have recently occurred in a number of Victorian schools. It is very useful and can be downloaded at www.ssafeschools.org.au

There are also many other useful and downloadable resources (Developed by Ian Seal and Liz Alexander) available at this site.
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State Government of Victoria, Department of Education, Employment and Training, 


Conversations - Part 7
OHT’s To Support Facilitators Presentation

A Sexual Diversity Training Kit for Schools

Michael Crowhurst
How many same-sex attracted young people (SSAY) are there?

La Trobe University's 'Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society', have found that:

'a significant minority of young people are not unequivocally heterosexual, with numbers ranging between 8 and 11%.'


* 

Australian research demonstrates that a significant proportion of the student population of any secondary school are same-sex attracted.
What Numbers Are We Talking About?


Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training, (Feb 2000)
Summary Statistics Victorian Schools: p 17.

28,073 - 38,600 same-sex attracted young people currently attending a secondary school in Victoria.
Sexuality is a way of taking up space in the world.

Sexuality is a social category that mediates relationships.

Glossary at:
'What's The Difference!'
Ministerial Advisory Committee on Gay & Lesbian Health, 2002
School and Other Experiences

There is a growing body of academic literature that documents and attempts to theorise the experiences of GLBTI young people

The literature suggests that GLBTI school experiences are often problematic
Hillier et al, in 'Writing Themselves In' (1998: 3, 71), for example report that:

More young people (70%) were abused at school than anywhere else, with other students being the perpetrators for 60% of abuse cases. Ten percent had been abused by family members. Verbal and physical abuse had a profound effect on these young people. It affected their feelings of safety at home and at school and was related to the use of drugs and a reduction in their sense of well-being.

This is an effect of structural or contextual factors
SSAY I have interviewed have identified 3 key issues or areas of concern:

'Value Laden' Subject Content

The Need for Anti-Harassment Policy

The Need for Support
Subject Content

The following extracts are a sample of what participants said about the subject content that they encountered.

Louise is 18, is a VCE student in Year 12 and attends a Catholic school:

Louise: Well...It's not really spoken about in any classes or anything...Ummmmmm...Actually this year in English we did a book and there was a lesbian in it but I haven't actually read the book I think that it was just mentioned that she was a lesbian you didn't find out through anything that she did, but when the class found out, when the teacher pointed it out that she was a lesbian everyone was like 'Oh gross'...The teacher was like 'Come on what's your problem' because there was like one girl in class who just kept on and on about she's a lesbian and the teacher was like 'Get over it there are lesbians in society move on'...So the teacher was good but.......
Subject Content

Dante is 18, is a VCE student, he is in year 12 and attends a Catholic school:

Dante
The only time anything about being gay was ever mentioned...As with any other time that sex is ever mentioned you learn about anatomy not about sex(uality)...I was in year 10 and ummmmmm...Our teacher was talking to us about drugs and the only thing he goes was: 'Don't start Heroin because you end up selling your bum'...And Ummmm...You know around ‘beats’ and stuff and that was all I can remember about our teachers ever walking into a classroom (and) saying anything about being gay or anything like that...(I) was never taught anything about it.......

I
What class was that in?

Dante
That was in RE.
Subject Content - Student Action

James is 15, is in year 10 and attends a State School:

James  Well I don't think any subjects really do touch on gay or lesbian students or experiences at all...But...I have brought the topic up but they've said: 'No we don't want to talk about it because there's just not enough gay and lesbian students'

I  So who did you bring that up with?

James  I brought it up twice with my History teacher last year and yeah he said we can't or I think we don't have enough time to talk about it or touch on it so

I  How did you feel about that?

James  I'm not happy about that at all I think that we should be studying gay and lesbian subjects or that we should be touching on homosexual subjects within each subject
Subject Content - Thought

While it is important to think about the inclusion of GLBTI perspectives it is equally or perhaps even more important to consider the factors that govern the production of knowledges in classrooms that mean that such perspectives are omitted in the first instance.
Bullying

Kelvin (15, Year 9, State, Co-Ed, Outer Eastern Suburbs Melbourne):

I In relation to all that we've been talking about...What do you change about yourself? What don't you change about yourself? Do you change anything about yourself?

K It just depends on the situation...Well sometimes I change my voice...Sometimes you have to change the way that you walk and stuff and not just the tone of your voice but the way that you talk...

I And what is motivating you to do that? Why do you want to do that?

K Ummmm...I don't really like it but I just know that I have to because if they find out about me then ummmm what am I going to do I'll have to leave school probably

I So you'd be scared or fearful of the reaction of other people at your school? What would you be fearful of there?

K Ummm...Probably...I know I'd get bashed...

I So physical violence?

K Yeah...Verbal doesn't worry me but I know I'd definitely get bashed up
Bullying

Louise (18, Year 12, Catholic, 7-12, co-ed, outer-suburban school):

I Are you 'out' to other students?...Do you know any other lesbians?

L Well I'm only 'out' to one girl at school and that was pretty recently...But apart from that like apparently there are a few bi-sexual people at school but ummm...

I Apparently?

L Oh well they never told me...It's just rumoured

I What is the basis of the rumours?

L Oh well one girl I guess she looks a bit 'butch' or something but ...If someone's different...

I A bit 'butch'?

L Winter uniform you can wear a skirt or pants and she always wears pants...You know things like that...You know...I remember during mid-year exams one girl had to sit next to this supposed lesbian and she came out of the classroom and said to all of us: 'Oh I had to sit next to so and so she's such a dyke', with a lot of disgust in her voice that she had to sit next to her, not even next to because the desk was separated so...

I There is an idea circulating about 'butchness' and what do you think that is to do with?
L Oh just stereotyping...The ‘short hair-ed bleached dyke’ sort of thing...Just the appearance...

I Would the response of the young woman who refused to sit next to a woman that she described as 'butch' be typical?

L Oh yeah

I How many 'butch' girls are there and would they encounter that sort of treatment often?

L There would be a couple...maybe 2

I Has that ever happened to you?.

L No yeah...Occasionally

I What does it mean to be labelled as 'butch'?

L Ummm...

I Is it a comment about sexuality or is it a comment (about gender)?

L It's just a hateful thing...I guess it's about sexuality too it's about yuk I don't want to associate with you...Because you're different
Bullying - Thought

While policies and responses that attempt to minimize bullying are important unless the contextual factors that nurture bullying behaviour are also unpacked and addressed we are not really addressing the issue.
Support

Kelvin (15, Year 9, State school) describes how it felt to be gay in a Sex Ed class in Year 7 where 'everybody was discussing heterosexuality'. He reports that the absence of queer perspectives meant that he felt alone. Consider his comments:

I Now in Year 7 in that Sex Ed class as someone who saw himself as gay...How did that make you feel?

Kelvin Alone

I Can you describe that a little?

Kelvin I just felt that I was the only one there...'Cause they didn't discuss anything about it and then everybody was discussing heterosexuality...

I So you didn't feel angry about that?

Kelvin I suppose but...I was more annoyed.
Support

James (15, gay, year 10, co-ed State school) said:

I Any other things apart from curriculum that might be (useful)?

J Maybe just a gay group or something at school...But...

I There are problems with gay groups at school...How is it a problem?

J Yeah...Then other people would assume that you're going along to the group you must be gay...

I So how could they be overcome?

J Just have a teacher...Who does gay stuff...

I A designated teacher...Maybe not a gay and lesbian officer but someone like the Equal Opportunity Officer...?

J Yeah

I And how would people find out about that?

J Well you could just put it up on the notice board or something...If it was just a normal teacher then there wouldn't be problems and stuff...

The conversation then turned to support groups outside of the school. James spoke about the group that he had attended:
I How helpful has that group been?

J It's been great...Meeting other gay people...Yeah...Getting to know other gay people as well not being surrounded by straight people as well it's totally different...

I And it's just freer...

J You can act how you want to act and be who you want to be and they don't care...

I So it's not an issue...If that group was run in the school that you attend?

J I'd probably still go anyway...'Cause since I'm 'out' I don't care what people say at the moment...So it's just fine with me...Mmmm

I So...Some sort of service beyond the school or within the school...A contact person...?

J Maybe phone numbers for gay kids...Gay teenagers

I On a poster or something…?

J Because there's nothing at my school at all...
Benefit of Support

Max (16, Year 11, co-ed State school, lesbian):

I Now how is school different as a result of that network?...Do you think that having that network changes your experience of school?

M It's more comfortable...I mean you've got somewhere to go

I Because school doesn't actually change in a way does it?

M No

I You still have kids pushing people into lockers and calling out things

M But you've sort of got somewhere else to deal with it and at the same time you have got support...And it's not all on you it's spread...It's more sort of general not direct

I And you have an escape from it

M Yeah

I Whereas when you were in year 8 and coming to the idea that you might be a lesbian...At that time were you aware of homophobia in the school?

M Yeah

I What was the experience?

M It felt like it was more directed at you and you'd really take it to heart and it would really hurt and you'd think that there really is something wrong here...It was very demeaning...
Support - Thoughts

Supportive spaces, facilitate connectedness, and therefore have the potential to enhance well-being.

Different people seek and make connections in different ways.

It is imperative that young people be given access to information about spaces that affirming of sexual and gender diversity.

It is imperative that schools set about the construction of such spaces within their boundaries.

It is imperative that young people are involved in real ways in the construction of such spaces.
Conversations - Part 8

Workshop Session 3
2 Weeks Later
Discussion of Implementation of Interventions

This session should take place about 2 weeks after workshop participants have identified their three do-able interventions, it can be repeated as often as funding, interest and time allows.

This session is offered to those members of staff who:

* Are very interested in sexualities and schools,
* Have expertise in sexualities or a related area,
* Actively support the work,
* Are lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender, intersex or straight.

In ‘Workshop Session 2, the facilitator takes on the responsibility of typing up and distributing (perhaps via email) a summary of all of the interventions that the whole group have developed.

The summary is distributed in hardcopy to the participants who attend this session.

An informal discussion, with coffee and biscuits, regarding how successful participants have been forms the basis of this session.

The facilitator in this session needs to be responsive to staff concerns and to offer whatever support is possible.

The emphasis in this session should be on gains and on making and doing change rather than on difficulties and obstacles. It should be expansive and positive in tone.

This session takes about an hour, with an additional hour reserved for those who are interested.
‘Conversations’
Appendices
Conversations Appendices- Part 1

Some Web Resources

Michael Crowhurst
A Small Selection of GLBTI References
Updated – August 2003

Materials to Use as an Evidence/Process Base

Framework Documents


Ottawa Charter For Health Promotion
1986
http://www.can-survive.org/our_charter/ottawa_charter.html

'Respect' The Governments Vision for Young People
The Office for Youth

'What's The Difference!'
Ministerial Advisory Committee on Gay & Lesbian Health, 2002

'Health and Sexual Diversity: A health and wellbeing action plan for GLBTI Victorians’, 2003

‘Mental Health Promotion Plan’ 1999-2002
VicHealth, 2001
http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au

Student Wellbeing Policy - Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools,
Department of Education & Training

Making It Easy: A Guide To Developing Protocols and Partnerships
SFYS John Moran and Anne Roseman, 2002
Useful Legislation and other Government Information


and


Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

SSAY Specific References and Evidence Base

Writing Themselves In A National Report On The Sexuality, Health & Well-Being of Same-Sex Attracted Young People
Lynne Hillier, Deborah Dempsey, Lyn Harrison, Lisa Beale, Lesley Matthews, Doreen Rosenthal, 1998

There are many references and links that are on line at the Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society’s web page.
http://www.latrobe.edu.au/arcshs/

Our Town: Working with Same-Sex Attracted Young People in Rural Communities
Frere Jukes Crowhurst; VicHealth, 2002
(there are many references listed in the bibliography)

Queering Elementary Education: Advancing the Dialogue About Sexualities and Schooling.
Letts, W. and Sears, J. T. , (ed’s), 1999

Schooling and Sexualities: Teaching for a Positive Sexuality
Laskey, L. and Beavis, C. (ed’s), 1996
http://cat.lib.unimelb.edu.au/search/aLaskey/alaskey/1,7,10B/frameset&FF=alaskey+louise&1,1

Working Through Tension: A Response to the Concerns of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Secondary School Students
Michael Crowhurst, 2001
Young Queers Getting Together: Moving Beyond Isolation and Loneliness
Greg Curran, 2003

‘Marginalized by the Mainstream’ The Construction of Sexuality and Representations of Lesbians, Gay Men and Bisexuals in Australian Youth Policy.
Mic Emslie
Access Thesis at RMIT Library

Abused, Ignored or Included? Developing Supportive Environments For Lesbian or Gay Students in Victorian Secondary Schools
Ian Seal, 2001
Access Thesis at RMIT Library

Don’t ask don’t tell Hidden in the crowd: the need for documenting links between sexuality and suicidal behaviours among young people. Report of the same-sex attracted youth suicide data collection project.
www.latobe.edu.au/arcshs

Classroom Materials that are useful include:

Kenton Miller and Mahatmi’s 'Not Round Here' - available from Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

MindMatters (Downloadable Booklets)
http://online.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters/resources/mmbook.htm

Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, 2001

‘Talking Sexual Health: A Whole School Approach To Improving Sexual Health’
http://online.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters/resources/mmbook.htm

YGlam 'Just one Day' video available from Co-Care 9355 9978 (Mondays)

Daniel Witthaus' 'Pride and Prejudice' is available from Youth Services Moonee Valley Council 9243 8793
www.prideandprejudice.com.au
Family Planning Victoria’s SSAFE WebSite

www.ssafeschools.org.au
Materials developed by Ian Seal and Liz Alexander - All Downloadable

Melbourne University

Melbourne University’s Education Policy Schools and Society course applied group web page (diversity page useful material around queer young people and schools). www.policyatschool.org
Your homework is to locate a support group that operates in your area and make a commitment to make yourself known to the worker who runs the group.

Ring and make a date for coffee
Youth workers are always up for a coffee.

How might you be able to support this worker?

Are you teaching students that might need to know about the support group that runs in their area?

How might you advertise this group in your school?
Do they have a flyer?

Could you ask the youth worker to come to your school to speak with interested staff?

Could you ask the youth worker to come to our school and speak with students?

Is there a Schools Focused small grant partnership possibility?

Is there a submission that your youth service needs school support for?

Build Bridges
Support Group Information Courtesy of The Rainbow Network (9/2003)
www ssafeschools.org.au

Further Details

The Action Centre: 9654 4766

### Statewide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of group</th>
<th>Fresh</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of program</td>
<td>Fresh is a social and support group for young people with HIV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>18 – 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time &amp; place</td>
<td>Varies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact details</td>
<td>Worker: Gina Greco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phone: 9863 0444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fax: 9534 2708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:gina_greco@vicaids.asn.au">gina_greco@vicaids.asn.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation:</td>
<td>Positive Living Centre</td>
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<tr>
<th>Name of group</th>
<th>Minus 18</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of program</td>
<td>• Dance party</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• SSAY Entertainment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Drug and alcohol free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>14 – 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time &amp; place</td>
<td>Convenors: Andrea Anquillano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phone: 0402 702 863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fax:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Website: <a href="http://www.minus18.org">www.minus18.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation:</td>
<td>P-FLAG</td>
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<th>Name of group</th>
<th>Pride and Prejudice</th>
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<td>Type of program</td>
<td>• Peer mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• School workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Support and information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>14 – 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time &amp; place</td>
<td>Ongoing, varies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact details</td>
<td>Worker:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phone: 9243 8793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation:</td>
<td>Moonee Valley City Council</td>
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<th>Name of group</th>
<th>New Agenda</th>
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<tr>
<td>Type of program</td>
<td>Under development - transgender support, mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>12 – 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time &amp; place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker:</td>
<td>Sally Goldner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone:</td>
<td>0407 946 242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:wbjg@bigpond.com">wbjg@bigpond.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of group</td>
<td>YAK</td>
</tr>
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<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of program</td>
<td>Support/ chat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Up to 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time &amp; place</td>
<td>1st and 3rd Friday of each month, at the Action Centre, 277 Flinders Lane, Melb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker:</td>
<td>Peter or Ian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone:</td>
<td>9654 4766 or 1800 013 952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:yakaction@hotmail.com">yakaction@hotmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation:</td>
<td>Action Centre/Family Planning Victoria</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of group</th>
<th>Y&amp;YA (Youth and Young Adults)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of program</td>
<td>Social group for GLIBT and GLIBT friendly young people, peer organised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Under 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time &amp; place</td>
<td>3rd Saturday of month – contact group for venue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker:</td>
<td>Miles-David or Sarah Jan (mentor of the group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone:</td>
<td>0408504983 0438811553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mccmelb_youth@yahooogroups.com">mccmelb_youth@yahooogroups.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation:</td>
<td>Metropolitan Community Church of Melbourne</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of group</th>
<th>Young &amp; Gay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of program</td>
<td>Note: people who are interested in participating in Young &amp; Gay must register prior to attendance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>26 and under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time &amp; place</td>
<td>Young &amp; Gay is usually be held at night time on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. Victorian AIDS Council. 6 Claremont St, South Yarra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker:</td>
<td>Asvin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone:</td>
<td>9865-6700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:YouthProject@vicaids.asn.au">YouthProject@vicaids.asn.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation:</td>
<td>Victorian AIDS Council/Gay Men's Health Centre</td>
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**Rural/ Regional**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of group</th>
<th>Bass Coast</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of program</td>
<td>Social support group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>14 to 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time &amp; place</td>
<td>Saturday evenings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker:</td>
<td>Chris Garde, Jamie Hogan, Deb Amor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Chris.garde@ymca.org.au">Chris.garde@ymca.org.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Organisation:</td>
<td>Bass Coast Youth Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name of group</td>
<td>“Diversity” Same Sex Attracted Youth Support Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Type of program</strong></td>
<td>Support, Information and Referral. Must meet worker before joining.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>15 – 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time &amp; place</strong></td>
<td>Fortnightly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact details</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker:</td>
<td>Rowena Allen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone:</td>
<td>58316157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rowena_allen@ceys.com.au">rowena_allen@ceys.com.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisation:</strong></td>
<td>Cutting Edge Youth Services-UnitingCare</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of group</th>
<th>GASP! Geelong Youth Sexuality Project</th>
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<td><strong>Type of program</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>14 – 25</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Time &amp; place</strong></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact details</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker:</td>
<td>Trevor Graham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone:</td>
<td>5227 0699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisation:</strong></td>
<td>City of Greater Geelong</td>
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<tr>
<th>Name of group</th>
<th>GLOSS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Type of program</strong></td>
<td>A support group for GLBT young people and those with questions around their sexuality. Must meet with Florence before joining.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>16 – 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time &amp; place</strong></td>
<td>Every Friday fortnight in the school term 6.00pm-7.30pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact details</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker:</td>
<td>Florence Adamec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone:</td>
<td>9770 6222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:florence.adamec@frankston.vic.gov.au">florence.adamec@frankston.vic.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisation:</strong></td>
<td>City of Frankston</td>
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<tr>
<th>Name of group</th>
<th>Kaleidoscope</th>
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<td><strong>Type of program</strong></td>
<td>Activities based program</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>16 – 21 with 14 to 15 year olds being supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time &amp; place</strong></td>
<td>Meets every second Friday on the Mornington Peninsula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact details</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker:</td>
<td>Viv Ray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone:</td>
<td>597944443 or 0408 483 980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:kaleidoscope@infoxchange.net.au">kaleidoscope@infoxchange.net.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisation:</strong></td>
<td>Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of group</td>
<td>Type of program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
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</table>
| Conversations – Michael Crowhurst | Support group                                                                   | 16 – 20 year olds    | Meets monthly in the Shire of Yarra Ranges | Worker: Jodie  
|                        |                                                                                 |                      |                                  | Phone: 9294 6748 or 0418 389 196  
|                        |                                                                                 |                      |                                  | Email: j.doyle@yarraranges.vic.gov.au  
|                        |                                                                                 |                      |                                  | Organisation: Shire of Yarra Ranges                                             |
| WayOut: Central Victorian Youth & Sexual Diversity Project | • Professional development  
|                        | • Work in schools  
|                        | • Information & referral for family, teachers & workers of SSAY                  | Principal target is SSAY, but focus for work is others in their environment | Covers Macedon Ranges, Mt Alexander, Central Goldfields and Bendigo Shire      | Worker: Sue Hackney (Mon – Thurs)  
|                        |                                                                                 |                      |                                  | Phone: 5422 3011 / 0428 347 407  
|                        |                                                                                 |                      |                                  | Email: shackney@cobaw.vic.gov.au                                                | Organisation: Cobaw Community Health Service, Kyneton |
| Young and Proud (YAP) | A support group for GLBT young people and those with questions around their sexuality. Must meet with Florence before joining. | 14 – 21              | Every Friday in the school term 4.00pm-5.30pm | Worker: Florence Adamec  
|                        |                                                                                 |                      |                                  | Phone: 9770 6222  
|                        |                                                                                 |                      |                                  | Email: florence.adamec@frankston.vic.gov.au                                    | Organisation: City of Frankston                        |
| ZARQUE                |                                                                                 | 14 – 24              | Do not give out these details     | Worker: Brendan Sartori  
|                        |                                                                                 |                      |                                  | Phone: 03 5320 5645  
|                        |                                                                                 |                      |                                  | Fax: 03 5333 5072  
|                        |                                                                                 |                      |                                  | Email: brendansartori@ballarat.vic.gov.au or cassielindsey@ballarat.vic.gov.au | Organisation: City of Ballarat Youth Services          |
### Bit Bent Buddies

**Name of group:** Bit Bent Buddies  
**Type of program:** Buddies for young people with gay or lesbian parents  
**Age:** 10 – 24  
**Time & place:** Meets three or four times a year for get-togethers  
**Contact details:**  
- **Worker:** Viv Ray  
- **Phone:** 9462 5166  
- **Email:** vivrobin@aol.com  
**Organisation:** Darebin Council  

- **Contact details:**  
- **Worker:** Viv Ray and Rob Kosic  
- **Phone:** 9462 5166 or 9301 5200  
- **Email:** vivrobin@aol.com or robert.kosic@anglicarevic.org.au  
**Organisation:** Darebin Council and Anglicare Family Services  

- **Contact details:**  
- **Worker:** Felicity  
- **Phone:** 9431 1333 or 0411 593 607 (Monday and Friday)  
- **Fax:**  
- **Email:** felicitym@elthamchc.org.au  
**Organisation:** Eltham Community Health Centre  

- **Contact details:**  
- **Worker:** Jemma, Vicky or Helen  
- **Phone:** 9355 9978 (Mondays)  
- **Fax:** 9355 9993  
- **Email:** jenimam@mchs.org.au or vicky.guglielmo@jss.org.au  
**Organisation:** Moreland Community Health Service
### North West Metropolitan Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of group</th>
<th>SASSY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Type of program | • Support  
• Social  
• Training  
• Creative Projects |
| Age | 14 - 18 |
| Time & place | Moonee Valley |
| Contact details | Worker: Arry Valastro (Mon/ Wed)  
Phone: 9243 8793 |
| Organisation | Moonee Valley City Council |

### Eastern Metropolitan Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of group</th>
<th>NQS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of program</td>
<td>Social Support Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>14 - 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time &amp; place</td>
<td>In Boroondara. Weekly 4.00 – 6.00pm. Open to young people in Eastern Region (But specifically Boroondara)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Contact details | Worker: Kate Clark and Rob Glas  
Phone: 9882 2621  
Email: kclark@boroondara.vic.gov.au |
| Organisation | City of Boroondara |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of group</th>
<th>Pride &amp; Diversity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of program</td>
<td>Peer support and recreational activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>14 - 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time &amp; place</td>
<td>Glen Waverley Every wed 5-7pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Contact details | Worker: Shlom Eshel  
Phone: 9561 7359/ 0402 208 070  
Email: shlome@monash.vic.gov.au |
| Organisation | City of Monash |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of group</th>
<th>Purple Bus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of program</td>
<td>A magazine produced by SSAY for SSAY.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>15 - 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time &amp; place</td>
<td>Meets in the outer east suburbs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Contact details | Worker: Aishling (Knox Youth Services)  
Phone: 9298 8304/ 0438 545 924  
Email: aishling.fagan@knox.vic.gov.au |
| Organisation | Knox Youth Services |
### Whitehorse Same Sex Attracted Support Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of group</th>
<th>Whitehorse Same Sex Attracted Support Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of program</strong></td>
<td>Social and support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>15 - 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time &amp; place</strong></td>
<td>Meets fortnightly on Wednesdays from 5pm to 7pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact details</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker:</td>
<td>Lara Mantegna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone:</td>
<td>9878 3782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:yab@refs.asn.au">yab@refs.asn.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisation:</strong></td>
<td>YAB Youth Resource Centre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Southern Metropolitan Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of group</th>
<th>GLB Taskforce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of program</strong></td>
<td>Research project looking to speak to GLB young people, workers etc to identify needs in City of Greater Dandenong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>12 - 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time &amp; place</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact details</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker:</td>
<td>Agnes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone:</td>
<td>0413 592 492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:glbttaskforce@hotmail.com">glbttaskforce@hotmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisation:</strong></td>
<td>City of Greater Dandenong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of group</th>
<th>Spectrum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of program</strong></td>
<td>Support and recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>Young people in the City of Greater Dandenong area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time &amp; place</strong></td>
<td>Springvale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact details</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker:</td>
<td>Micky Lomman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone:</td>
<td>8558 9152 or 8558 9001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:spectrum@southernhealth.org.au">spectrum@southernhealth.org.au</a> or <a href="mailto:michelle.lomman@southernhealth.org.au">michelle.lomman@southernhealth.org.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisation:</strong></td>
<td>Southern Health</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of group</th>
<th>SSAYSP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of program</strong></td>
<td>Social and support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>14 to 18 years old in the City of Casey or Cardinia Shire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time &amp; place</strong></td>
<td>Weekly from 5 – 7pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact details</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker:</td>
<td>Sarah Jones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone:</td>
<td>0409 569 900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sarah.jones@careconnections.com.au">sarah.jones@careconnections.com.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisation:</strong></td>
<td>UnitingCare Connections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Western Region**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of group</th>
<th>Type of program</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Time &amp; place</th>
<th>Contact details</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Generation Q  | Social and support | Young people aged up to 20 in Brimbank | 4 to 6pm on Wednesday afternoons in St Albans | Worker: Jemma or Julie  
Phone: 9364 3200  
Fax: 9364 3733  
Email: gsjemmam@infoxchange.net.au | Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of group</th>
<th>Type of program</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Time &amp; place</th>
<th>Contact details</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| MSSAY         | Social support group | 14 - 18 | 4 to 6pm on Thursday afternoons in Melton | Convenors: Liz Alexander, Kodie Webb or Katherine Goulliard  
Phone: 9747 0700 or 0408 109 032  
Email: elizabetha@mchc.com.au or ealexander@fpv.org.au | Djerriwarrh Health Centre |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of group</th>
<th>Type of program</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Contact details</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| TBC           | TBC             | TBC | Hobsons Bay | Worker: Daniela Beardsley  
Phone: 9932 3003  
Email: dbeardsley@hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au | Hobsons Bay City Council |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of group</th>
<th>Type of program</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Contact details</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| TBC           | TBC             | TBC | Maribyrnong | Worker: Christopher Lynch  
Phone: 9688 0131  
Email: christopher.lynch@maribyrnong.vic.gov.au | Maribyrnong City Council |

For a current list go to: www.ssafeschools.org.au
‘Conversations’ Appendices - Part 3

Useful Work Principles

The following principles may be useful to discuss with participants in relation to developing strategies across a whole school community.

Such principles can also be found in Frere et al’s (2002) ‘Our Town’ report and Seal’s (2003) ‘Safe Environments in Schools’.

References


(See particularly part 3)
http://www.ssafeschools.org.au
Conversations

Useful Work Principles

1  Situate the work in relation to the Evidence

2  Situate the Work in Relation to Broad Frameworks that are Supportive (feminist, poststructural, health promotions)

3  Situate the Work in Relation to Policy Documents that are Supportive Eg. Student Wellbeing Policy - Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools

4  Structure Generates Success
   Establish Committees

5  Partnership - Involvement
   
   students
   teachers
   administration
   parents
   community
   community agencies
   department

6  Only Engage in Partnerships with Community Agencies that Fully Support Equal Opportunity
7 **Draw Out and Draw Upon Local Expertize**

- Build Capacity
- Enhance Sustainability

8 **Make Yourself Look Good**

- Find your Friends Forget your Enemies
- Generate your own Success
- Locate Where you can be Successful and Work There When You Can (geography, landscape, readiness and values)

9 **Work Across the Whole School**
- Layers and Segments

10 **Work Over the Long Term**

11 **Remember that the Work is About Promoting Diversity as Much as it is About Tackling Discrimination**
‘Conversations’ Appendices - Part 4
On Dialogue

All of the strategies and supports outlined previously are designed to promote dialogue

What are the links between dialogue and culture?

Between dialogue and culture and attitudes?

Between dialogue and culture and wellbeing?

Between dialogue and who we can be?

What are some effective models of promoting dialogue that in turn promote diversity?

What are the links between dialogue diversity and connectedness?
On Diversity and Wellbeing

Connectedness Generates Wellbeing

Different People Seek and Make Connections in Different Ways.

Contexts that Celebrate Diversity Enable a Larger Number of People to Feel a Sense of Connection.

Involvement Generates Diverse Contexts
Good Pedagogy is Good Health Promotion
Author/s:  
Crowhurst, Dr Michael

Title:  
Conversations With Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Secondary School Students: A Sexual Diversity Training Kit for School Communities

Date:  
2004-04

Citation:  

Publication Status:  
Unpublished

Persistent Link:  
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/33784

File Description:  
Conversations With Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Secondary School Students: A Sexual Diversity Training Kit for School Communities

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