Non-hegemonic Masculinities and Sexualities in the Secondary School -
Construction and regulation within a culture of heteronormativity

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Declaration of Originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for any other degree in any university.

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference is given in the text.

Signature: ........................................
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Abstract

This project looks at the ways in which masculine identities are constructed and perceived in secondary schools. It identifies some of the links between broader gender politics and the more specific area of masculinities as they apply to the lives of gay-identified and non-identified secondary school students.

Through focussed discussion with groups of students the research describes types of behaviours that are characterised by students as desirable or undesirable and the perceived relationship of such behaviours with particular sexualities. In this thesis I interrogate the treatment (including bullying, harassment and lack of acknowledgment of the gay experience), in schools, of boys who express gender unorthodoxy/non-hegemonic masculinities.

In order to understand this behaviour I look at the means of control of such expressions as exercised by other students and teachers and explore the motivation behind this control. Through listening to the stories of students I identify the need to evaluate school policy and pedagogical practices with a view to making the educational experience more inclusive of a broad range of masculinities and sexualities and therefore a more relevant, positive and productive one.
Non-hegemonic Masculinities and Sexualities in the
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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Popular notions of masculinity are adopted and worn comfortably by some, for others they constrict or oppress. For the school-aged boy, stepping beyond the boundaries of ‘acceptable’ dress, mannerisms, speech, leisure and vocational activities and subject choice can lead to persecution and isolation. Who defines these boundaries? How are they policed? Why are they policed? What are the consequences of not ‘towing the line’? Being punished for expressing an individual identity, which is outside of the confines of hegemony, is a reality for so many boys. Schools provide the setting for much of this policing of gender boundaries.

From personal experience I know what it is like to be called names; names which related to aspects of personality and bodily presentation which to me were perfectly natural; names which alluded to a sexuality I didn’t identify with or even understand. This project looks at how identities are constructed, shaped and named in relation to others. It interrogates the rules, the boundaries and the mirrors that let us know, directly or indirectly what we are, what we are not and what we are permitted to be.
The problem in the schooling of homosexual students is not their sexuality, but the phenomena of heterosexism that dominates their world (Connell, 1992; 735).

This project also illuminates cultural and pedagogical practices which impact on the construction of masculinities in secondary schools and takes a look at the strategies employed by disenfranchised boys to negotiate their way through an oppressive school environment. The interviews with young people provide insights into how the school and wider society shape and control expressions of masculinity and sexuality. Some of the participants describe practices that they feel have stunted their own development while others provide observations of how their friends have been affected. Discussions with and among the young people involved in this study uncover discourses on homosexuality and lesbianism. The comments of the students show that both gay and ‘straight’ students struggle to find meaning and justice within heterosexist discourses. By listening to these students I have heard accounts of how it feels to live a life where there is mismatch between how you feel and how you express yourself and how you are expected to be. This disenfranchised state; this ‘disconnectedness’ has become a central theme in my investigations of masculinities and sexualities in the secondary school.

**Teasing, bullying and homophobia – intersections and confusions**

Being teased in the schoolyard is, unfortunately, a part of the school experience for many young people. Studies on the incidence of bullying in schools have indicated the extent to which it occurs. In a study of 2,328 boys and 1,901 girls in South Australian schools it was shown that among 13 year olds about 25% of boys claimed to be bullied at least once a week (Rigby, 1996). In 1994, the Kids Help Line received over 7,000 calls from children claiming to be bullied. 75% of these calls came from the 10 to 14
year old age group (ibid.). Although it cannot be assumed that all of these incidences of bullying relate to issues of sexuality or masculinity, jibes aimed at boys’ bodily presentation and mannerisms would account for a significant proportion. A recent national survey of same-sex attracted young people found that over 50% experienced verbal or physical abuse and that most of this abuse occurred at school (NCHSR, 1998).

Some would argue that this is a part of the rough and tumble of school life; that it toughens people up and serves the function of preparing them for adult life. Conflict management and resolution skills are certainly useful to have but I would argue that the opportunities to hone such skills are not distributed evenly or justly.

Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual adolescents may be at a higher risk of dysfunction because of their unfulfilled developmental needs for identification with a peer group, lack of positive role modeling influences and experiences, negative societal pressures, and their dependence upon parents and educators who may be unwilling or unable to provide emotional support concerning the issue of homosexuality (Uribe and Harbeck, 1992:16).

Short term effects on bullied students include loss of self esteem, feelings of isolation and reduced academic performance (Rigby, 1996; Hall, 1988 in Stafford, 1988). The long term effects can be devastating, with symptoms such as depression and difficulty in forming close relationships being reported (Olweus, 1992, Dietz, 1994 and Gilmartin, 1987 in Rigby, 1996).
Difference and alienation

Being made to feel different can produce "harmful alienation" and a corresponding decline in self-esteem (Herdt, 1989). With key adolescent peer grouping practices including heterosexual dating and team sports, exclusion of some boys is inherent. Participation in alternative practices may not to be rewarded with an equal level of support and encouragement. Non-valued activities are unlikely to attract behaviours in peers or adults which are associated with maintaining or bolstering the child’s self-esteem.

I was just thinking before, I did art and I was very good at it, to year 9 and I did music in year 10 ’cause I played the piano and I was a 7th grade pianist. I felt one of the reasons I didn’t do art in year 10 was because the stereotype that it had with gay people. Most of the well known artists were gay and I just didn’t want to associate myself with that because it would make my life complicated. In whatever way, I didn’t know, I just thought it might so I steered clear of it. When I was in like year 10 or 11 you have to, and you’re not out, I was under a very strict code like I’ve gotta make sure I walk this way and I don’t look at guys and I don’t do this and I don’t do that and I do this and I don’t do that. It probably really wrecked me emotionally in a way but I still did it (Alex, 18 year old male).

Alex modified his behaviour and based his choice of subjects on what he perceived others would value. He missed out on an opportunity to excel in art because he felt he would be seen as gay and subsequently disadvantaged at school. Martino (1998: 35) describes an example where the taunt "art boy" escalated to "fag boy"; the connection
between artistic pursuits and homosexuality being made by the name-calling group of boys.

Blumenfeld and Raymond (1988, in Schole, 1993) referred to homophobia as “a devastating and insidious condition which closes off life options and stifles the spirit.” This was demonstrated by Alex steering away from art despite his enjoyment of it and recognition of his own talent. There are researchers who have suggested that young homosexuals are likely to be denied the realisation of their full academic potential because of the failings of schools to provide a suitable environment in which they can achieve (Hall, 1988 in Martin and Hetrick, 1988; Stewart, 1997/8). The truancy that may result from victimisation at school is unlikely to enhance academic achievement. Other researchers have put forward ‘compensation’ theories which state that there are those young homosexuals who actually excel academically because their isolation has caused them to withdraw into academic pursuits (see Herdt, 1989). As De Montaigne points out, sublimation of sexual longing (because of its social unacceptability) “may lead to some brilliant lives: witty, urbane, subtle, passionate. But it also leads to some devastating loneliness” (De Montaigne, 1995).

The GLAD survey into discrimination and violence against lesbians and gay men in Victoria (1994) reported that of their 1002 respondents, 29% of lesbians and 26% of gay men described problems, especially harassment and being given anti-lesbian and anti-gay course materials. The report states that an emerging theme was that respondents were unhappy and uncomfortable during their years of education. Same sex attracted youth are reportedly more likely to use alcohol and drugs than heterosexual young people (NCHSR, 1998; Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service/WA AIDS Council, 1998) and to become homeless (Gibson, 1989 in O’Conner, 1995; Stewart, 1997/8).
The most alarming of consequences of the fear and confusion felt by students unable to express their true selves is suicide. Several studies have linked a high proportion of youth suicide or attempted suicide with sexuality issues (e.g. Trenchard and Warren, 1984 in Rogers, 1994). Research suggests that 30% of suicides among 15 to 24 year olds in the US are directly related to sexual preference issues and the associated societal prejudice surrounding same-sex relationships (Harbeck, 1992, Gibson, 1989 in Unks, 1995). More recent research reports that young homosexual males in the USA are attempting suicide at a rate seven times that of their heterosexual counterparts (Remafedi et al., 1997). A Belgian study in 1998 put the figure at between two to five times more likely. Although there are discrepancies in the statistics coming out of such studies (it has been suggested that flaws in research method may account for these discrepancies, see Dean, 1997) the message is clear. Sexuality issues are a contributing factor to the high rate of youth suicide. If non-heterosexual sexualities were recognised as mere variations within the natural spectrum of sexualities and not treated as aberrations then it is possible that so many suicides could be avoided.

In a letter to Amnesty International, as a plea for recognition of those persecuted and incarcerated on the basis of their sexuality, Ian MacNeill writes:

To state the obvious: homosexual people are in psychological and literal chains in many societies, subject to constant tortures and mutilations, denied the most ordinary rights, without the support of even family, coerced for no good reason into hating themselves (MacNeill, 1990).
For no ‘good reason’ people are forced to doubt their self worth. The problem is far wider than that which exists in the microsociety of the school. But if schools are indeed a place where children are taught how to become decent and useful members of a community then this, surely, is an appropriate and likely place for positive changes to occur.

A school environment which limits the availability of acceptable expressions of masculinity is one which creates difficulty for all male students. The hegemonic male has been described as an ideal model which is practically unattainable by any single man (e.g. Connell, 1987). Striving for the unreachable puts all men in a vulnerable position. As insecurities about one’s adequacy are played out, men are unnecessarily impoverishing their lives (Almeida, 1996). Through his research, Máirtín Mac an Ghaill (in Blair et al., 1995) concludes that: “Administration, regulation and reification of gender/sexual boundaries was institutionalised through the interrelated social and discursive practices of staffroom, classroom and playground cultures”.

At a time when Health and Safety issues are taken so seriously in the workplace and in schools then we should recognise abuse; physical, verbal or emotional as important concerns for the basic welfare of children in the care of teachers. As Ken Rigby puts it:

We forget that schools are (or should be) places where we deliberately (and at great expense) seek to induce the maximum cognitive and emotional development of human beings during the most sensitive period of their lives. This cannot be done for children who are fearful of the very environment that has been created for this purpose (Rigby, 1996).
To deny students an environment they feel safe in; to enforce an identity that is at odds with the child’s inclination is to fail in the fundamental duty of care we owe all students. Just as left-handed children are no longer forced to write with their right hand we need to allow for and support a variety of expressions of masculinity and sexuality. To treat heterosexuality as normal whilst pathologising other sexualities is to create an underclass; an entire group of emotionally malnourished youth.

**This study**

Much of the current research into the construction of masculinities, particularly non-hegemonic masculinities, has relied on reflective appraisal case studies for data. Using this method, gay men who have completed their secondary schooling have been interviewed in order to gather data about practices in schools. Typically, subjects have recalled the stigmatisation of homosexuality and the behaviours associated with it. It is not uncommon for gay men to describe their school years as a time of sexual frustration and feelings of isolation.

Some of the research has involved students currently attending secondary school. The subjects of Mac an Ghaill (1994a), who were students of the school in which he taught, often reported that those not conforming to hegemonic models of masculinity were victimised by both students and staff. In general, curricula have been found to be lacking in terms of responding to the existence of non-heterosexual sexualities. Mac an Ghaill believes that “Much work remains to be done on the intersection of specific social and psycho-dynamics of these processes at the local school level” (ibid.). This project aims to go some way towards addressing these needs.
This research contributes a contemporary Australian perspective on young people and their engagement with discourses around sexuality. It provides a voice for students to express their observations, feelings and needs.

Chapter 2 outlines the research design. The sample groups of students used in the study are described as are the qualitative methods employed.

Chapter 3 looks at the emerging and growing body of work in the area of masculinities. It draws on the studies conducted by those educational researchers who are naming the problems faced by boys in schools and who are providing visibility for young people disadvantaged by an oppressive hegemony with regard to masculinity and sexuality. Chapter 3 positions this study in the arena of gender politics and historical power dynamics.

Chapter 4 places the struggles around masculinities and sexuality in terms of identity construction. It points out that the school is an important site for the construction of sexual identities and discusses the binarisms produced in the school context. This chapter theorises the creation of the ‘other’ as necessary for the maintenance of power structures.

Chapter 5 investigates the gender surveillance that occurs in schools. Policing of the boundaries of sexuality is looked at through specific school and broader cultural practices. Silences around homosexuality and sexuality in general, homophobia and associated violence, official and hidden school curricula are discussed in terms of the work of other researchers and illuminated through the views of participants of this study.
Chapter 6 takes a look at how sexualities and masculinities are negotiated by young people in schools. Students provide their own strategies for coping in a heteronormative environment. They discuss tactics employed to deal with the negative views of non-hegemonic expressions of sexuality and masculinity and the threat of homophobic violence.

Chapter 7 discusses examples of previous attempts to address the needs of gay students and stresses the need for schools to affect change at the levels of policy, curriculum and provision of positive role models.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by speculating on the implications of the research and looking at future directions. It is a call for change in our schools so as to create an environment in which difference is not only tolerated but understood and embraced as normal variation.
Chapter 2 - Research Design

The primary consideration in conducting this study was one of ethics. Before involving any human subjects in this research I had to be convinced that it was being conducted for a positive outcome. The code of Ethics for Research in Education stipulates that the purpose of research should be for “the development of human good” (AARE, 1995). In researching the issues of masculinities and sexualities in education I believe I am aiming towards a more equitable, accepting and meaningful education experience for all.

The sample

The students who contributed to this study were selected through purposive sampling, a method appropriate for the nonprobability sampling required of this type of exploratory research (see Neuman, 1997). No generalisations about student experience or attitudes were made from the data provided. Rather, the data was used to illustrate particular aspects of the theories of masculinities, gender relations and sexualities and to generate new questions and new ways of theorising masculinity in the school setting. One group of students, including boys and girls were interviewed to provide perspectives on masculinities and sexualities from a position of non-disclosed sexual attraction or identity. I was interested to hear the stories of both boys and girls about their school experience and to listen to their accounts of masculinities as expressed and perceived in their school. The other group (two young men) was interviewed so as to provide perspectives from the position of having constructed a gay identity in school.
One focus group interview was held with each group of students. The 'non-disclosed' group consisted of six year 12 students from two Melbourne metropolitan schools. The group comprised three girls and three boys, none of whom were asked to declare sexual identity or attraction. Five students all attended the same State Secondary school, located in one of the bayside suburbs. The other student attends one of Melbourne's traditional, independent boys' schools.

The 'non-disclosed' group was recruited through the daughter of a work colleague of mine. She agreed to be interviewed for the pilot study and suggested that she ask a group of her friends to participate in the study. The interview took place outside of school hours at the home of my work colleague. Participants chose their own pseudonyms. The profile of the 'non-disclosed' group is as follows:

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<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
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<tr>
<td>PJ</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aldous</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yola</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jet</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juliet</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candy</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
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The 'disclosed' group interview was conducted with two gay male students. One was completing year 12 at a Melbourne bayside private boys' school; the other was in second year at a Melbourne University. The two participants in this group were both members of the social and support group PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). I met them at a meeting organised by the gay and lesbian teachers and students group *Context*. They agreed to participate in the study. The meeting was held at the
home of one of the young men. Both participants chose their own pseudonyms. Their profiles are as follows:

Alex - Year 12, 18 years old
Justin - 2nd year University, 20 years old

I acknowledge that schools differ greatly in policy, and ‘atmosphere’, making the experiences of boys, in many ways, unique to the particular school. Epstein and Johnson see these differences as occurring within “the general features of schooling and of widespread homophobia and heterosexism” (1994: 198). I assumed that issues around gender and sexuality were present in various forms in all schools and chose to illustrate some issues as they are lived in a very small sample of schools.

My initial intention was to talk with a group of year 10 students as I felt, from personal experience and through the pilot study, that this was a level where issues of sexual and masculine identities were vigorously contested. My attempts to gain access to such a sample were thwarted by schools either ignoring my request or stating explicitly that such research was too risky in terms of how it would be perceived by the parent body. One school informed me that the religious ideology of the school expressly spoke to homosexuality and so it was inappropriate to conduct such research in their school. The coordinator of the health and human relations and pastoral care ‘faculty’ of this particular school did, however, express encouragement for the research to occur. She told me that although school policy could not allow my research to proceed there, they did make an effort to address such issues at a classroom level. Redman (1994) discusses the difficulty in gaining access to subjects for research into sexualities. He believes that the confusion about sexuality education often manifests itself as a belief that sexuality
education is equivalent to talking to pupils about being gay and lesbian. I believe that the heterosexist agenda, through recruitment myths and general hysteria about sexualities and young people, contributes to the obstacles placed before research of this kind.

**Qualitative methods and the ethnographic approach**

This study used qualitative methods to gather data on the experiences of young people in schools. This approach is considered the most appropriate to explore issues of sexuality, because it is widely acknowledged as a method that allows the exploration of cultural life and beliefs (Burns, 1995). Using a deductive approach to data analysis allowed me to integrate the data with issues raised in previous literature. It provided the scope for a constant reinterpretation of both data and previous observations and theories. Mac an Ghaill, who has conducted extensive research in this area, justifies the use of qualitative methods as they “locate schooling within the larger socio-political processes” and empower subjects through the opportunity to share life histories, challenge power asymmetries and become actively involved in the construction of the research stance (Mac an Ghaill, 1994b, 1995). Personal narratives by students to describe their high school experiences have been widely used and drawn upon to illustrate current issues in schooling. Some examples of this approach can be found in the work of Fricke (1981), Sears (1990) and Heron (1983), these studies were cited in Uribe and Harbeck (1992).

Other researchers have spent a great deal of time with the groups they were studying (see Willis, 1997 and Hargreaves, 1967, in Connell, 1987; Blackman, 1995). In terms of a local ethnographic approach, such studies have provided insights into “specific group
practices, meanings, rituals, relations and communication as they are lived by the groups” (Blackman, 1995: 251). The scope of my project did not allow such sustained contact with students. It relied on the anecdotes and snapshots of opinion at the time of the interviews. Importantly, the open nature of questioning did provide for students to express their own voice as well as the understandings common in their group. The ‘group voice’ provided an insight into their cultural setting and meanings. Aspects of the students’ own personal stories were illuminated through this approach.

Grounded Theory

Adopting the grounded theory approach of Glasser and Strauss (1967, in Telford, 1997) has allowed for theory and data to inform one another. Drawing upon established theorising of masculinities and sexualities I have been able to interpret data through particular frameworks or ‘lenses’. I have also been able to use the data to revisit and question the theories of others.

Feminist research stresses the role of grounded theory as a method or a tool with which to interpret the experience of subjects (Kehily and Nayak, 1997). This study draws heavily on feminist ideology in viewing the power structures operating in schools and uses feminist methods of contextualising experience, behaviour and meaning.

The pilot study

Themes to be explored and questions to be asked of the groups were generated through an informal discussion with Yola, a student currently studying year 12. This pilot interview was employed to provide an insight into language used and to illuminate
salient issues which formed the basis of the focus group interviews. Maxwell (1996) describes the pilot study as a place for learning about the field of study. Through talking to Yola I was able to generate questions which would be relevant to my inquiry and appropriate within the culture of the young people to be interviewed.

**Interview structure and questions**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted which allowed informal discussion to flow from issues raised. Each interview ran for approximately 1½ hours and was recorded on audio tape and then transcribed for later analysis. Semi-structured interview techniques have been used by a number of researchers in their studies into the area of masculinities in the secondary school (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, 1995; Kehily and Nayak, 1997; Epstein, 1997).

Group interviews were used in order to allow for a variety of opinions, experiences and attitudes to be expressed and for students to comment on the experiences of one another. Kitzinger (1995, in Gibbs, 1997) states that “If a group works well, trust develops and the group may explore solutions to a particular problem as a unit.” Individuals’ opinions and experiences were expressed but the group was able to interpret the experiences of one another through commonly understood attitudes and social practices. The issue of reticence to discuss true feelings in the presence of peers was considered. I felt that the voice of group opinion, expressing group values and beliefs, was important to hear, as compliance to hegemonic views is a salient phenomenon in the study of masculinities in schools. Gibbs (1997) believes that attitudes, feelings and beliefs are more likely to be revealed via the social gathering and the interaction which being in a focus group entails than through observation, one to one interviewing or questionnaire surveys. Although not strictly focus groups, the group interviews in this study provided the opportunity for
participants to interact and evaluate the responses of one another. Through discussing
issues with the groups I was able to get a feel for the dynamics of consensus and
resistance regarding particular issues.

The students were guided through a discussion about masculinities as it applies to their
experience at school. Participants of the group interview were asked to describe their
observations of the treatment of those students exhibiting masculinities outside of the
‘norm’ and were given the opportunity to discuss their feelings about the issues and the
people involved. Comments made and issues raised with the ‘non-disclosed’ group
interview were taken up with the two gay-identified students, of the second interview
group, in order to explore their responses.

The possibility that one or more members of the group would have their own, related
identity confusions impacted upon by the interview experience or might have suffered
harassment related to issues raised in discussion was acknowledged. I was aware that
some interviewees might therefore feel uncomfortable being a part of such a discussion.
All participants were given a list of referral and counselling agencies to consult in the
event that they wished to explore the issues further (see appendix 9). There were no
visible signs of discomfort amongst the interviewees but avenues for follow-up were
provided in case any of the students felt it necessary.

See appendix 1 for a list of questions used as a guide in the interviews.

**Interviwer – interviewee interactions**

Ethnographic data should be understood in terms of the power
relations between the studier and the studied (Connell, 1995: 34).
In the light of Connell’s statement about power relations as produced and reproduced in the research situation it is worth commenting on its impact in this study. As an outsider to both groups of students I didn’t feel there were significant issues to be taken into account here. With no contact between their teachers and me there were really no risks associated with disclosure about specific school situations and incidents. Although one of the girls interviewed is the daughter of a work colleague and friend of mine, the very open nature of their particular father – daughter relationship allowed her to speak freely and without concern for consequence.

The biography of a researcher who undertakes a qualitative study is known to impact on the focus of the research and the type of study produced (Blackman, 1995). Further to this it will necessarily influence, in part, the relationship between interviewer and interviewee and the subsequent interpretations of data. My interest in the area has come about through my experience as a (pre gay-identified) student and as a gay teacher. Whether the students in the ‘non-disclosed’ group identified me as gay, and if so whether this affected their responses, is unclear. I did not declare sexual identity to them nor did they appear to tailor their responses to this end. On reflection, perhaps declaring my sexual identity would have at least allayed the ambiguities associated with our relationship.

My sexual identity was made clear to the second group as it was through my participation in the Context discussion as a gay (ex)teacher that we met. I believe this knowledge facilitated a more open and honest discussion of the issues relevant to the two young men. Blackman believes that biographic experiences can be “resources to establish rapport with the different groups” (1995: 7). Rogers describes disclosure of
(homo)sexuality of the interviewer to the interviewees as increasing the feelings of cooperation and solidarity during the interviews (Rogers, 1994).

Like any discussion of contentious issues amongst people, certain tensions were produced and felt. Engaging with data on such a personal level was one of the challenges and joys of this research. It is also worth acknowledging that the impact of students’ comments on my personal values influenced my choice of data to present and created the meaning I saw in that data.

**Data analysis**

Coding involves dissecting transcripts, field notes, etc. meaningfully while keeping the context intact. This is the essence of analysis. It involves differentiating and combining data in association with reflection made about this information (Hurworth, 1996).

Transcripts of the interviews were made within days of the interviews taking place. Completing this task, with the conversations and interactions still fresh in my memory, was helpful when making annotations to indicate non-verbal communication and perceived subtext. Transcripts were read with a view to identifying emerging themes, thereby giving rise to new ideas. The comments of participants were also used to ground the theories of other researchers. These were organised into themes such as ‘personal solutions’, ‘policing issues’ etc. From this grew the structure of this paper as transcript material both informed and illustrated theory.

In discussing the data some comments are taken as ‘stand-alone’ examples to illustrate particular ideas and concepts. I have also included extensive sections of conversation in
order to preserve the context of particular comments and to see how the students relate to and inform one another. This technique of data presentation enables the reader to sense the nature of specific interactions such as debate, contradiction and consent.
Chapter 3 Masculinities – What, there’s more than one?

The theoretical framework for this research draws on recent work on masculinities. Masculinity has a commonly shared meaning based around a quantity of ‘manliness’ with some men possessing more of it than others. Evolving out of feminist research and ideology, the concept of masculinities emerged in the late eighties - early nineties as a framework within which to explore the variations in expression of masculinity which exist. By moving away from a concept of masculinity, which by the nature of its definition leaves some men ‘lacking’, to one of masculinities, a range of identities inhabited by males are legitimised and validated. Such a shift also opens up identity options previously considered not possible.

Masculinities acknowledges the social patterns and individual psychologies which give meaning to the ways of being for men. Mairtin Mac an Ghaill describes the research which went into his book *The making of men* (1994a) as occurring within an “institutional pattern of a patriarchal social order with the accompanying dominant gender divisions and heterosexual arrangements”. His work illuminates the contradictions between a publicly projected confident masculinity and the private anxieties often experienced by men (ibid.). Early work in this area, such as that by Tolson (1977) and later by Hearn and Morgan (1990) began to explore masculinity in terms of its relations with such influencing factors as economic circumstance, sexual identity and life cycle. Men’s relationships with each other were starting to be looked at in terms of contradictions like competition and solidarity and fear and longing (Hearn, 1988 in Mac an Ghaill, 1994a).
From the sex-role theories of the fifties to the studies of gender and power in the eighties, the psychology of men has increasingly come to be seen as one fraught with strain and crisis. An emphasis on the divergent, inconsistent and contradictory meanings of masculinity now accompanies most research on men (Segal, 1990).

As researchers continued to point out the problematic nature of men’s lives and relations, the popular press began to pick up on the feeling that changing gender relations and the dismantling of gender ‘roles’ required a re-evaluation of men’s place in society. Steve Biddulph’s *Manhood* (1994), for example, could be seen in every bookstore and notions such as boys feeling the strong need to prove their ‘masculinity’ became the topic of articles in popular weekly magazines. There is now an Australian web-site called *Manhood Online* where one can read about ‘The good things dad did’ or find out about upcoming ‘Manhood forums’. More recently, books have been appearing on the issue of boys and child-rearing practices. The immensely popular *Raising Boys* by Steve Biddulph (1997) has been followed by *A fine young man* by Michael Gurian (1998) and *Real Boys: Rescuing our sons from the Myths of Boyhood* by William Pollack (1998). These books discuss the roles and consequences of various child-rearing practices in a time when notions of masculinity are changing.

A review of both books in *TIME* (Barovick, 1998) sees them as arguing that “boys are in crisis from emotional undernourishment.” Both authors advise “boy specific nurturing technique”, with Gurian emphasising a need for male bonding which acknowledges what he sees as ‘biological differences’ in the brains of boys and girls. These books tend to move away from a social constructionist view of gender expectations and relations and towards a focus on the specific ‘needs’ of boys. This approach would seem to be more aligned with the so-called ‘men’s movement’ than the area of Masculinities.
Hegemonic Masculinity – A permanent stronghold?

Hegemony is a term borrowed from Gramsci’s analyses of class relations in Italy. It refers to “a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contents of brute power into the organisation of private life and cultural processes” (Connell, 1987).

Hegemonic masculinity is that dominant form of masculinity which, by definition, renders those who don’t aspire to its expression to the lower ranks in the masculinity hierarchy. Contemporary hegemonic masculinity is heterosexual, closely connected to the institution of marriage and is relational to a “key form of subordinated masculinity”, i.e. homosexual (Connell, 1987). The certain forms of masculinity which are hegemonic in today’s western society could be viewed as those which are “white, heterosexist, middle-class, Anglophone and so on” (Hearn and Morgan, 1995). Hegemonic ideals may well be beyond the reach of most men but the fact that certain ways of being are held in such high regard is in itself an instrument of power maintenance. “Indeed the winning of hegemony often involves the creation of models of masculinity which are quite specifically fantasy figures…” (Connell, 1987). The tensions between real men’s experience and cultural ideals were seen by the gay participants in the research of Hall (1991, in Mac an Ghaill, 1995) as causing “the ‘performance’ of publicly exaggerated models of masculinity.” This ‘public validation’ of masculinity is seen, by Carolyn Dixon (1997), as central to the role of ‘sex-play’ by boys in school. The interplay between hegemonic and subordinated masculinities represents a struggle in contemporary society based on a complex history of power and gender relations. Hearn
and Morgan (ibid.) believe that this struggle serves to point out that the experience of being a man is not a uniform one and that ways of theorising the differences should be developed.

Discourses on masculinities are relevant in a study of boys and schooling as the school context provides a setting for some of the earliest struggles around identity and its relation to hegemonic constructs of masculinity. This research is concerned with the clashes that occur when individuals demonstrate behaviours, attitudes and desires that are not in concert with hegemonic ideals. It is obvious to educators that boys take up various forms of masculinity. What may not be apparent to all is that this occurs despite the dominance of hegemonic masculinities. Dixon (1997) says that masculinity “is taken up differently by groups and individuals in the interplay of other cultural texts/discourses.”

The pluralist nature of masculinities is related to the variety of cultural settings in which they are constructed. Factors such as race and class have been seen to impact on the construction of masculine identities (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Kehily and Nayak, 1997; Blackman, 1995) but even within the one cultural or institutional setting it is quite clear that a range of masculinities are produced (Connell, 1995). Mac an Ghaill (in Epstein, 1994) points out the relationship between class and masculine identities in those who develop “compensatory hyper-masculine” forms in response to their academic failure. Masculinities have been in many instances tied to labour. The “erosion of traditional work makes masculinity problematic” Dixon (1997). In the economic rationalist environment, which has resulted in many of the traditional labouring jobs disappearing, this type of identity is not as viable as it once was. Kehily and Nayak (1997) propose that an alternative is to turn to “postures of heterosexuality”. Whereas certain masculine
posturing in school could once be seen as a rehearsal for the labour force, we must now
question the function of such behaviours as it continues in a post-labour force society.
Kehily and Natik envisage that “as long-term manual work declines, in a ‘feminised’
world of flexible workers and new technologies, male pupils will adopt other ways of
being ‘proper’ men that aim to accentuate heterosexuality beyond the emasculating
existence of unemployment” (ibid.: 85).

**Dissociation from the feminine – Don’t be such a girl!**

(males) have to try to achieve manhood through a process of
distancing women and femininity from themselves and maintaining
the hierarchy of social superiority of masculinity by devaluing the
female world (Arnot, 1984, in Mac an Ghaill, 1994a).

Hegemonic heterosexual masculinity holds as central the need for separation from
effeminacy and homosexuality. Behaviours associated with effeminacy such as
emotionality, tenderness and passivity are ritualistically held at a distance. In male team
sports such as Australian rules football, the taunt “Don’t be such a girl!” has such a
sting that behaviours are effectively controlled through its deployment.

Connell (1995) believes that the point of homophobic practices is not just to abuse
individuals but to “draw social boundaries, defining ‘real’ masculinity by its distance
from the rejected.” Through name calling, punching and banter, boys expel ‘femininity’
from the self onto others (Kehily and Nayak, 1997: 19). Such ritualised dichotomisation
of masculinity and femininity is the backbone of gender politics; the definer of ‘us’ and
‘them’. Masculinity becomes defined by its superiority to particular characteristics. “To
be masculine is not to be ‘feminine’, not to be ‘gay’, not to be tainted with any marks of ‘inferiority’ – ethnic or otherwise” (Segal, 1990: x).

The use of the words ‘girl’ or ‘woman’ as insults to men exposes the links between homophobia and misogyny. Segal (1990) points out that army training relies upon intensifying the opposition between male and female. She sees the practice of using the term ‘women’ to punish incompetent performance as serving the function of cementing the prevalent cultural links between virility, sexuality and aggressiveness. Denman (1993) talks of the practice of ‘splitting’, accentuating the differences between us and them, as one of the mechanisms used to maintain prejudices. By keeping a ‘safe’ distance between masculinity and femininity, the myths surrounding the concepts are less likely to collapse in the face of reality. Dissociation from the feminine helps to keep macho ideals alive despite their actual unattainability.

I asked the ‘non-disclosed’ group whether the term ‘girl’ was used in a derogatory fashion at their schools. The students spoke about their perceptions of its use:

**PJ**

I had a sports coach that um, I used to play tennis, and the whole team played shockingly, it was a cake-walk. And he’s rounded us all up and all he was doing a Tommy Haffey impersonation. “You’re a bunch of girls” and there’s this woman there who was a teacher of an all girls school and she’s gone “Did you see that girls? Did you hear that? This is what I’m on about.” And she came over and she’s talking to our coach and she’s saying “You shouldn’t be saying that, you’re a product of the la di da di da. And we’ve all just looked at her and gone “Get away, get real, don’t take it so seriously.”
WG  How do you girls feel about that? If the word girl, or don’t be a woman or whatever is used in that sort of derogatory sense, how do you feel about that?

Candy  Nuh, 'cause I say it myself. (laughs, along with others)

Juliet  How do you mean? Sorry I was in the bathroom.

WG  OK we’re talking about PE lessons and stuff like that, if the boys aren’t going in for the tackle or whatever in footy and the PE teacher says don’t be a girl or You’re a bunch of girls, how do you feel about that?

Juliet  It used to offend me a little bit, I used to think it was degrading but, it just seems to be used so often that I don’t even blink any more you know.

Yola  It’s everywhere, it’s the whole…

Juliet  It’s not even an issue sort of thing. It’s like ‘and’ and ‘the’, “you’re a girl.”

PJ  If anyone actually did take it seriously and took major offence at it, you’d sort of look at them and you’d sort of think “Why are you so concerned about this?”

Juliet  It’s sort of like, come on, don’t take it to heart, why make a deal out of it. It’s like being called a chick. I really don’t care about that sort of terminology at all.

Aldous  That’s the paradox of the feminist revolution. If you have, if people are trying to challenge it..

Juliet  It’s like taking the ‘man’ out of ‘woman’.

The students were aware of the offence that the term may cause to women but they felt the usage was so common that it didn’t bother them. Most of the group admitted to
using it themselves without concern for any implications or consequences. They had identified the objection to its use in terms of feminism and felt that any objection was rather extremist. The group went on to discuss how the term ‘girl’ was deployed specifically to undermine boys’ feelings of superiority over girls:

**Candy**  Yeah, it’s like they’ll say “you girl’ to a guy or “you throw like a girl.” Earlier this year, there’s another girl in my PE class and they were doing sprinting and she beat like a few of the guys and they were like pretty big, you know, jock type guys.

**Juliet**  That’s so ace.

**Candy**  So when they were walking back I went “Did you get beaten by a girl? Oh, so you got beaten by a girl.” That really bothered them that they did get beaten by a girl. I don’t care if I get beaten by a guy or whatever but to them it really bothered them. So I kept saying “Oh so you got beaten by a girl” and even a couple of weeks ago I said it because it really does bother them whereas there are some guys that it doesn’t bother if you do call them a girl or you say to them “you throw like a girl” or whatever.

**WG**  So why does it bother them so much?

**Candy**  Because..

**Juliet**  It’s hard to feel masculine and in control and..

**Candy**  Yeah, they’re the type who like to feel masculine.

**Juliet**  Dominating and in charge of the family and the income and the whole bloody..

**PJ**  That’s fair enough isn’t it?
Juliet: No, it’s not fair enough PJ. How is it fair enough? How can two people who live on the same planet have two exactly equal roles in this world?

PJ: It’s biological.

Juliet: It’s not biological it’s bloody being made. It’s being moulded into our brains it’s..

Aldous: It’s nurture, you’ve gotta admit it’s nurture.

Candy: It’s true that men are physically stronger than women.

PJ: It’s more than that it’s nature.

Juliet: No, it’s not like that. You should..

Aldous: What differences in, are you talking about differences in athleticism?

PJ: Oh yeah, it’s hormones. If you look at teenage boys right, their hormones tell them to be more aggressive. Do you know what I mean? Their hormones tell them to have sex on the brain.

Juliet: It’s got a lot to do with like, the whole dominant ideology and the way that you’ve been brought up and the way that you get treated in school and stuff, it’s just..

Teasing the boy who was beaten by a girl in a running race was intended to strike a blow to his masculinity. This strategy deployed a weapon designed to undermine his supposed position of superiority over women. Notions of hormonal control versus socialisation theories were brought into play as the discussion turned to an argument over the nature-nurture issue. PJ redirected the discussion from the initial issue of the boy’s ‘masculine’ pride being seen as a vulnerable target, to an advocacy of the concept of biologically driven aggression and sexual ‘appetite’ in males. He has constructed a
link between (physical) sexual dimorphism, as it relates to athletic performance, and the supposition that males have a naturally high propensity for aggression and sex. To link aggression and sex so closely and to justify the link through a biological argument gives us some indication of the enormously complex psycho-social issues educators face in designing interventionist strategies.

**Embodied masculinity – Can men hold hands?**

To talk about a ‘common knowledge’ of masculinity is to talk about how masculinity is embodied. Judgements are made about how ‘masculine’ a person is based on perceived qualities such as bravery, courage and power but the most accessible ‘clues’ are the person’s embodied characters. Assumptions of a true and fixed masculinity are often based on observations such as big, muscular, square jawed, deep voice etc. These characteristics are all bodily projections that have a shared meaning within social discourse. Without knowing anything of a person’s character, we make assessments of their levels of masculinity.

True masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men’s bodies – to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body. Either the body drives or directs action (e.g., men are naturally more aggressive than women; rape results from uncontrollable lust or an innate urge to violence), or the body sets limits to action (e.g., men naturally do not take care of infants; homosexuality is unnatural and therefore confined to a perverse minority) (Connell, 1995: 45).

This assumption that biology determines the social is widespread and accounts for a myriad of excuses for men harming or neglecting others. This dominant reading of male
‘immaturity’ and biologically driven aggression allows us to excuse anti-social behaviours in “all-male contexts such as sport and drinking” (Skelton, 1993 in Dixon, 1997). Although the body is instrumental in the construction of masculinity it should not be thought of as fixed. The body can deny and contradict social symbolism and control.

In her discussion of lesbian femininity, Lori Beckett (1995) argues against the existence of an “essential lesbian body” by citing Creed’s (1995) assertion that the very need for some lesbians to construct a sense of community through dress and appearance contradicts the concept. Similarly, characteristics that may be read as essentially gay in men have been socially constructed as such. Connell (1995: 56-60) sees bodies as sharing in social agency, not as a blank landscape onto which social meaning is ascribed. As a theoretical basis for the meanings and symbolism of bodies, it allows us the space to reinterpret and rewrite symbolism. Brittan (1989, in Dixon, 1997) believes that the body is always social. Although the body may be intertwined with social order, neither bodies nor our readings of them are fixed. A male body which is constructed as effeminate and therefore non-masculine need not be read that way at all.

In the school context the body is a recognised vehicle for expressing sexuality and engaging in gender power relations. Kehily and Nayak (1997: 72) describe the “routine forms of physical game-play that young men undertook to demonstrate their dominance over young women and one another.” The rough and tumble that is expected and often encouraged in males involves running, hitting, pushing etc. ‘Boys being boys’ is read as a moment of pride for parents. Confirmation that the boy is not a ‘sissy’. A boy may use his body to enact sexual fantasy as a (public) social project which serves to position him
within gender power structures and to make a public expression of a "publicly validated masculine identity" (his heterosexuality) (see Dixon, 1997).

**Unitary sexual character and a universal masculinity – Do they exist?**

Masculinity, although having a shared meaning within cultures, has variation in definition between cultures. Working in Zimbabwe for a couple of years I was initially struck by the acceptance of men walking hand in hand along the street. In Western Anglo societies this is likely to be read as homosexual behaviour and contradictory to masculine ideals. In Zimbabwe it signifies friendship. In anthropological studies of masculinity across cultures David Gilmore (in Connell, 1995) would only generalise that masculinity, across cultures, involved marking masculine achievements through various rites of entry in a "distinctively masculine realm". His belief is that "The cultural function of masculine ideology is to motivate men to work" (Connell, 1995). Connell states that masculinity is not measurable by the same standards across different societies.

'Sexual character' is Connell's term for the concept of males and females having different traits such as temperaments, characters, outlooks, opinions, abilities and whole structures of personality. Despite the bulk of research indicating that there are no distinct unitary sexual characters for males and females, the great investment in the notion of sexual character prevents its destruction (Connell, 1987: 170). Connell describes femininity and masculinity as "ways of living certain relationships". He suggests that a more appropriate approach than that of treating femininity and masculinity as essences is to replace such "static typologies of sexual character" with "histories, analyses of the joint production of sets of psychological forms" (ibid.: 179).
Men doing feminism – Oxymoron or necessary alliance?

There are some groups of men who can recognise injustice when they see it and are far from comfortable with the position they have inherited. (Connell, 1987: xi)

Connell (1987) argues that hegemonic masculinity is organised around the dominance of the other sex and that concepts of femininity are “constructed in the context of the overall subordination of females to males.” Hegemonic masculinity is therefore necessarily an issue of feminist concern. It is no surprise that studies of masculinities are informed by feminist discourse.

Gender discipline as imposed on women was the subject around which feminism was organised. Such gender discipline is not unique to women. Masculinity is the subject of gender assumptions; “men who are constructed as being less than masculine are also likely to come under suspicion and surveillance” (Carlen et al. 1992: 102, in Mac an Ghaill, 1994a). Within a patriarchal society certain individual men and groups of men, based on sexuality, class, marital status etc., are subject to subordinations, marginalisations and stigmatisations. Feminism provides a framework within which to theorise such phenomena.

In problematising the patriarchal order, male researchers are aligning themselves with women in a feminist cause. Any advances made by women researching gender constraint are going to be of benefit to the males subordinated by the patriarchy. As men research the same thing, albeit from the perspective of masculinities, the outcomes must be mutually beneficial. As Craig Owens (1987, in Segal, 1990) puts it, “homophobia is not primarily an instrument for oppressing a sexual minority; it is, rather, a powerful
tool for regulating the entire spectrum of male relations.” The struggle against the gender system has gay men united with feminists in a struggle which has the potential to transform the whole of society (Segal, 1990).

Bartky (1998) challenges the notion of male feminism as oxymoron. She acknowledges the contribution of men to feminist theory and speaks of the need for “gender traitors” to “effect a thorough ongoing reform of our institutions and a wholesale movement to a new plateau of consciousness” (ibid.: xii).

Skelton (1998: 219) argues that research into masculinities needs to adopt a feminist approach despite the old arguments that feminist research is “by, for and about women.” She believes that this definition of feminist research is problematic because gender-power dynamics necessarily demand consideration of issues relating to masculinities. Skelton distances feminist research from ‘new men’s studies’, which she sees as being concerned primarily with men’s individual experiences rather than the interpersonal relationships and issues of power and powerlessness which impact on inter and intra-gender relations.

**Sex-role theory – Whatever happened to that?**

The notion of sex-roles as being culturally assigned and adhered to, as it has been written about since the 1930’s, is certainly relevant to this research in terms of the historical development of ‘masculinities’ as a research area. More recently post-structuralist theory has added ‘layers’ to the notion of sex-roles to take in the broader social and psychological issues which impact on the way one engages with societal expectations of gender. Connell (1987) points out the problematic nature of the blurring
or interchangeability between notions of sex-roles and sex-differences. This naturalisation of sex-roles required a more complex analysis. The relatively widespread rejection of social gender norms, particularly by gays and lesbians challenges socialisation theory. It demonstrates that individuals engage with normative prescriptions of gender through complex interrelations with power structures and personal identity. Early feminist research identified the female ‘sex-role’ as being oppressive and led to an understanding of the mechanisms through which gender orthodoxy is upheld through general and specific power structures.

Definitions of femaleness and maleness are introduced to the child at an early age and reinforced throughout a lifetime. Judith Butler’s notion of ‘performativity’ describes how people present gender through a “regularized and constrained repetition of norms” (1990, in Jagose, 1996). I think it is useful to think of an individual’s ‘performance’ as an ongoing construction which is regulated by societal norms, influenced by particular setting and at times designed to flirt with taboos or express outright rejection of cultural expectations. It is evident that masculinities diverge, contradict one another and take on different meanings in particular social and institutional settings. A simplistic and static view of maleness, through role-theory, does not help elaborate on the “internal conflicts and fragile sexual identities” (Segal, 1990: xii) experienced by men.

**Patriarchy – Come and collect your dividends**

Violence against homosexual males can be seen as a transference of attitudes about females and against that which is feminine (Hinson, 1996 in Telford, 1997).
Connell made the statement that femininity and masculinity on a large scale is “centred on a single structural fact, the global dominance of men over women” (1987: 183).

Stemming from this premise are the interactions between men which define a hegemonic masculinity and set the scene for the mechanics of a “patriarchal social order”. Homosexual oppression has been theorised in terms of gender in that male homosexuals share the oppression of patriarchy with women (Hurley and Johnston, 1975 in Jagose, 1996). Lyn Segal equates the various institutional routines for preserving men’s power over women, such as marriage and associated masculinities, with homophobic discourse. “...homophobia and the reassertion of men’s rights and traditional masculinity operate in tandem – they are, in fact, the same thing.” (Segal, 1990:58)

The maintenance of a patriarchy takes a lot of work but do all males participate in its upkeep? It’s easy to generalise about ‘those’ men who actively prop up patriarchal structures but who are they? As a gay man I exist in the murky area where there are benefits to be had from such a system but at the same time feel disenfranchised by the heterosexist nature of its operation. It reminds me of Eric Rofes’ description of the vulnerable boy who aligns himself with the bully rather than suffer daily humiliation. Of this situation he says “the powerless take on the trappings of power” (Rofes, 1995: 80). It’s surely in the moral grey areas to be the beneficiary of particular privileges, afforded only to men, when the same order that so amply provides with one hand, oppresses with the other. It seems that patriarchy simultaneously occupies both an offensive and a defensive position. The position is offensive in that women and gay men are being acted upon; having oppression ‘done’ to them and defensive in feeling the need to ward off perceived (and real) threats.
It might be useful to look at the ideals that the maintenance of a system of patriarchy supposedly protects. Perhaps homosexuals present a threat to the fantasy of men monopolising the expression of sexual desire and ambition, with women positioned as the recipients. In the context of gay sex, men occupy both ‘top’ and ‘bottom’ positions as it were, thereby destroying the patriarchy’s fantasy of male dominance.

In the recently published sexual health guide for young gay men, Simon Donohoe has this to say on the motivation behind homophobia:

As a group, it is straight men who are most confronted by homosexuality and gay lifestyle as it challenges their ideas of manhood. On the whole, gay men do not strive to get married or raise 2.3 children. We can and do show affection to other men in public and in private; we are seen to spend the money we earn on ourselves rather than having to support a family. All these things help to create a combination of envy, resentment and suspicion in the minds of straight men. We are seen as spanners in their works! (Donohoe, 1998)

Constructing ‘straight men’ as the perpetrators of homophobia is rather simplistic an approach given that there are obviously heterosexual men who recognise injustice and oppression and some who actively oppose homophobia. To cast gay men as spanners in the works of a patriarchal order creates a useful ‘lens’ through which to investigate the motivations and mechanisms of homophobia. Borrowing the concept of ‘big’ stories and ‘little’ stories from Shane Town (1998: 1), it is perhaps more accurate to look not only at the ‘big’ stories of gender which implicate all males as participants in a universal patriarchy but rather recognise the many ‘little’ stories of the lives of individuals and groups of boys and men. A consideration of the many diverse subject positions they may occupy can illuminate what drives their actions.
Links between bullying practices and sexuality may be obvious in many cases but it is difficult to create and implement interventionist programs which target these links (see Martino, 1998). Conventional approaches to bullying (including acts of homophobia, which may or may not be identified as such) in schools have targeted the bully for punishment. Each act is treated as a peculiar incident (the relative merits of this are discussed in chapter 5) but taken in the context of gender power relations the individual act may be seen as operating at several functional levels. On bullies in general Eric Rofes says “I know they have a specific social function: they define the limits of acceptable conduct, appearance, and activities for children” (1995: 80). His statement implies an agenda broader than that of the bully – the ‘operator’. From this perspective the bully is a social agent, operating at the front-line; a puppet as it were. Connell (1995: 79) describes the deployment of ‘frontline troops of patriarchy’. Although other males may not be active in the ‘hegemonic patterns’ – in this case bullying - he considers them complicit nevertheless, as they are able to sit back and reap what he calls the patriarchal dividend (1995: 79).

This theme of the ‘coal-face’ or the ‘dirty work of patriarchy’ being somehow controlled by (more powerful) others has been taken up by several researchers. Kenway and Fitzclarence talk about the mobilising of violence as a tool in the larger, “ongoing project of sustaining male power and masculine identity” (1997: 120, original emphasis). They observe that it is the groups of boys who are most marginalised by society who are most likely to be prone to violence and to subscribe to such values. This method of obtaining some status has been described as "an opportunity to exercise personal power under conditions of minimal structural power...a mode of influence of last resort" (Archer 1994: 317 in Kenway and Fitzclarence, 1997: 122)
To recognize diversity in masculinity is not enough. We must also recognize the relations between the different kinds of masculinity: relations of alliance, dominance and subordination. These relationships are constructed through practices that exclude and include, that intimidate, exploit, and so on. There is a gender politics within masculinity (Connell, 1995: 37).

Connell based his book *Masculinities* (1995) on a theme of "embodied politics of masculinity". So much is invested in the concept of maleness and its embedded meanings that divergence is identified, problematised and pathologised. Gender unorthodoxy in any form is treated with suspicion but bodily expressions of non-conformity, due to their immediacy and accessibility, are quickly noted. A recent advertising campaign for Nike shoes challenges normative representations of the male body by asking "Why don’t men in pom poms cheer for women’s sport?" The short answer is because our society adheres to a set of expectations of gender which forbid it. The long answer is the subject of an entire area of study, located within the realm of gender practice and gender relations, called Masculinities.
Chapter 4 – Identity: the construction of ‘otherness’

The school as a site for construction of sexual identities has been noted by several researchers. Epstein (1997) argues that “Schools are highly sexualised sites”. Many educational researchers have pointed out how pervasive sexuality is in schools, and in particular, how significant the power relations in sexuality are. Redman asserts that schools are a “significant place in which pupils learn about sexuality whether schools intend this or not” (Redman, 1994: 142). Having observed infant boys imitating sex upon restrained girls in the context of a playground ‘game’, Connolly and Wood (in Dixon, 1997) argue that ‘sex’ should be recognised as a key theme of schooling and identity. As a site for defining masculinity, school is a powerful agent. Beynon, in his study of forms of violence in the lower school (1989 in Skelton, 1993), saw violence and the threat of violence as a way of encoding messages about the nature of masculinity. Both teachers and pupils saw this as an important part of toughening up and becoming a man.

School-based masculinities are said to draw on wider cultural representations and relations of power, just as they intersect with the forms of masculinities validated in other cultural arenas: the home, the labour market, the spheres of leisure and popular culture. Nevertheless, schooling is said to be an important site in which masculinities are produced and negotiated (Redman, 1998: 69).

A boy at the school I attended as a student once put forward a theory that being called a ‘poofter’ repeatedly might make a person believe that he was one. His comment had a resonance that I didn’t fully comprehend at the time. On reflection I see his comment as a recognition that some kind of co-construction of identity was operating. He had also noted that one of the key aspects of identity for boys in the school was that of
perceptions of masculinity. Arnot (1984, in Mac an Ghaill, 1994a) argues that in a male-dominated society femininity is ascribed; in contrast “masculinity and manhood have to be achieved in a permanent process of struggle and confirmation.” Rather than following an historically fixed path, this struggle to achieve manhood takes place within the changing contexts of social structure and power relations (Carrigan, Connell and Lee, 1985 in Mac an Ghaill, 1995).

The example cited earlier of the infant boy restraining a girl and playing sex ‘games’ brings into play the much contested nature-nurture argument. Some would maintain that the boy was responding to innate biological urges whilst others would say that he was repeating observed patterns of gendered behaviour and power relations. If the latter is the case then children are picking up and acting out adult social patterns at a very young age. Children have an embarrassing habit of repeating their parents’ phrases and behaviours at socially inappropriate times. I wonder if many parents would recognise the ‘sex play’ as repetition of behaviours the child had observed at home.

Social constructionists believe that there are no essential, inborn, and ageless criteria for identity; rather, that certain human features assume importance as a result of society’s temporal needs or dictates (Lipkin, 1995).

Social – psychology theories are useful for interpreting the motivations behind behaviours. The interaction between the person’s psychology and the social meanings of actions is complex, with each informing the other (see Connell, 1987: 220). Epstein and Johnson (1994) describe the processes involved in the “policing of masculinities and femininities” as “charged with emotion”. They believe that the vehemence with
which they are monitored and shaped indicates that there is “an unconscious or psychic
dimension to the process of forming identities.”

Homosexual Identities

The gay critical perspective provided gender studies with one
further question beyond the questioning of the essentialism of male
and female: the essentialism of hetero- and homosexuality
(Almeida, 1996: 3).

Rather than enter into the debate on the origins of homosexuality I believe it is more
important to consider the personal and cultural meanings of homosexual identities and
same-sex attraction. The definitive factors leading to particular forms of sexual desire
are not known. When asked to state his position on the nature-nurture arguments of the
origins of homosexuality Michel Foucault replied “On this question I have absolutely
nothing to say. No comment” (in Halperin, 1995). Sigmund Freud’s perspective was
that infants are innately bisexual and that gender identity and sexual object choice are
negotiated internally through fantasy, anxiety and the denial of particular longings
(Denman, 1993: 348).

Some researchers question the very motivation behind research into ‘sexual orientation’
and propose that seeking an ‘origin’ of homosexuality reveals homophobia.¹ Schüklenk
and Brookey (1998) believe that “...a prospective genetic probe for genetic information
predictive of homosexuality is likely to be abused in countries where homosexuality is
considered pathological.”

¹ For an outline of arguments against the search for a ‘gay gene’ or other biological determinants of
‘sexual orientation’ see Schüklenk and Brookey (1998) and Schüklenk et al. (1997).
Much has been written about the idea of homosexual identities being a function of socially constructed interpretations and reactions. Same sex attraction need not be linked to a personal identification as homosexual. Foucault believed that while there were previously same-sex acts, there was no corresponding category of identification. He attributes the birth of the homosexual as an identifiable person (a ‘species’) to Westphal’s article of 1870 on ‘Contrary sexual sensation’ (Foucault, 1978 in Jagose, 1996: 10). Recent terminology such as ‘sexual object choice’, ‘same-sex attracted youth’ and ‘men who have sex with men’ consciously avoids identity labels like homosexual or gay. The man who meets with other men for sex on occasions or the man who sells sex to other men may adopt heterosexual or homosexual identities, or indeed may reject all such categories.

Stage theories of the development of a homosexual identity, although not universally accepted, can be useful models for analysing the points of impact of others on the psychology and well being of an individual (see Kus, 1985; Troiden, 1988).

Social constructionist discourse, which sees these identities as emerging relationally, would describe them as a function of social power relations and morality as they have developed in history². Lynne Segal, commenting on a medicalised, pathologised view of homosexuality, which has dominated modern Western thinking, made the following comment:

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² The term ‘homosexual’ was first used by the Hungarian writer and translator Karloy Maria Benkert in 1869). The term was later taken up by the English sexologist Havelock Ellis in the 1890s in his “pioneering studies and classification of varieties of human sexual experience.” (see Altman, 1982: 4, Weeks, 1977: 2, in Segal, 1990: 135)
On this view, a type of socially constructed, collectively expressed, subordinated masculinity came to exist in self identifying homosexual men. (Segal, 1990)

Mary McIntosh in her paper *The Homosexual Role* (1968, in Segal, 1990) describes the function of the creation of the homosexual as “a distinct, despised and punished category of person – as a mechanism for controlling and policing the rest of society.” She argues that this particular social category is not defined in terms of actual behaviour; rather it is framed by myths and anticipated behaviours such as paedophilia and effeminacy. Accepting that a social process has created the category of homosexuality then it is justifiable to believe that further social actions can change the way homosexuals are viewed (vilified) and indeed the notion of or need for such categories of sexual identity. Miriam Schneir (1994, in Jagose, 1996) believes that the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality exist only as a tool men use for the oppression of women. Following this argument, changing the power dynamics of the society would cause such categories to disappear.

**Available Cultural Categories and Compulsory Heterosexuality**

The pervasiveness of the categorical imperatives to act like heterosexual men circumscribed the peer group’s everyday cultural practices. (Mac an Ghaill, 1994a)

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3 I am not arguing that a homosexual identity is fixed in time (for a description of shifts in cultural discourse around homosexuality see Herdt, 1989: 2). Personal and social meanings of this identity category do change and can serve useful purposes (such as support and belonging) for people identifying as homosexual.
The term ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ was coined by Adrienne Rich in 1980. It describes the ways in which heterosexuality is reinforced and ‘promoted’ while lesbian (and gay) sexuality is punished (see Epstein, 1994: 34). The concept can be extended to include compulsory masculinity; the hegemonic frameworks which effectively police the range of gender and sexuality roles available to young men (Town, 1998).

In an atmosphere where heterosexuality and its associated behaviours are expected of everyone, rejecting macho modes of masculinity carries with it a high price. Foucault emphasised that sexuality is not an essentially personal attribute but an ‘available cultural category’ (in Jagose, 1996: 79). My understanding of Foucault’s theorising of identity is that cultural categories serve specific cultural projects and are designed for habitation, leaving the spaces between existing categories fraught with conflict and confusion.

The socialisation of children in schools is described by Connell (1987:195) as a series of invitations to participate in social practice. These ‘invitations’ are issued on certain terms which are often coercive and provide no alternative to the practices and categories on offer. I’m reminded of such practices as school dances in which boys were expected to ask a girl to dance. Teachers and peers alike encouraged this practice but there was never any mention of the option of dancing with another boy. Redman describes the meanings, practices and subject positions which are embedded in formal and informal school curricula as not deterministic in pupils’ identities but nevertheless as providing the “terrain upon which school-based forms of gender and sexuality are produced” (1998: 69). He believes it is through the available categories of masculinity that individual boys, with varying degrees of success and failure, make sense of their schooling experience (ibid.: 71).
A defining moment of tension for many adolescents is when they realise that there is a mismatch between their own feelings of desire or identity and those made available to them. The options are to actively decline the 'invitations' or to accept and take on the practices of the common project. Expressions of decline may involve such elements as a refusal of heterosexuality, blending masculine and feminine elements or creating a split in their own lives (e.g. drag) (Connell, 1987: 195). This recognition of the discordance between internalised identity and cultural expectations is experienced as confusion and even trauma by many. The identities offered by representations of gays and lesbians in the media may offer no solace as they still may not show a lifestyle which the student feels they can relate to.

Alex describes the expanding rift between the sexual identity categories being taken up by his classmates and his own feelings of desire:

**Alex** Yeah I’ve been there since year 7 and I’ve known I was gay since I was 13 or 12 really but you don’t really worry about it until about year 9. Well I never did, because you think everybody’s going through the same thing that you’re going through really. And when you read in books that you’re attracted to all kinds of people and all kinds of things, like when you’re in your early teenage years and when year 9 sort of hits, the guys go through puberty. And they suddenly switched to girls and then you feel a bit left behind because you find guys more attractive than girls. But still nothing’s said really and you’re sort of aware that you’re gay but then slowly between about year 9 and year 10 I slowly heard the prejudice that existed between the two. I never really worried about it before.
Alex also talks about his emerging awareness that any expression of his sexual desire is subject to prejudice from the ‘other side’. Interestingly, in his early high school years he wasn’t aware that there was anything different about his sexuality. Alex goes on to talk about the subject of ‘coming out’ as a gay person:

**Alex** And at year 12, where I am now the, I know after being told that 11% or so of the population is gay or bi-sexual, you wonder who else in the school is. You don’t know because no-one’s out at school. I’ve only told my two closest friends really, no one else needs to know. And being in year 12, at this stage of the year I’ve got exams coming up soon and it’s a very busy year and hectic and stressful, you don’t need added stress so you don’t say anything. You talk to the counsellor about it, well I do and they’re very supportive and very helpful. At my school we’ve got good teachers and everything. It’s a fairly good school I’m lucky.

Alex recognises that coming out would not be an easy process at his school. Although he sees the benefits of coming out, of exposure, as a way of showing solidarity with others like him he is not willing to create extra stress at a time when he anticipates the pressure of exams. Connell describes coming out as part of a reconstruction of personal life which, done under pressure and at risk, repudiates “the business of keeping up a front of heterosexuality” (1997: 233).

The following discussion, during the group interview of six year twelve students, referred to a situation where a man introduced himself to the mother of one of the students and came out as part of the introduction.

**Candy** One of my mum’s friends, my mum met this guy at Tabaret, she was sitting down next to him and was talking to him and he goes “Hi I’m
gay” and mum goes “Oh that’s nice I’m Vera” and he just wanted to use the shock factor to see if my mum would be offended, because generally people in their fifties or forties-fifties are quite offended by, you know they haven’t quite accepted homophobia, they’re still..

Juliet  They haven’t grown up with acceptance like we have.

Candy  Exactly, whereas people our age have grown up to accept it, and it’s more accepted, homophobia is something of the past, well..

(All show signs of disagreement)

Candy  Well it’s starting, it’s starting to get that way, it’s still very much there, very much present. And she just turned around and said “Hi, I’m Vera” and now they’ve been speaking, they’ve been friends for, I don’t know, quite a few months now. But I just thought that that was really..

Yola  That’s really strange.

Candy  ..that that was really strange, that he just turned around and said to her...

PJ  I think that’s very bad manners.

Candy  It is..

Yola  “I’m heterosexual”, yeah.

Candy  It’s quite rude, but he said..

Juliet  But hey why not say that?

Candy  No because he said to my mum that quite a few times he’s made friends with people then they’ve found out he was gay and that was it, dropped him like a hot potato.
The group didn’t like the way this man introduced himself as gay. General consensus was that it was odd and in fact rude to state one’s sexual identity at first meeting. The students felt that they have grown up with a certain tolerance or acceptance that the previous generation didn’t have, yet there was no mention that Candy’s mother disapproved. The discourse centred on manners and appropriateness and what aspects about one’s identity should be spoken in polite society.

**Multiple binaries – Us and them (and them and them)**

Defining one’s identity in the school context seems to be a matter of positioning oneself in relation to the others around. The students interviewed for this study spoke of such groups of people as the ‘nerds’, the ‘faggots’, the ‘jocks’ and the ‘ravers’. When I asked them to describe where they fit in they told me they were just ‘normal’. They described who they were in terms of who they were not. This had me searching for some sort of model that would help me to understand how the concept of identity was managed on a personal level. At first I thought of polar opposites with some kind of continuum of identities between them. For example the faggot/jock binary would have the individual positioning themself somewhere along the line between the two poles. Similarly, one could place oneself somewhere between feminine and masculine poles.

With my interest being the construction of identity for boys I began to think how boys position others in relation to themselves. Using the metaphor of the behaviour of a gas in a container of known volume, a ‘shapeless’ identity would take up the available space but as the walls of the container close in (the social boundaries are drawn), identity begins to condense, become more restricted and subsequently defined. This metaphor was useful as it allowed me to see each individual as the centre, a kind of void that is
defined in terms of its relative distance from other labelled identities. I have placed faggots and females in the outer circles to represent the distances established between them and the (male) self. See appendix 4 for a diagram that illustrates this (admittedly simplistic) concept.

Many others have theorised the role of binarism in identity construction. Rutherford sees binarism, as expressed in class contempt, racism, homophobia and misogyny, as serving to expel anxieties, contradictions and irrationalities from one person (the centre) onto the subordinate term. Subsequently the ‘other’ simply reflects and represents what is deeply familiar to the centre (Rutherford, 1990 in Mac an Ghaill, 1994a). Misson sees the deployment of binaries as problematic, describing the very term other as positioning “us as the self and at a distance from the other” (1996: 123). He believes that the aim of feminist, anti-racist and anti-homophobic discourse is to deconstruct the binary oppositions, thereby denaturalising them.

A number of binaries are analogous to the masculine-feminine binary. Others such as rational-emotional, body-mind, straight-gay, jock-faggot and natural-unnatural spring to mind. On the nature of dichotomies and their function of marginalisation, Anne Cranny-Francis has this to say:

It can be argued that those rigid classifications which constitute each term of the binaries simply do not exist; instead, one term is constituted by the repression of the other, and in a move which places the marginalised term at the very heart of the definition of the dominant. Nevertheless, as a set of strategic metaphors, these dichotomies continue to exist. Consequently, it has been particularly important for feminists to deconstruct them (1995: 24).
Schools actively maintain such binaries as those mentioned above. Shane Town describes three ways in which this is achieved:

- Officially sanctioned silence about sexuality as a whole and homosexuality in particular,
- lack of intervention and recognition of verbal and physical homophobic and homonegative acts within peer groups, and
- any mention of homosexuality exists as a mere add-on to the central heterosexual curriculum (Town, 1998: 4).

Such strategies as these serve to embed the labels and reinforce their power to minoritise. Other dichotomous categories are formed in the school that, once again, reinforce perceptions of dominance and subordination. Within the formal curriculum there are oppositional categories such as academic-vocational, arts-science and academic-sporting (see Epstein and Johnson, 1994: 215). Students view themselves and judge others according to where they fall in relation to these very real categories which carry with them a shared meaning in the particular school culture.

I recall, as a first-year engineering student, the rivalry between the ‘engies’ and the ‘graphos’ (graphic arts students). These categories carried with them messages about identity, solidarity and divergent masculinities. The ‘engies’, on the whole, were seen to (and expected to) subscribe to a hegemonic form of masculinity, with its associated dress codes and ‘blokey’ behaviour. The ‘graphos’ on the other hand were read as ‘alternative’ because of their expressions of such ‘feminine’ characteristics as interest in fashion and the arts.
The binaries used to reinforce heterosexist values derive their meaning from a basic
gender dualism. The concept of masculine as oppositional to feminine creates distance,
a ‘demilitarised zone’ as it were. Stepping across this creates extreme tension. Rather
than existing as “simply dichotomous, symmetrical and complementary”, Cornwall and
Lindisfarne presuppose that “gender relations were, at the base, relations of power,
hierarchy and inequality” (1994, in Almeida, 1996). Extending this concept to the
relations between dominant and subordinate masculinities we begin to elaborate on the
complexity which underscores the seemingly simple binaries such as faggot-jock. On
the function of the multiplicity of binaries created and referred to, Mary Douglas
believes that social order relies on “exaggerating the differences between within and
without, above and below, male and female, with and against” (cited in Butler, 1990:
131, see Cranny-Francis, 1995:33).

Although social relations based on gender are of particular interest in this study, they
can’t really be viewed as relations occurring in isolation. They interact and intertwine
with the dynamics of relations based on class, status, ethnicity, age and so on (see

“Gay until Graduation” - Homosexuality as fad

In a TIME article published last year, on students becoming more open about their non-
heterosexuality, I came across the term “gay until graduation”. The term is used
derisively to describe those who experiment with gay sex during their college years.
The perception that gay is this year’s ‘Rubik’s cube’ has been emerging of late.
In the interview with the ‘non-identified’ group, Jet talks about a friend of his who has just announced his bisexuality:

*Jet* But it’s very popular, there are so many people who are like, it’s trendy to be gay. Like young people are like “yeah I’m gay” like I’ve got this friend who’s so impressionable and he’s just decided he’s bisexual. He just went to a new school and he’s got a friend who just told him he was bi so now all of a sudden he’s bi. And he’s like still a virgin so I don’t know where he gets this from.

(All laugh)

*WG* Do you think that a person can only make that sort of decision once they have experimented?

*Juliet* I think so.

*Jet* How do they know if they like it or don’t like it if they haven’t experienced it?

*PJ* My friend told me, I asked him “When did you know?” and he said he always knew, that there was never that attraction to girls. And he says that when he was with a girl for the first time it was awkward and when he was with a guy for the first time he said it felt really natural.

*Juliet* Comfortable.

*Jet* But see he’s been with a guy and a girl before.

Jet describes his friend as impressionable and assumes that he has only declared bisexuality to conform with his other friend. The group’s perception was that one could only legitimately declare a bi-sexual identity if they had actually experienced same-sex
sex. I asked them whether it was OK to identify as heterosexual without having had sex with a partner of the opposite sex. The following conversation followed:

**PJ**  
I’d say most of the time.

**Juliet**  
I think it’s probable, most likely. Most of the time.

**PJ**  
Because before having sex guys are getting to know their bodies, as it were.

**Juliet**  
Yeah, you’re automatically assumed heterosexual.

**Jet**  
My uncle, he got married had two kids and then decided he was gay.

**Juliet**  
If you’re a girl and you’re a virgin and you’re constantly looking at guys, dribbling all over the place and no desire, no real desire for girls, it’s just assumed you are heterosexual until perhaps you do have sex with both sexes. I think only ‘till then do you really know.

**WG**  
It sounds a bit like a double standard, like if a person says “I identify as being gay, I haven’t had sex but that’s how I identify” you don’t trust that but if someone identifies as heterosexual and they haven’t had sex either you trust that.

**Jet**  
You’re not gonna go, “you’re not gay because you haven’t had sex yet”  
You’re gonna go “oh yeah.”

**PJ**  
I do know a gay guy who thought he was gay. He was with a guy and then after 3 weeks he actually woke up one morning and thought “hey..”

**Juliet**  
“Hey this isn’t me.”

**Candy**  
Another friend of mine, he’s had sex with quite a few partners and other friends of ours have been saying “No, if he had sex with a girl he’ll see. He’ll see that he’s not gay.”
(All laugh)

Candy And I’m like no, he’s attracted to males it doesn’t mean just because he hasn’t had heterosexual sex that he’s, you know..

The feeling among the group appeared to be that a presumption of heterosexuality was legitimate. When I pointed out the apparent contradiction there was some acknowledgment of a double standard but PJ had a story to illustrate that a guy could think that he was gay but be mistaken. Perhaps he was providing evidence that a gay identity could still be a phase or a fad.

I asked Justin and Alex whether they thought a person could choose to become bisexual in order to be trendy:

Alex It’s an automatic stereotype.

Justin It is becoming, I dunno, I don’t think it’s trendy for guys yet but it’s trendy for a lot of girls to be bi. I mean it seems to be like “Oh wow, that’s fantastic” sort of thing. But I didn’t know it was trendy for guys at the moment or a fashion trend. My parents thought I was just doing it because it looks good at the moment. I’m like “How do you work out that it looks good at the moment?” “Because there’s all these movies on and everyone’s talking about it and ra ra ra” Some people do think it is because of a sort of trend thing. I think it’s just because more people are coming out and more people are being noticed that everyone’s like “There’s a trend happening, they’re not actually gay it’s just they’re saying it.” It’s a way of straight people coping with the fact that there’s more gay people around.

Alex and Justin disagreed with the fad theory as it applies to males but Justin believes that there is a tendency for women to declare bisexuality in order to be trendy. Justin
went on to theorise why people would put forward the gay-as-fad proposition. He believes that heterosexuals, in order to deal with an increased gay visibility, are discrediting a gay identity by calling it a trend. I asked Alex and Justin whether they thought people could choose their sexuality:

Alex  No.

Justin  If you're bi you could go like one way or the other or like, say if you're bi you could decide, sort of make a decision, "OK, I'm gonna stay with girls, because it looks better and it's easier" and...

Alex  But you'd always be looking at guys and finding them attractive.

Justin  But you'd be looking at girls too and you'd still get satisfied or whatever.

Alex  Yeah.

Justin  There's a couple of bi people I know that I do believe are genuinely bi. They've chosen to remain sort of straightish so that they fit in and it's better and it's easier.

Alex  There's a lot of 'biz' that, sorry go on...

Justin  To choose to be like gay is, I don't know, stupid. If it was a choice..

Alex  I don't think anyone would choose to be gay. I couldn't imagine; it would be a silly thing to do.

Justin  Not at this time.

Alex  And I don't think honestly you could really and keep it going for..I'm trying to imagine trying to be straight. What a dreadful time.
Justin and Alex thought that a bi-sexual person could suppress desire for people of a particular sex, thereby putting on a ‘performance’ one way or the other. Justin refers to bisexuals acting straight in order to make their lives easier. In terms of choosing to be gay both Justin and Alex thought it would be foolish to choose what they perceive as a more difficult life. Alex viewed a performance of a sexuality against one’s nature to be unsustainable.

**Labelling – “They put you in a box”**

The labelling/action/expectancy process can serve to enrich or limit personal growth. (D’Augelli, 1992: 218)

Although stereotyped behaviours such as wrist flapping, lisping etc are widely used to indicate or represent feminised or gay males, it is not always predictable which social practices will be categorised by different peer groups as feminine or masculine. Mac an Ghaill found that this was “contingent on specific location and most significantly on individual male students’ established sexual reputations” (1994a). The same behaviour, for example putting on a woman’s dress for a fancy-dress party can take on a different meaning, within a social group, depending on the reputation of the male wearing it. A boy with a reputation as an established heterosexual may be allowed more latitude in behaviour than a boy whose sexuality has come under suspicion in the past.

Once a label has been applied to a school student it tends to stick. Some labels are welcomed as they enhance the person’s status within the group, others can be damaging. Labels such as ‘sissies’, ‘sensitive boys’, ‘nerds’ and ‘wonks’ can arise because of a wide range of non-traditional behaviour among boys. These labels serve to create
several different persecuted identities (Rofes, 1995: 84). On labelling in the school environment the students in the group interview made the following comments:

**Aldous**  
There’s the ethos of tagging, labelling every person there at an all boys school. You’re either labelled as a good bloke or they’d have another label that they thought picked on something that characterised you.

**Juliet**  
It’s just what they don’t fail to see, they can’t respect other people’s individuality.

**Aldous**  
They put you in a box, to make them feel more comfortable.

**Juliet**  
To make them feel better, to make them feel big and masculine and sure about themselves.

According to Aldous, you’re either labelled as a good bloke (acceptable) or as something else (unacceptable). Both Aldous and Juliet felt that labelling served the purpose of propping up the labeller’s self-esteem. People are also labelled according to a group identity to which they are seen to belong. The students didn’t feel that they belonged to any particular group but they were able to identify who the other groups were and those who belonged to them. ‘Jocks’, ‘ravers’ and ‘surfies’ were the group names given. Justin describes some of the persecuted boys as ‘dweeb’ or ‘computer nerds’. These were the boys who “made no effort whatsoever to try and do anything and would always sit by themselves and so got tormented.” I felt that Justin was implying that these boys created their own vulnerability and subsequent victim status by not trying to join in with the others.
The group started to talk about non-traditional behaviours in terms of deviance. A curious analogy was employed to describe the experience of seeing two men holding hands:

Candy  But I don’t see what, say you see two guys walking down holding hands, people say “Oh god, look” whereas if a guy and a girl are walking, holding hands, why don’t people say “oh god, have a look, have a look”?

Juliet  You know.

Jet  The thing is when you’re a young kid you do do that, like when you’re in Primary school.

Yola  Because it’s not what you’re used to.

Aldous  It’s the same thing, if you see people walking along holding a dog and then you see holding a zebra, then even if you’ve got no prejudice towards zebras, you’re still gonna say “well that’s out of the ordinary.”

Juliet  Exactly.

PJ  That’s a really weird analogy.

WG  Because it’s confronting, because you shouldn’t be with a zebra. Is that what it’s about?

Aldous  No I don’t think it’s about that I think it’s just about, like if you..

Yola  Unusual.

Juliet  It’s not the norm.
If more people would walk their zebra to the park would it eventually become acceptable behaviour? Without using the terminology, the students are discussing ‘normalised’ behaviour and the subsequent construction of ‘deviance’.

Patrolling or policing the boundaries of acceptable behaviour is common practice in all manner of social arenas. With regard to sexuality and the variability in individual relations to the heterosexual norm, Epstein and Johnson make the following comment:

The boundaries are by no means fixed and individuals may experience moments of confusion, ambivalence and the need to declare a sexuality and draw tight boundaries around it. It is precisely because of these ambivalences and contradictions that those who patrol moral categories attempt to enforce their own psychic ‘resolutions’ on others (1994: 221).

Sexuality and associated social conduct are policed and shaped within a framework where behaviours and sexualities are constructed as ‘normative’ or deviant. The means through which this occurs will be explored in the next chapter.
Chapter 5 – Policing the boundaries of masculinity and sexuality

In this chapter I will outline some of the specific mechanisms through which surveillance and social regulation of sexualities and masculinities occurs. Formal and hidden curricula impact on the student in the school but socialising mechanisms operate across the young person’s world through home life, popular culture and the media.

Heteronormativity and the silences around homosexuality

Justin ... basically gay issues weren’t an issue because no one talked about it or said anything. It just didn’t exist so there was no prejudice as such, like no one said you might be gay or whatever. It just didn’t exist.

As a starting point on the literature available on the topic of homosexuality I consulted the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. It tells us that homosexual behaviour “has been considered perverted and sick by a large portion of the population” (Britannica Online). It neglects to mention that the majority of researchers in the field of sexuality consider homosexual behaviour to be neither ‘perverted’ nor ‘sick’. The encyclopedia informs us that:

The programming that encourages heterosexuality and discourages homosexuality, even close physical contact with the same sex, generally results in the stunting of any budding homosexual fantasies or behaviour in most prepubescents. Heterosexuality is left to unfold. (ibid.)

Such a discourse presumes that heterosexuality is the natural state and that it will “unfold” if homosexuality is nipped in the bud. Given that the *Encyclopedia Britannica* is considered a conservative text, and one that reaches a limited audience, it is
nevertheless often regarded as ‘authoritative’. This notion of homosexuality as pathology is still being promulgated and has proven to be pervasive and persistent.

When sexualities are spoken of, heterosexuality is the unspoken term. It is to this very silent and unremarked nature that its power has been attributed (Epstein and Johnson, 1994: 149). The presumption of heterosexuality is verbalised by Juliet when she says “Yeah, you’re automatically assumed heterosexual.” Such a presumption and the subsequent discreditation of other sexualities is nicely summed up in the term ‘heterosexism’. A heterosexist discourse at once “denies, denigrates and stigmatises any non-heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship or community” (Herek, 1992: 89 in Unks, 1995: 5). Because homosexuality is generally the problematised situation we rarely pause to consider what heterosexuality actually is. The heterosexual lifestyle is described by Veronica Beechey as “a particular kinship system and set of living arrangements (the coresident nuclear family)” (Beechey, 1985 in Redman, 1994). She claims that this system is promoted as “universal and normatively desirable” (ibid.).

Silences around sexuality, particularly homosexuality, can speak volumes. The absence of representations of non-heterosexual sexualities creates a paradoxical ‘presence’ in the school’s agenda. This invisibility of homosexuals in the curriculum can be interpreted as a lesson that homosexuals have done nothing of consequence. Gerald Unks believes that “to the homosexual student, the message has even greater power: no one who has ever felt as you do has done anything worth mentioning” (1995: 5).

Adopting a post-structuralist position, that normalisation of behaviour is a socially constructed phenomenon, several researchers have begun using the term ‘heteronormativity’. Warner defines heteronormativity as “the normalising processes
which support heterosexuality as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of inter-gender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn’t exist” (1994: in Town, 1998: 2).

Alex and Justin discuss what they feel are society’s expectations:

Justin    There’s an expectation..

Alex      Exactly.

Justin    Like even with like in everyday conversation..

Alex      If you’re a guy you’re gonna be with a woman.

Justin    You still have to, even when you come out you say “That’s it.” It’s not it. You’ve gotta keep sort of coming out every day so to speak. Because someone will assume “Oh have you got a girlfriend?” and it’s like “No I’ve got a partner” and it works (inaudible word) and yeah so you’ve got that sort of everyday thing and society is set up for straights. So there’s a bit of, and then there’s blatant, outright homophobia which quite a few people possess.

Justin recognises the heteronormative discourse which he feels he must challenge each time it is assumed that a partner of his would be female. He also points out that homophobia operates on several levels, including the presumption of heterosexuality and direct homophobic acts. In order to maintain its hegemonic status, heterosexuality polices its boundaries via subtle and not-so-subtle means. Mac an Ghaill observed in his studies that “for heterosexual males at Parnell school, sexual boundary maintenance, policing and control were definitive peer-group cultural practices” (1994a). Elaborating on the origin of such practices he states that “Male students’ sex/gender identities are formed against an older generation’s surveillance and social regulation” (ibid.).
Messages, which serve as warnings or deterrents to young people, may be delivered in
the form of myths that construct lesbians and gay men as isolates and social deviants.
Being told that gays turn out to be lonely, tragic old people outlines a particularly scary
scenario. Threats of rejection by friends and exclusion from jobs are quite common. In a
statement about policies addressing the needs of gays and lesbians, One Nation’s
Melbourne Ports candidate (for the 1998 federal election) said that he’d never met a
happy homosexual. He went on to say that “...they seem to be rather sad people” (Bell,
1998). Nick, an interviewee of the National Lesbian and Gay Survey remembers his
Priest-teacher telling the class that most homosexuals commit suicide and that suicide is
a mortal sin (1993: 37). Statements such as these serve to map out an unpleasant future
for young people grappling with the complexities of their sexuality.

It is not necessary for homophobia to be expressed for
heterosexism as a cultural structure to be active in a particular
moment. It operates through silences and absences as well as
through verbal and physical abuse or through overt discrimination
(Epstein and Johnson, 1994: 198).

Abuse, an overt form of social regulation, directed at young people is particularly
prevalent in schools. Of the abuse reported by the subjects of a recent study involving
750 same-sex attracted young people, 70% took place at school (NCHSR, 1998:33).
Although I wouldn’t say that teachers condone such abuse, when they do nothing about
it their lack of intervention may be read by the ‘victim’ as consent. The GLAD survey
into discrimination and violence against lesbians and gay men in Victoria reported that
47% of respondents aged under 20 said that they’d been harassed during their
education. It also states that 69% of lesbians and 52% of gay men agreed with the
proposition that “many gay people also suffered discrimination due to their sexuality
not being acknowledged or recognised” (GLAD, 1994).
Homophobia – Does the term adequately describe the acts committed?

The term *homophobia* is useful in that it has a shared meaning. Most people would understand the word as describing unreasonable negativism towards homosexuals. Its popular usage tends to be within the context of a social justice discourse. For these reasons I will use the term throughout this study. The term is problematic, however, as a phobia inadequately describes its range of expressions and the intents behind them. A phobia is a medicalised state for which we rarely blame the ‘sufferer’. The arachnophobe’s aversion to spiders is empathised; his desire to see the animal removed or harmed, pardoned. Misson (1998) describes the term *homophobic* as importing a kind of psychological explanation for the behaviour. Within this quasi-clinical framework, homophobia may be seen as excusable, hence the panic defence which has been successfully put forward in court by perpetrators of violence against gay men. Hinson believes that implicit in the term is a justification of the acts committed in its name (1996: 243 in Telford, 1998). It is at once affirming and problematic that, consistent with phobias, the term homophobia implies irrationality. We can acknowledge that homophobia is irrational but it is a dangerous presumption that homophobic beliefs and acts are beyond the perpetrator’s control.

I propose that the term *homocontempt* more accurately reflects the many acts of violence or hate crimes which are attributed to homophobia. To hold in contempt is to scorn or despise. The term reflects the positioning of homosexuals as subordinate and describes the acts of aggression (active or passive) directed towards homosexuals and those associated with homosexuality. Connell (1987: 186) describes acts of subordination such as police and legal harassment, street violence and economic discrimination as “expressions of the contempt for homosexuality and homosexual men
that is part of the ideological package of hegemonic masculinity.” Kenway and Fitzclarence extend this concept further, claiming that violent cultures in general “draw from, distort and exaggerate discourses from the discursive field of hegemonic masculinity” (1997: 121).

Homophobia has been defined by many researchers in terms of the fear that is generated by notions of, or proximity to homosexuals. Unks defines homophobia not only as a fear but as a hatred. He describes homophobia as “the fear and hatred that heterosexuals experience around homosexuals and the discomfort that homosexuals feel towards themselves” (1995). Similarly, Hart defines homophobia as “the irrational fear and/or hatred of same-sex acts and actors” (1986: 85). Denman, in her paper entitled Prejudice and Homosexuality, argues that prejudice and its effects are major barriers to the construction of good theory about homosexuality. Homophobia may be understood as a prejudice according to her model. She makes the distinction between passionately held beliefs and prejudices as follows:

Thus prejudices are not simple opinions which happen to be passionately held, wrong or just different from one’s own. Rather they are strongly held convictions often of a moral nature which qualify as prejudices because they are defended in a distinctive way. That is they are defended in a way which, by its motivated illogicality, betrays simultaneously a deeply rooted desire that they should be true and an anxiety about their actual truth (Denman, 1993: 348).

Although the term homophobia was not introduced until the early 1970s, Lynne Segal describes the phenomenon of homophobia as emerging in the latter part of the nineteenth century as English middle-class culture began to polarise masculinity and
femininity. Masculinity was associated with characteristics like physical strength and economic independence whilst femininity was defined by physical weakness, emotionality and economic dependence (1990: 138). In order to maintain appropriate definitions of masculine and feminine behaviour, at a time when sexuality became firmly bound to marriage, homosexuality became a punished category. Lynne Segal believes that homophobia exists because the visibility of lesbian and gay sexuality challenges the "historic harnessing of sexuality to the social creation of gender, along the lines of active male predator and passive female prey" (1990: 156).

Teasing and the bully – Dynamics and function of the oppressor-oppressed relationship

As I got older and fully entered the society of children, I met the key enforcer of social roles among children: the bully. The bully was the boy who defined me as queer to my peers. If they had not already noticed, he pointed out my nonconformity (Rofes, 1995: 79).

Rofes sees the bully as performing the specific social function of defining acceptable conduct, appearance and activities for children. It would seem then that bullying is an activity sanctioned by society. Why then would so many of us claim to oppose bullying and so few admit to having done it? The bully as school-ground watchdog is kept on a leash. He is not encouraged to attack but he is given enough rope to inflict the occasional bite.

Kehily and Nayak (1997: 72) believe that language as it is used for cussing or making smart comments acts as a stage for performing masculinity. ‘Onupmanship’ can be
achieved through the use of witty or even venomous comments. They describe the use of ‘mother’ taunts, which challenge the links with femininity, thereby producing heterosexual hierarchies between the real men and those ‘wooses’ who are likely to cry. Teasing because of perceived ‘sissyness’ or ‘girlishness’ serves the likely function of socialising girls and boys into stereotypical gender roles and to control the forms of masculinity likely to be adopted (Epstein and Johnson, 1994:205; Epstein, 1997:110). This view is also held by Eder, Evans and Parker (1995 in Phoenix, 1997) who see the function of insulting, teasing, collaborative storytelling and gossip as reproducing and producing afresh traditional gender beliefs. They give the example that ritual teasing was often used by boys to reinforce notions that masculinity is synonymous with toughness.

Students in this study discussed their experiences of teasing and why it occurs. They felt that the teaser gained satisfaction in seeing the victim hurt or unsettled.

**WG**  
When you fight back, if you like, even if you’re fighting back with words, do they stop because they think, “Oh, now we can’t get away with it he’s fighting back” or is it because they realise they’ve actually hurt you?

**Aldous**  
No I think they stop if they realise that it’s not working, it’s not doing anything.

**Candy**  
That’s right, if you don’t let it sort of phase you in a way it becomes pointless because they just keep saying the same thing over and over again and if you’re not phased by it, it doesn’t seem to, it’s not as bad. If they’re hurling abuse at you and you’re running away crying then that’s, they want that outcome.

**Juliet**  
That’s the reaction that they feed on.
Candy  Yeah, that's the kind of reaction they thrive on, whereas if you just turned around and said 'Oh really, OK thanks very much' and like, you turn around and walk away it's not as bad as them seeing you running off and crying or something like that.

Juliet used the metaphor of bullying as 'feeding'. This notion of nourishment or sustenance achieved through bullying raises questions about the needs and nature of those who dominate and the choices they make in who is to be dominated. Ken Rigby, in his book on bullying in schools, comes to the conclusion that bullying and harassment (which he defines as a type of bullying, usually of a non-physical nature) are rooted in prejudiced social beliefs. He says that the knowledge of the social characteristics of the target may or may not be accurate. To the bully, it is enough that the intended victim is vulnerable; to dominate them is an attractive proposition as it somehow elevates the bully (Rigby, 1996: 23). Whether or not the boy who is bullied is same-sex attracted is irrelevant, if he shows the stereotypical characteristics of gay men then the bully will seize an opportunity to dominate.

Justin describes teasing as a group identifier, a catalyst for some kind of shared experience among a particular group. He recalls an incident where a boy was accidentally hit by an apple which was thrown.

Justin  An incident happened and I, someone threw this apple and someone, this guy happened, the wall sort of thing, missed the wall a bit and this guy, one of the computer nerds, walked out at just the wrong moment. And got the end bit of the apple and no one could have seen that was going to happen and he got called 'apple' from then onwards. He was 'apple' and everyone would laugh because it was a shared sort of "Oh remember that, he got splattered with the apple" so he just became apple. I mean it's a really stupid name but that was just what he was called. That was like a derogatory name
but none of the teachers could see it was a derogatory name so they couldn’t
do anything about it.

The boy who was hit by the apple had already been labelled a ‘computer nerd’ so he
was already vulnerable, an easy target for harassment. Justin also points out the
subversive nature of such taunts as he identifies the teacher’s powerlessness to control a
situation, which technically, doesn’t violate any school rules about language,
discrimination etc.

‘Poofs’, ‘Sissies’ and ‘Faggots’ – Actual or symbolic ‘deviants’

Society, at least such an internally regulated society as the military,
needs its symbolic deviants; actual deviants may be beside the
point. (Morgan, 1987 in Segal, 1990)

One of the most difficult aspects of this study to explain is the nature of the relationship
between masculinity and sexuality. Hearn and Morgan (1995: 179) describe notions of
hegemonic masculinity as being bound up with hegemonic sexualities. The two notions
are so closely linked it might seem as though I have been using them interchangeably. I
concede that it may be politically correct to divorce the two as it can’t be said that a
‘feminine’ boy is or will become gay. However, Rofes (1995), in his article Making our
schools safe for sissies, argues that maintaining that the ‘sissy’ boy will not necessarily
be gay is counterproductive. As this type of research is often done by gay men it may
well be clouded by a collective voice saying “I wasn’t a sissy!” It’s understandable that
recollections of childhood may invoke painful memories for some gay men but there
may be value in honest discussions of school experiences. Rofes believes that keeping
the sissy out of discussions of boys and sexualities is tantamount to denial of a
commonly experienced reality. With evidence suggesting that those children, who manifest nonconformist gender behaviour at an early age, are the ones with the greatest likelihood of being gay as adults (Harry, 1982, in Herdt, 1989) it would be a shame to deny the link. It may be worth trying to disentangle masculinities and sexualities to illuminate motivations, history and power dynamics but the two concepts are so interrelated the impact of one on the other must be acknowledged.

The sissy boy who is beaten up because of the way he talks or dresses is being punished for his alignment with homosexuality. Almeida discusses masculinity in terms of it being strongly grounded on specifically sexual elements. He believes that the divisions among men are analogous to divisions between men and women. Following this argument he theorises aggression in the male homosocial realm as an attempt to exorcise the immanent danger of homosexuality. “The most common fear and form of aggression is present in the idiom of homosexuality, understood as a passive category, symbolised in the image of anal penetration thus feminising men” (Almeida, 1996: 57). In a nutshell the argument goes: homosexuals are like women so any man who is like a woman will be devalued, vilified and perhaps punished.

I explored, with the students, why labels were used and what they actually mean:

**WG** What sort of boys would be called poofer or faggot? What would make people call them that in year 9 or 10?

**Justin** Effeminate.

**Alex** Just anything that would be effeminate.
Justin  Yeah, not the norms. Like I mean you could just not do, if you were just a computer nerd you could be called a faggot. If you just didn’t bother putting the effort into like going out onto the sporting field or..

Alex    Yeah, anyone who wasn’t particularly masculine or like ‘one of the boys.’

Having identified that perceived effeminacy or lack of hegemonic masculinity could have one categorised as a faggot we discussed the meanings of such labels.

WG      Back to name-calling, somebody mentioned the word faggot before, what other words are used to mean that same thing?

Yola    Everything.

PJ      Everything in the book.

WG      Can you list them?

PJ      You’ve got fag, poof, homo, I’ve heard fairy boy a couple of times.

Juliet  Freak, that’s a bit general though.

Yola    Yeah, general, it doesn’t necessarily go down..

WG      If those words are used if a boy is called a poofer or a faggot or whatever, do you think the person who’s calling them that is really thinking and referring to their sexual behaviour?

Juliet  No, no way.

Yola    Oh they call their friends that as well.

Juliet  It’s the way they are.
PJ  It's like a manner of speech, it's like, you know, some people say 'um-er' in the middle of a sentence other people just, instead of the word 'dude' there's 'poof' or 'gay', whatever or things like that.

Yola  You constantly hear..

PJ  Not much thought is put into it.

Juliet  Or based on the way somebody walks, if he's pigeon toed he'll be a faggot, you know what I mean?

Candy  Yeah, yeah. Exactly.

Juliet  If he has a lisp he'll be, oh ya poof, why don't you speak properly, there's no evidence.

Aldous  I don't think it's something they examine closely.

Juliet  Yeah they don't think about it at all.

Aldous  But they have a list of criteria and which they question your sexual preferences if you fit under any one of the criteria.

WG  What are they?

Aldous  But they wouldn't take it that seriously if they weren't sure.

WG  What sort of criteria would make somebody suspect, would make them...

Candy  The way they speak.

Aldous  It depends where they go to school and what year level they're in.

Jet  Definitely, that's one of the reasons I reckon I got it a lot, like these two (referring to Yola and Juliet) they thought ..
Yola: We thought... we were in year 8 we were horrible, we were like..

Juliet: When we were in year 9 we were almost as bad as..

Jet: They wrote letters to each other saying that I was gay.

Yola: Yeah, like we had this new guy..

Juliet: Yeah we thought he was a girl and then he started speaking and I was like, oh!

Yola: And we wrote letters to each other like little bitches.

Jet: That's how I got heaps, like heaps of people thought I was gay just 'cause of the way I talked.

WG: When you say they thought you were gay or you say you thought he was gay do you mean you thought about his sexual preference?

Juliet: No, no we were just completely not even thinking it was just the first thing that came to mind. It was the first visual perception of a person and it was immediately associated with you know the stereotypical 'Fast forward' "oh hello daahling", you know what I mean.

Aldous: We all watch television so we can...

Juliet: Yeah that's right we just immediately associated it with gay and didn't think about sexual preference at all.

In this passage of conversation the students express that words like 'faggot' and 'poof' are used as general derogatory terms but they are linked to perceived masculinities.

They say that sexual preference or sexual behaviours were not considered. The students are aware of stereotypes and draw upon them in their labelling of boys. The use of terms
that equate sexual identity with general references of negativity is concerning and points to a common discourse where certain masculinities and sexualities are devalued. Martino (1998) refers to such trivialisation of homophobic practices and sees as problematic the naturalisation of such derogatory terms in the school context. Justin and Alex held a similar view with regard to the meaning of these terms as applied to name calling:

**WG**  
Do you think the name callers actually think about the sexual preference of the person?

**Justin**  
No. It was used like basically as a derogatory term, it didn’t really mean that they were.

**Alex**  
They wouldn’t think anything about it.

**Justin**  
No, they called all the computer nerds..

**Alex**  
Even if they said “Are you gay?” or something they wouldn’t think a second of it.

My recollection of the use of these terms when I was a student was that they didn’t actually refer to sexual identity or activity. I was curious to see whether students today felt the same, given that there seems to be a greater awareness of gay people and same-sex attraction than when I was at school. According to the students I spoke to, the terms tend to be used to describe deviance in general or perceived femininity in males rather than specific sexual practice. Several researchers have reported this in their studies (Mac an Ghaill, 1995; Epstein, 1994, 1997). “Terms like ‘poof’ and ‘queer’ may be deployed against any young man who does not conform” (Epstein and Johnson, 1994: 204). The boy to whom such insults are directed not only receives these ‘hints’ on how
to behave in a gender ‘appropriate’ manner but may feel that others are detecting differences, with a more primitive sense, which he himself doesn’t fully understand.

Recalling his experience in the army, David Morgan (1987, in Segal, 1990) believes that terms like ‘woman’ and ‘pansy’ when applied to men are synonymous with anything regarded as proof of physical or emotional ‘inadequacy’. He says “All men are vulnerable to the supposed ‘unmanliness’ of failure in such cultures of misogyny.” Eric Rofes also links these terms to ‘youthful’ misogyny. He says words like ‘sissy’, ‘pansy’ and ‘nancy-boy’, words which particularly referred to aspects of masculinity have been replaced with ‘gay’, ‘faggot’ and ‘queer’. The newer terms are synonymous with the old ones yet carry with them the tag of homosexuality. When challenged by their teachers for using such terms the students said they were deploying the words to brand an individual as odd, non-traditional or ‘girlish’ (Rofes, 1995: 81). He points out that the “bully/sissy paradigm was the key element of male youth culture; it occupied separate space from the academic culture” (ibid.:82). Such a paradigm charts the dominant and subordinate masculinities within the particular culture.

Violence

...girls and boys are profoundly affected by fear and the loathing of difference, and the demand for conformity which is enforced by violence in all its forms (Beckett, 1995:16).

In the LaTrobe University study of same sex attracted young people, almost half (46%) reported being verbally or physically abused because of their sexual orientation with 13% reporting physical abuse (NCHSR, 1998: 34-35). Similar figures were reported in a National Gay and Lesbian Task Force survey of 2,000 gay men and lesbians. Nearly
half of the males and nearly one fifth of lesbians had been harassed or attacked in high school or junior high school (in Harbeck, 1992: 17). According to a 1995 Massachusetts study, 62% of students identifying themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual said they had been in a fight in the previous year. This compares with 37% of all students (Cloud, 1998). These studies indicate that same sex attracted young people are experiencing more violence than other students. Although it is worth looking at this phenomenon along with other accounts of violence in schools, Eyre urges that we avoid “slipping homophobia under the mat of ‘violence in schools’” (1997: 201). Similarly, Skelton (1998: 222) is critical of analyses of male bullying tactics in school which don’t take into account how investments are made and reproduced within power structures.

Responding to the cartoon of the boy who had his head flushed down the toilet for wearing a badge declaring ‘out and proud’ (see appendix 3) the group had this to say on the issue of making such a statement at school:

**Yola**

Don’t you reckon that someone wouldn’t be bold enough to wear the badge? Like in any schools I can’t see anyone doing it.

**Juliet**

But say they did, I don’t think this would be the thing that would happen.

**Candy**

I don’t think people would be bold enough.

**Jet**

I could see Susie or maybe Anna.

**Yola**

Yeah, I know, maybe females.

**Candy**

Wearing it?

**Jet**

Yeah wearing the badge.
Yola  I can’t see someone wearing the badge.

Juliet  I have, yeah but you know what I mean, males...

Candy  Girls is very different.

Juliet  Listen, listen! You wouldn’t have your head flushed down the toilet you’d be beaten to a pulp.

The predicted consequence for a boy wearing such a badge in their school is that they would be dealt with violently. The students believe that a girl would probably get away with wearing it. They provide a couple of examples of students they believe would be ‘bold enough’. Wearing the badge is seen as a statement that carries with it the risk of retaliation from other students. Several researchers have noted that girls seem to have more latitude for such expressions of ‘difference’ than that given to boys. Epstein noted that the behaviour of ‘tomboys’ was more acceptable than the behaviour of ‘sissies’ (1997: 109). Walker believes that as members of the ‘higher’ sex, males are less easily forgiven for deviating from their assigned roles (1988, in Telford, 1997)

After a short break I returned to the cartoon to see if they had anything else to add:

WG  Did you have any thoughts about this cartoon while you chatting out there that you thought might be of interest to me?

Yola  With the picture, pretty unrealistic.

Juliet  Yeah that’s what we were saying.

Candy  It seems like an American High School Movie sort of thing.

Aldous  It’s relevant only it’s just exaggerated.
Candy – Yeah really exaggerated.

Jet Yeah it's like really over-reacted.

Aldous And not usually with, not really with homosexuality, more with teasing on other levels, and the school turning somewhat of a blind eye to it.

Yola The younger ones maybe.

Candy But it is quite possible for that to happen.

Jet Not at our school.

Candy Not at the schools we go to.

Yola And not toilet flushing, smash your head in more like it.

Candy Yeah exactly.

PJ It's like one of those, you know one of those films from the 80's, you know which is about uni kids on some vacation.

Aldous American College movies.

Juliet Yeah, a full on American movie is what I associate this with.

PJ With the ghetto blaster on the shoulder and things like that.

Aldous They have to steal the mascot from the other college.

WG Given that this is an exaggeration, what it's basically saying, I think, is that the authority will often turn a blind eye and basically be complicit in this sort of moulding or this teaching that we've been talking about. Does that sort of happen?
Juliet I don’t.

Yola Not really, I don’t think it happens.

PJ I don’t think they can afford to let it happen nowadays, I think.

Jet Yeah there’s too many risks.

Candy In the past five years they’ve really cracked down on bullying in schools because they realise how much it does affect a lot of kids especially like overweight kids and stuff like that get persecuted a lot.

There’s a contradiction in what they’re saying here. The picture seems foreign to them; more like a scene out of a movie, yet Yola and Candy agree that a likely response in their school would be to go further than the toilet flushing. Yola thinks that the wearer of the badge would have his head ‘smashed in’, consistent with Juliet’s earlier remark. Given some of the examples of hate crimes committed against gay students such as hanging with a school tie, being thrown onto a BBQ fire or burned with a cigarette (see McDougall, 1998), the head flushing incident may not be such fiction. Yola and Candy discuss the perceived potential for violence in the school even though they may not have experienced or witnessed it. Hierarchies can be established on the basis of the threat of violence; kind of a cold war among the boys in a school. Blackman (1995: 254) observed in his ethnographic study of peer group cultures that it was the potential for violence rather than the reality that formed the basis of authority. There is evidence that school age homosexuals are particularly at risk, as adolescents, more than any other age group, are likely to commit violence against homosexuals (Masters, Johnson & Kolodny, 1992: 394, in Unks, 1995:6). The murder of Matthew Shepard in Wyoming last year caused global community outrage that homophobia could have so barbaric an
outcome. I was horrified that even in the gay press, a joke can be made of gay bashing.
In a so-called humorous column, reference was made to the alternative Olympic sport
of “Poofter bashing” (Miss Information, 1998). This so-called parody risks being
misinterpreted by the reader, thereby adding to the damage of homophobic discourse.

Kenway and Fitz Clarence (1997: 118) reason that if widespread violence in schools is
understood as an expression of certain types of masculinity and schools are implicated
in the making of them then schools can be involved in the ‘unmaking’ of these types of
masculinity. The possibilities of such an effort will be explored in the next chapter.

**Internalised homophobia and self-censorship - Homosexuality as “a
fatal flaw in masculinity”**

It did not take me long to become aware that my sexuality made me
part of a group which social consensus had decreed necessary to
contain, control and, if and when possible, to eliminate. (Bryan,
National Lesbian and Gay Survey, 1993: 52)

In a culture that appears to legitimise prejudice towards homosexuals we must expect
that negotiating and reconciling one’s own sexuality and identity must involve a fair
amount of confusion and contradictory notions of self worth. Internalised homophobia
has been well documented among same sex attracted young people. Anthony D’Augelli
(1992: 214) talks about the double victimisation of gay teens who have to contend with
the homophobia of their social world and the myths they have internalised. Surrounded
by words such as ‘poofter’ and ‘faggot’ the young person, understanding that these
terms carry with them notions of stigmatised identity, may begin what Martin calls their
“primary developmental task of learning to hide” resulting in cognitive, emotional and
social isolation (1982, in Grossman, 1993). Fearing rejection, even from one’s parents, it seems easier to conceal feelings and sexual desires. As a year 10 student I was mortified when my English teacher asked me to read something to the class in my “sweet voice”. He wasn’t having a dig at me but I felt that he was on to something; that I was being exposed to the class – as what, I didn’t know but I felt that my masculinity was being publicly questioned. Such hyper-awareness of one’s body and subsequent self-monitoring and censorship are likely to result in feelings of confusion and guilt (see Epstein, 1997).

Wayne Martino cites an example of a boy who had constructed himself as a victim deserving of homophobic taunts: “Maybe I look like a fag or something or I deserve to be called a fag because I do Art” (1997: 41). This illustrates D’Augelli’s concept of ‘double victimisation’. The social warnings that produce a stifling effect in the young gay person may have far greater reaching consequences. Steve Biddulph in his book *Raising boys* states that the risk of being thought to be gay “leads to the self-censoring of any kind of warmth, creativity, affection or emotionality amongst the whole male gender” (1997, in McDougall, 1998). Internalised homophobia also operates to produce divisions within the ‘gay community’ through a ‘good poofs’ (those like us) and ‘bad poofs’ (those unlike us who are queeny, frequent ‘beats’ etc.) dichotomy. Donohoe warns young gay men that subscribing to such division allows the “people who carry out the bashings, murders, harassment and discrimination to get off scot free!” (1998: 85).

Justin and Alex discuss self-censorship and the heteronormative world:

**Justin** But I tried to be straight for like seven years and I actually honestly believed I was. Like I’d look at guys and go “No, I can’t look at guys, go and look at
women.” And I could walk on to a tram and go “Oh cute guy, no cute
woman, look at her.” And I’d get fixated by her because I looked at her the
whole time. And then it sort of dawned on me that I might be gay, and then I
thought “No no, I can’t be gay.” Then eventually it worked out I was and I
sort of accepted it.”

Referring to an earlier comment made by Alex I asked:

**WG** Why would it be silly to choose to be gay?

**Justin** Because of society.

**Alex** ‘Cause it’s a lot, it’s..

**Justin** It’s a harder road.

**Alex** You’re choosing a harder option and you’re choosing a life that’s a lot
harder to live that what a..’cause it’s basically a straight world like with the
media and all the songs that have ever, well most of the songs that ever been
written are about love between a man and a woman, not two men or two
women and most of the movies where there’s love scenes are always a man
and a woman.

Justin refused for some time to accept that he was gay because he believed it would be a
“harder road” than being heterosexual. He was prepared to try to be ‘straight’ but
neither Justin nor Alex could imagine anyone having the motivation to try to be gay. De
Montaigne discusses a ’closeted’ life of concealing one’s homosexuality:

> It requires a systematic dishonesty; and this dishonesty either is
programmed into your soul and so warps your integrity, or is
rejected in favor of – what?…..(to) pursue a consuming career to
cover up the lie at the center of your existence (De Montaigne, 1995: 190).

**Humour and Sex Talk – Q: How do you fit four poofs on a bar stool?**

Messages about ‘appropriate’ expressions of masculinity or sexuality needn’t be directed at any one person in order to be effective. Sexist jokes are deployed to position dominant and subordinate gender relations. Similarly, jokes or graffiti with anti-gay content reproduce discourse which positions heterosexual masculinities as dominant. Humour can serve the purpose of putting down a particular person or deriding a whole group of people whilst consolidating the heterosexual masculinity of the teller and the listeners. Humour can be used to act out embodied heterosexual elaborations as a means of displacing fears and anxieties (Kehily and Nayak, 1997: 79). Through stories and gags, macho behaviour is mythologised, providing a masculine ideal and carrying a warning to those who would challenge it. Humour is one of the many tools of an informal education that invalidates non-hegemonic masculinities, thereby setting up a hierarchy of sexual cultures. For the purpose of regular maintenance and upkeep of hegemonic masculinities and sexualities, humour is a rather effective device.

Sex-talk has several functions. According to Cohen, sex-talk may be confessional, seductive, therapeutic or educative (in Mac an Ghaill, 1994a). As education, sex-talk informs about the range of sexual possibilities as well as setting limits. It recreates myths, conventions and power structures. Through the male fictions of sexual narratives in school one can achieve legendary status or become the school pariah. Pupil cultures create their studs, sluts and ‘bum-boys’.
Bragging about sex can be used to create anxiety in others. Anyone made to feel like a slow developer is likely to see prestige in the male social group slipping away from them. An accusation of lack of sexual experience is tantamount to an undermining of masculinity. Male virginity is an arena for the contestation of masculinities (see Blackman, 1995). Losing one’s virginity affords membership into a ‘club’ for those of ‘confirmed’ heterosexuality. Virgins are likely to come under suspicion as others rush to declare their non-virgin status. Writing the names of girlfriends or female pop stars on books and pencil cases is one way of declaring heterosexuality without having to provide the details; the ‘proof’. A collection of posters and pictures cut out from magazines can also be a satisfactory public declaration of heterosexuality. In terms of cultivating a hyper-masculinity, these indirect methods do not carry the weight of a descriptive sexual narrative. In her article Listening in on boy talk, Charlotte Faltermayer (1998: 61) describes the situation in one school where a boy was identified by his peers as ‘liking boys’ or as a possible bi-sexual because he had been observed to go out with a girl for five months without kissing.

I asked the ‘non-identified’ group of students whether having a girlfriend would render a boy exempt from homophobic taunts:

WG: If it’s known that a boy has a girlfriend, and everybody knows that he has that girlfriend, is he still likely to be called poof or faggot in any situation?

Yola: By his friends and stuff, you know still in that colloquial, yeah you know you faggot but not...

Juliet: But, no, not in a sense that they mean it.

Aldous: But not in a way that they’ll continue it and that he’d feel really.
PJ Not to single him out.

Although he’s still likely to be called faggot in a jocular, ‘blokey’ kind of way, it seems that having a girlfriend is likely to ward off suspicions of homosexuality. Justin recalled how he was able to use his “wonderful group of girlfriends” as not only a smokescreen but as a status symbol.

I asked Justin and Alex how they could identify another gay male:

**Justin** – Well firstly, the biggest, easiest thing is to see what they’re looking at.

**Alex** – I’ve never really tried that. I look a their past history. If I think they’re really good looking or something and I see if they’ve had a girlfriend and whatever. Like there’s one guy who has never had a girlfriend and he took the ugliest looking girl to the formal. And they weren’t going out or anything and this guy still hasn’t got a girlfriend. He took a friend to the formal this year, who I knew and they weren’t going out so I ..that is the first thing. And then you check, well when you compare them to other guys who are like masculine or whatever how do they rate. They’re not feminine but not particularly masculine either. They could cover the feminine side and just stay sort of neutral or semi-masculine sort of thing.

Interestingly, appearance or voice were not considered by Justin and Alex as the most reliable indicators of homosexuality. Sexuality was identified and named through sexual history first and foremost with expressions of masculinity a secondary point of reference.
Participation in Sport – A valid measure of masculinity?

Perceived grounds for discrimination and consequent harassment in a school can be almost limitless. In the Australian context sport may feature largely, for example – in one class of year 12 students subgroups were identified by students according to whether they were footballers or non-footballers, and the latter group further divided into Fats (girls who were seen as overweight) and others who were dismissed as Faggots (Rigby, 1996: 79).

Sport, as an institutional setting for the construction, expression and contestation of masculinities, is one which appears often in the literature and featured prominently in the interviews. Walker noted that hegemonic masculinity in schools tended to be related to sporting prowess (1988, in Connell, 1995). The dichotomy of the sporty type and the bookworm is a familiar one to school students. The value placed on sporting prowess in schools is obvious to anyone who enters the school foyer. Trophies, flags and honour boards are commonplace testimonies to the place held by sporting achievement in schools.

Eric Rofes describes the “rampant sissy-baiting” which is integrated into sports in America (1995: 83). The discomfort of being the last person to be picked for quickly assembled teams in PE or sports days is all too familiar to many boys and men recalling their school days. There has been a call for physical educators to find experiences which are enjoyable for all pupils rather than rely on the sports and games which construct students as competent or incompetent in the physical arena. As Skelton (1993) outlines in his paper on PE teacher training, the informal culture of contesting masculinities throughout pre-service training is resistant to change despite the introduction of more inclusive methods in the curriculum. He describes a mind-body dualism as a pervasive
feature of school and later life. This dualism provides a reference point for the
differentiation of masculinities with boys following academic pursuits being constructed
as ‘wimps’ whilst ‘men in the making’ engage in sport (ibid.:301).

As a definer of masculinity in mass culture, sport would be the leader (Connell, 1995:
54). In Australia, modern day heroes tend to come from the ranks of our leading
football, rugby and cricket teams. Masculinity personified appears regularly on TV in
the faces, bodies and behaviour of our sports stars. A photograph showing two
Australian rules football players fooling around with a hose was rejected from the 1999
‘Men of football’ calendar because of the perceived risk of homoerotic interpretations.
Such acts of censorship help to shape public perceptions of the limits of homosocial
behaviour.

This adulation of sports stars is reproduced in the school context with skilled football
players ascending to the top of the social hierarchy (see Martino, 1997). Describing the
role of sports in their schools, the students I interviewed placed football and those who
played it as high up in the ‘pecking order’. PJ adds to this that although revered by
many, the ‘sportsmen’ are likely to be constructed as stupid by an intellectual minority.
He alerts us to the alternative arenas that exist for constructing valued masculinities:

WG Back to boys’ behaviour in schools, what sort of behaviours are encouraged
and rewarded in boys and what sort of behaviours in boys are discouraged?

Juliet Sports.

PJ By who, by parents or by teachers or who?

WG By anyone.
Aldous  And what year level are we talking about, our year level?

Juliet  'Cause I think we can only base it on our sort of knowledge and perceptions of what we go through in our year level.

WG     You can use any year level in school but tell us what year level you’re talking about.

Juliet I think sports.

WG     Like what?

PJ     (shows disagreement)

Juliet Praised, well in my school PJ sports are really praised and rewarded on you know your name will be on a plaque in the hall, you know you’ll be a great bloke, that’s wonderful.

PJ     There’s the other side to that.

Juliet That’s just my school PJ.

PJ     No, no but at my school if you’re a member of the rowing team then there’s cheers and there’s even a rowing song, a rowing song that the school has. You get your name put on a plaque and all the rest of it. There’s the flip side of all that as well. Yeah you’re glorified for being a rower but you’re also considered to be a meathead. I remember for the Grammar#1 – Grammar#2 rowing race they were advertising at school and on the posters it had Grammar#1 v Grammar#2 rowing on the Barwon River. And then in quotes under that “We’re not just meatheads” or it would be something like if you don’t understand the school play sink to eye level or something like that. I mean there’s the flip side to it as well.

Juliet  Definitely.
PJ  If you’re particularly good at one thing there are always gonna be people who will glorify it you know, and there will always be those people who sort of...

Juliet  Who just don’t give a shit what you do.

PJ  There’s two sides to each stereotype.

WG  Are some sports more valued than others?

Yola  Australia it’s football, that’s how I see it.

Candy  Oh yeah.

Jet  And basketball.

Juliet  Hackie sack seems to be one of the major ones but yeah, mostly footy I think.

Candy  At our school football is like really big, I do PE and there’s, oh, five girls in our class and then the rest of the class, not to stereotype are...

Yola  Football playing yobbos.

Candy  Skip, jock, yobbo football players and they all play football outside of school and they all play football inside of school.

Juliet  And the extent of their knowledge is beer and I went to this party on the weekend and smashed, you know, my can over his head and stole his girlfriend.

Candy  Yeah, that’s exactly the type, that’s exactly the type of guy in my PE class.

Juliet  Come to school to PE and talk about it.
This particular group of students were rather cynical about their sports players but they did acknowledge the value placed on sporting prowess by the school. Discussing what aspects of a student’s being would cause others to question their masculinity the students once again brought up football:

WG So what kind of things, let’s follow that one up, if you think it makes them feel big and feel masculine, what do they say to others, have you got any examples of things that they would say to others?

Aldous Questioning your sexuality based on interest in artistic pursuits.

Candy Clothing.

Yola And if you keep away from football.

Aldous Anything, if they don’t understand what you’re into they’ll try to make reasoning to, so they feel secure and if they can’t find good reason within themselves then it tends to come out in some sort of discrimination.

Juliet The way you talk, they way you say different things, if your vocabulary doesn’t consist of football and fuck and shit and he’s a poof and I scored last night then you’ve got problems.

When I asked Alex and Justin a similar question; once again sport was mentioned in the response:

Alex When you’re a guy you’re supposed to be good at sport and everything which I wasn’t and I can’t even catch a ball I can’t throw a ball. Anything that comes at me I jump 100 metres and go sideways. Perhaps the art subjects, I don’t know, not really. Everybody did everything at our school I guess.
Media representations – Regulation through portrayal

Often the first point of contact with gay identities is through the media. Recalling characters on TV who were meant to be gay they were mostly of the high camp, lip pursing, wrist flapping variety such as Mr. Humphries on *Are you being served* or ‘gender benders’ like Julian Clary or Boy George. The incidence and variety of representations seems to be increasing lately with gay characters appearing in popular soap operas, situation comedies and drama series. Gay identities as shown on TV can offer confusing messages for the same sex attracted young person who sees such representations as foreign and who feels that they bear no relation to how they see themselves.

First, the often sensationalistic nature of television talk programming indicates the importance of ratings over accuracy. The images of gay people on these shows could confuse or frighten the ordinary gay kid, who might relate to neither the “motorcycle dyke” nor the “gay weightlifter/model” (Lipkin, 1995).

Another image appearing on TV is that of homosexuality’s relationship with controversy and suffering. Seeing gay men dwindle away as AIDS takes hold or watching gays crying outside a church because they are being denied communion offers the young gay a pretty dismal prospect. Students in this study felt that the media was highly influential in shaping peoples’ attitudes towards homosexuality. They spoke of their perceptions of gay and lesbian visibility in the media:

**WG** Can I follow up that thing about TV? These days on TV there are a number of gay characters, can you think of any?
Yola  Melrose Place.

Candy  Ellen Degeneres.

Juliet  Yeah Melrose Place.

Yola  I’m gay great, we’re a gay couple, you know that’s a big stir...

Juliet  I just think that’s just being politically correct and it’s a load of crap because..

PJ  All the gay people on television are such excellent role models, they’re all professionals with great jobs they’re all lovely people..

(laughter from the group)

Aldous  Exactly, and they show everyone else on the program as..

Juliet  They wear their ties, they’re loving..

PJ  I think television goes out of its way to have really positive gay symbols.

Candy  And there’s Ellen, she has her own show.

Jet  She got axed, that show got axed ’cause once she came out everyone stopped watching it, in America especially.

Juliet  I reckon that’s a load of crap as well.

Candy  Yeah I reckon they’re more prudish than what they are in Australia with what they show on TV.

WG  Do you think that gay people and lesbians are represented on television as stereotypes?
Jet    I think very positive stereotypes.

Aldous Yeah I think very positive stereotypes.

Juliet They come across as very stable family life, their parents accept them, their friends accept them. There's no inner life, there's underground clubbing.

Aldous There's still a stereotype in their interests and things every time but it's a positive stereotype in their character which, you've gotta...

PJ Apart from the fact that, you know, they're gay, everything about them, everything else seems to be perfect. I think, yeah, the show's play it that way.

WG What do you see as the more realistic situation?

Yola Movies like Head On, we saw that, that was pretty...

Jet I wouldn't say that was realistic, like how many people do you know that do that kind of thing?

Yola Yeah I know but..

Juliet Yeah but it's more to the truth than what Melrose Place is.

Candy No but the way, but his family...

Jet I know this guy and no-one ever knew, he was like the biggest yobbo..

PJ I imagine it'd be much more fucked in real life than it is on television.

Contrary to the view that gays and lesbians are represented as freaks or troubled victims, the students in this group felt that gays and lesbians were unrealistically represented as balanced, loving, professional people. It seems that they feel that a truer,
seedier side of life is missing form the gays and lesbians we see on TV. At the other end of the scale from the ‘goodie two shoes’ images they described is the portrayal of a day in the life of a young, gay Greek-Australian man in the movie Head On. Jet felt it was also an unrealistic scenario. Perhaps issues around morality were influential in this opinion.

The most visible representation of gays and lesbians in Australia is probably the televised Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade. I asked the students whether they had they seen the event:

WG Have any of you seen the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade?

Candy Watched it on TV yeah.

Jet My mum went this year.

Juliet My dad went to it.

Yola I reckon you’re reinforcing the stereotypical ideas because of the whole, you know, feathers and black leathers.

Jet Like collars..

Yola You know you don’t see sort of with the aerobics thing, you know guys with hairy backs.

(this is a reference to a cartoon I asked them to comment on, see appendix 2).

PJ I have to agree, it’s not about equality.

Yola It’ like a whole show that makes people kind of...
Juliet: It’s not, it’s almost singling them out. It’s like the gay Olympics. They ask for equality and yet they’ve got their own segregated Olympics, you know, why can’t they join the normal Olympics, it’s..

PJ: Aren’t they in Melbourne, the Gay and Lesbian Olympics?

Juliet: Yeah, I just think that’s silly.

PJ: That’s excellent, aren’t homosexuals the best in the world? (I detected sarcasm in this remark)

Juliet: Why can’t they compete with the heterosexuals?

Candy: They do, they do.

Aldous: I just got stereotypes out of Mardi Gras.

Jet: They do but you just don’t know about it and these ones are out there going yep, we are gay.

Candy: We are gay. I saw the opening to the last gay and lesbian Olympic games. Did you see on the news they had the opening?

Jet: Yeah I saw a bit of it, it looked so good.

Candy: It was fantastic they had like drag queens doing the opening and it was just so much more out there and partying, not like a serious type of thing.

Jet: Yeah they’re not all old ceremonies and like flag folding and that sort of thing.

Aldous: I just got the stereotype that gay people like having a good time.

Candy: They had Martha Wash singing ‘It’s raining men’.
Jet It’s fun, it’s not like serious.

The students express a number of opinions here. They obviously see the celebratory aspect to the Mardi Gras parade and to the Gay Gaymes and seem to enjoy the festivities. Jet and Juliet even associate themselves with the event by telling us that their parents have attended. The students agree with one another that the Mardi Gras parade presents a stereotypical image of gays. They would like to see gays represented as ‘normal’ people. There was some resentment that gays and lesbians have formed a separate sports competition. PJ’s comment “Aren’t homosexuals the best in the world?”, which was a sarcastic remark, belied what he had otherwise presented as a fairly liberal attitude.

Contradictions such as PJ’s advocacy for homosexuality and apparent contempt for homosexual visibility indicate that different discourses are being accessed at different times. When I first read the transcript and recalled PJ’s comment I began questioning the legitimacy of the demonstrated liberalism amongst the students. On later reflection I was able to accept that neither one nor another of the accessed discourses is more ‘real’ than the other is but that reactions and opinions may be specifically contextual. How many of us are totally consistent with our opinions across all situations?

Misson (1998) has noted that adolescents know how to argue from a politically correct position regarding gay and lesbian issues but that their true opinions often reflect a heterosexist view. His research has illuminated a discrepancy between the rational and the affective. He questions the notion
that learning the social justice discourse and learning how to converse in it
necessarily leads to an actual change in attitude/beliefs. He also believes that
notions of real and invented attitudes may be misleading, particularly as
attitudes are often expressed as a function of time and place. I return to this
idea in a discussion about curriculum in chapter 7.

The conversation about media representations of gays and lesbians

continued:

WG What message do you think the general community gets from the Sydney
Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras?

Yola That that's what they're all like. "Oh yeah All those gays all the feathered and
you know that sort of thing. I mean they do sort of have their little groups.
The, I dunno, the whatever group for business men and all that but still they
concentrate on the sort of leather and the glitter and all that.

PJ Does it sort of promote the idea that by being gay you're rebelling?

Aldous Yeah, I think it is. I think it's ..

PJ See, and that's the fault.

Juliet Yeah, fully, yeah.

Aldous ..in the organisation I'd say they sit around and say "What is gonna shock?"

Candy Oh they do, they use the shock factor. They like using the shock factor.

Aldous Which works against the revolution in a lot of ways.

Juliet Which also provokes it, you know kids our age especially.
So Mr and Mrs Doveton are sitting there watching television. What are they thinking when they see it?

(The use of the names Mr and Mrs Doveton refers to an earlier remark in which it was stated that people from working class, outer suburbs like Doveton are likely to have more heterosexist attitudes than those from the suburb where the students’ school is located)

They’re not watching the ABC anyway.

“Bunch of faggots.”

“I hope my son doesn’t turn out to be like that. What are they wearing?”

Just like making them feel that gays are like, you know how they have the stereotypes of them being these ‘poofers’ then they see that and it just...

It’s confirmation.

.reinforces it. Like they think, “Oh, that’s what gays are like”, That’s why gays get beaten up a lot. That’s what people think gays are like, gay people are like.

What about other people at school. Do they come back and say “I watched the Mardi Gras last night” and talk about it?

I can’t remember, I dunno.

I didn’t mention it but maybe I forgot.

I don’t know, but I also think that females don’t generally have so much of a homophobia..
Juliet Oh god no!

Candy It’s more males that have the homophobia.

Jet Yeah but it’s also got a lot to do with, like, lesbians are a lot more like, it’s fine ‘cause guys like, don’t mind lesbians but if it’s boy and boy they mind that.

Candy Gay girls or gay females are much more accepted than gay males.

Juliet Yeah but it also depends on the group. If you’ve got a group of girls and really open minded ace guys it’s sweet to go to school and go “I watched the Mardi Gras last night” everyone’s like cool, so did I blah blah blah.

Aldous Yeah I would never..

Candy You wouldn’t go up to the jock group and go “Hey did you watch the Mardi Gras last night?”

Aldous I’d never hide it.

WG Why wouldn’t you say it to them?

Juliet Because you’d get the kind of reaction, especially if you were a boy. “What the hell were you dong watching that you fag. Do you wanna like learn how to make a costume like that and prance around like that, you trying to get some pointers?”

Jet Yeah, they’d be more, like, “Did you see those faggots on the TV the other night?”

Juliet and Yola – Yeah, exactly.
When the students assume the attitudes of the general community, particularly 'Mr and Mrs Doveton', they identify a heterosexist discourse. Through these other personas we see a very different attitude emerging. There was a switch from the intellectual interpretation of stereotypical representation to the use of name-calling. Jet goes so far as to blame such representations on TV for the occurrence of gay bashings. Consistent with the feeling, expressed earlier, that a girl is more likely to 'get away' with wearing a 'gay and proud' badge, the students felt that a boy's sexuality would be more likely to come under suspicion, from his peers, for watching the Mardi Gras parade.

Later in the interview, Jet returned to the topic of the Mardi Gras, arguing that although the representations were, on the whole, stereotypical, there is value in its presence on TV:

Jet That's another reason why the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras on TV is good because young kids get to see that and even though it might be a bit stereotyped, like gays in leather stuff, but they get to see it as well as heterosexuals.

Juliet But I don't know if it's too good because then they get these permanent perceptions of what they are.

Yola The only gay ideals you have is sort of from that.

Jet Yeah but they get over-rided by all this heterosexual stuff and they can't make a choice. If they get to see like other stuff they can make a choice. Otherwise they just think they have to be..

Juliet Not too young, there has to be an age.

Jet Yeah, not, like two.
PJ It also sends out the message that, the division between those people who are gay and lesbian and those people who are prejudiced against them, it says that this is fun. That solving this problem is like having a party, it’s all music and dance and with love and joy we can, there’s nothing that can stand in our way. That’s not the truth, that’s a myth.

PJ felt that the politics and power relations of sexualities might be trivialised by the frivolity of the Mardi Gras Parade. He argued that the problems of prejudice and homophobia would not be solved by gays and lesbians dancing their way down Oxford Street.

Alex and Justin held a similar view to the others in that the Mardi Gras Parade is not representative of the way ‘normal’ gays and lesbians live and that joining in is tantamount to conforming with stereotypes. They showed admiration for those with the ‘guts’ to march but expressed the need for visibility of a broader representation of gays and lesbians:

WG What did you think when you saw it, of the people in the parade?

Justin I felt wow what guts.

Alex Yeah, pretty much.

Justin Like some people say you shouldn’t be flaunting it and whatever..

Alex Sometimes I’ve thought that.

Justin but it’s like they can do that or whatever, that’s their role sort of thing. Look the church flaunts it’s sort of thing. Everyone has Christmas, everyone has Easter. If that’s not flaunting it what is? Gay people only have Mardi Gras
and a few various little things so everyone has a right to, I don’t know, participate in their own events. Not saying that I will participate in it..

Alex    Yeah.

Justin   I could but I don’t think I really want to. I’m quite happy just being the way I am sort of thing. I don’t really want to fit into like the gay stereotype because I’m not. I’m me and that’s it.

WG   Do you think in the parade they’re representing a gay stereotype?

Justin They are.

Alex   I feel that actually. And sometimes I’m not sure, sometimes it’s what I don’t like about Mardi Gras. It doesn’t always represent like the normal, the people that live normal lives. When I looked at the Mardi Gras it was all the flamboyant ones and all the people that were dressed as drag queens or wearing only underwear and they were, they looked pretty good actually. But I didn’t feel that it represented, I still wouldn’t mind going in it one time though.

Justin Because that is the most visible image of gay society that is what everyone sees as gay because they don’t have any other sources of information. That’s sort of like why each of us individuals that are gay, I believe have a duty well yes some people are gay who are like that but there are also a whole lot of gay people that are just like you and me. So we sort of have a duty to present who we are. I mean like a couple of people at uni have said “How could you be gay, you’re so normal?” And it’s like “Well yes, there are a lot of people that are gay who are normal.” It’s like there are a lot of straight people who aren’t normal but what’s the difference?
Space – Allocation of turf based on sexuality hierarchies

In a discussion with the ‘non-identified’ group about where attitudes towards gay people come from, they spoke of parents, peers and the media as being important exponents of attitudes. PJ added that attitudes are also built around interactions with gay people. He then told of his friend who had ‘come out’ and the way that this event changed their relationship:

PJ Well certain gay people as well, that you know. A friend, there’s this guy at my old school who confessed to me that he was gay. And before that we’d have the school swimming and getting changed with him in the same room was OK but actually, about last year I was gonna get changed with him, he was in the locker room with me and I said “Oh do you mind?” I didn’t feel comfortable with him after that, after knowing and so, I mean, I thought I was this great, open-minded very caring justified person..

I experienced some discomfort with his comment for a couple of reasons. The use of the word ‘confessed’ implies that PJ’s friend was admitting to some kind of wrong-doing. The other aspect that caused me some tension was PJ’s assumption that the communal space of the changing room was automatically to be allocated to him as the heterosexual. PJ was able to recognise that his values were challenged by his friend’s coming out and was able to reflect how it affected the dynamics of their relationship and everyday interactions.

Studies into ‘ownership’ of space have been made with regard to gender. It is generally acknowledged that in a co-ed situation boys occupy more schoolyard and sports field space than girls. Allocation of space based on sexuality is an area beyond the scope of this project but worthy of further investigation and subsequent remedial action. The
following chapter explores some of the strategies used by young people in negotiating their way through the obstacles put up against them as they construct non-hegemonic masculinities and sexualities.
Chapter 6 – Negotiating a way out of the masculinities ‘fix’

Strategies – How young people approach the problems of heteronormativity

Rather than constructing young people as helpless victims, floundering their way through secondary school, categorised as ‘at-risk’, it is important to realise that many of us have emerged from school with self-esteem in tact. Many young males are taking control; negotiating their way through and around the numerous obstacles placed before them. Even in this environment they are managing to successfully construct non-hegemonic masculinities. Insights into a way forward can be gained from the personal stories of struggle, coping practices and triumphs of those so-called ‘at-risk’ young men.

In a situation where one is always marginal, Alison Jones points out that the choice is not between ‘being liberated’ and ‘being oppressed’, “it is a choice between being ‘Okay’ and ‘normal’ or being ‘weird’, between being on the margins, or in the centres” (Jones, 1993 in Dixon, 1997).

Confrontation - Fighting back and coming out

Alex developed a strategy of meeting the oppressors head on to circumvent any bullying. He discusses how this technique was deployed:

Alex ..there was a guy, he didn’t get bullied or anything but one of the other guys was saying things to him in a weird voice that was stereotypical gay. I can’t
even remember what was being said but it was making reference to gays and what they, probably anal sex or something like that. I think it was in the change rooms. I never really got any of it though myself I was lucky ‘cause I was sort of, I developed a head, like a brain that would be able to, like I could put people in their places by tormenting them mentally if I had to. I don’t do it much these days but I used to. People used to shut up.

The recent National report on the sexuality, health and well-being of same-sex attracted young people found a number of strategies in use by young people. A number were learning self-defence in order to protect themselves in the event of physical assault. It was also found that young people were using discourses around homophobia to problematise those who couldn’t deal with homosexuality rather than problematising themselves (NCHSR, 1998: 36).

Some young people have ‘come out’ as a way to ‘take the wind out of the sails’ of anyone who would try to gain power by speculating or rumourmongering. Alistair, a participant in a study by Epstein (1994: 27) describes intimidating the rugby club of his old college and later the managers in his office by adopting a ‘stroppy poof’ persona. Justin describes how being open about his sexuality makes him feel better through his concept of honesty:

**Justin** I don’t go out and say, like wear a sign on my forehead going I’m gay to every person I meet but if they ask a question like have I got a girlfriend then it’s like well no, I’ll tell the truth. So I’m not exactly like hoisting up a banner but I’m correcting any misconceptions people might have. I’m telling the truth, being truthful sort of to everyone. And then that makes me feel better, because I’m not like, I don’t go away thinking “What am I doing?” sort of, “I’m lying” it makes me feel better internally so that’s fine.
The success of adopting this sort of openness was not reflected in the NCHSR study. It found that young people who had disclosed their sexuality to at least one person were no more likely to feel better about their sexuality or their lives than those who had not disclosed to anyone. The study did find, however, that young people who disclosed and received support did feel better about their sexuality than those who did not (NCHSR, 1998: 4). As a result of this finding it was suggested that encouraging same sex attracted young people to ‘come out’ was not necessarily the best solution. Others have used the term ‘strategic coming out’ to refer to declaring one’s same-sex attraction when it is safe to do so, if the support offered by friends and family would warrant the risk.

**Talking - Establishing relationships with potential oppressors**

Alex employed the strategy of establishing personal relationships with those who had victimised him in the past in order to avoid further teasing incidents:

**Alex**

I always was nice to them I was always nice to everyone and they felt guilty. Like I would do a guilt trip to guys that were mean to me in early stages or something. They were “What happened to your hair?” or something, if it was like this (makes his hair stick up). I’d see them on their own one day and have a nice chat to them, “Oh what do you do outside of school?” and pretend as though nothing had happened. They’d realise I was really nice and then they’d always like me and they’d always defend me. So I got around, I had a few tactics and then nobody would ever bother me ever again. After like the first six months or so of school where everyone was just teasing everyone.
Melding and Self-monitoring—retaining invisibility within ‘the group’

Participants in this study spoke a number of times of ‘the group’ and the importance and safety of being in the central rather than the marginal. Kehily and Nayak (1997: 76) talk about those who join in on the taunts in order to “inhabit the masculine presence” of someone else. One of the motivations behind bullying, identified by Rigby (1996: 95) is that it prevents you from getting bullied yourself. This kind of camouflage is familiar to any gay man who has laughed along with his colleagues at homophobic jokes or comments. The cost of such collusion with homophobic discourse is the inner tension felt throughout the ‘performance’ and having to endure the unopposed continuation of similar comments. Dixon understands the choices people make regarding their interactions with others as a “coming together of personal projects and social practice, as they are circumscribed by issues of power, in the project of identity” (1997: 102).

Who can blame those whose project is to pass as ‘normal’ when the rewards for doing so seem so attractive?

Justin discusses how he managed to put in just enough effort to be considered ‘one of the boys’:

Justin 

It didn’t take that much effort in my school to be one of the boys. I was sort of like on the fringe but that was enough. I’d make an effort maybe two days a week at lunchtime and I wouldn’t bother before school, after school, recess or anything. That would be enough just to keep me within that group so it didn’t take a lot of effort. It was the guys that just didn’t bother who sat in class all the time and went to the library all the time that had the problems. Because they were sort of isolating themselves from the rest of the community.
Justin lays the blame of social isolation on the isolated for not doing the required groundwork. He returns to this theme later on in the interview, theorising the social function of the group and discussing how the group is consolidated through defining and creating the outcast:

Justin

The best thing they can do is to like stay in the group. Usually if they stay in the group it shifts to another person. But if they leave, they are now the person who gets teased non-stop, forever. And if they go to a teacher they’re like dead so really if they stay in the group it’ll pass, it usually passes. The reason they start getting teased is because of something that just happened like the apple incident I mentioned earlier. If that guy had’ve stayed there that would have worn off after a month it would have got like boring. But because he was like the outcast we only saw him occasionally, it became like “Oh we can torment him” sort of thing. And I don’t know, it’s a group sort of thing. To be a group it’s sort of exclusive sort of thing. You have to have someone that’s on the other side for the group to remain together. And so the person on the outside has almost got a useful function to keep the rest of the group together until they shift to another one that they want to put on the outside so they’ve still got the group together.

Justin believes the function of the marginalised is to define the ‘in’ group and to unify its members. He used a melding technique in order to avoid the precarious position at the edge of the peer group. He also described his “sacred cow” status within the school. He wears hearing aids which are quite visible. He was acutely aware that the ‘disabled’ tag afforded him some protection against bullying.

The ‘straight acting’ adult gay prides himself on his appearance as heterosexual; his ability to walk through a crowd unnoticed. This strategy, as deployed by young same-sex attracted people, is described by Karen Harbeck as effective but carried through at a price:
Most conceal their sexual feelings because of internal confusion, pain, and the fear of rejection and hostility. By developing elaborate concealment strategies these young people are often able to “pass as straight”, but at some significant, unmeasurable cost to their developmental process, self-esteem, and sense of connection (Harbeck, 1992: 9).

The process of self-monitoring requires a considerable amount of awareness and effort. Transforming the body into something considered acceptable to the peer group means constantly being on guard against being caught out enacting a non-conformist gesture or stance. Epstein describes the skill as “being able to carry off particular gendered styles which are usually coded heterosexual” (1997: 108). Alex discusses the motivation behind such concealment:

**WG**

That need to restrict yourself and change your behaviour, why do you do that?

**Alex**

It’s to conform with everyone else, so you don’t stick out in any way. Although I already did but they just thought that’s me and they all knew me. I mean like I have unusual hobbies and things so it didn’t worry anyone too much when I do something but I still felt I needed to, just for the sake of fitting in, just to get through school if anything else.

**Humour**

As discussed in the previous chapter, humour can be deployed to police behaviour. It’s also a tool used to cope with the daily reality of schooling. Woods (1976, in Kehily and Nayak, 1997: 70) describe laughter as a means of escapism, an ‘antidote to schooling’. Simon, one of Mac an Ghaill’s interviewees, believes he can get away with acting more
feminine or camp because he is "the joker in the group" (Mac an Ghaill, 1994a).

Humour can serve to remove behaviour from the confrontational realm of the sexual to an asexual place where it's OK to mess with gender. Homosexuality is frequently portrayed in television shows or movies in the context of humour. The camp yet asexual buffoon seems to be popping up in more and more prime time shows. Kehily and Nayak (1997) identify the under-researched phenomenon of humour as subversion. They observed how girls and subordinate males use humour and parody to subvert sexism and machismo. The depiction of the school's champion rowers as 'meatheads' was an example of this provided by PJ.

**Constructing an alternative, valued masculinity**

Hegemonic masculinity in schools tends to be related to sporting prowess. Those who reject this must fight or negotiate their way out (Walker, 1988, in Connell, 1995).

There are those who, in order to inhabit a valued space outside of the sporting arena, call upon varied talents to construct an alternative masculinity. Looking for available status, young people may draw upon the school's evaluation of their intelligence (Blackman, 1995: 174). School cultures and values vary considerably but it is likely that academic achievement will be valued. To those who excel neither in sports or the traditional 'masculinised' subjects such as science or business, a common project is to find another niche; to inhabit an alternative masculinity that is also valued. Versions of masculinity that seek to "invert the accepted hierarchy of what it meant to be a 'proper' boy" might be adopted (Redman, 1998: 70). Appropriating a camp style, adopting the styles of a 'fringe' fashion or flaunting an appreciation for 'high' arts such as opera.
provide such avenues. Aldous discusses available options for accruing value within the official school culture:

Aldous  I went to an all boys school, a private all boys school, slightly more middle class, up until half way through year 11. The thing I found was, up until year 10 there was a lot more credit and glory going to those who use their fists. And then what I found in year 11, there were still people who I thought were very alienated but because there was more emphasis on being studious and VCE, people were starting to worry about that, there was recognition given to you if you were smart and different. But if you happened to be different from the ranks and you weren’t terribly bright then you were still alienated. I think people suffer because of that.

He sees the non-sporty and the non-academic as marginalised by the school. Justin discusses his choice to follow the subject of catering through to senior high school and his way of validating the choice within the official school and pupil cultures:

Justin  At my school if you were effeminate, they sort of like, there was nothing really said, but it was a bit unspoken. However teachers wouldn’t discriminate except in the case where I did catering. And I did catering right up to year 11 and right through to year 12. But in year 11 to do catering I had to scrap chemistry and I happened to be very good at chemistry and I was very good at catering. I much preferred catering so I scrapped chemistry. My chemistry teacher went off, she was like “How can you like even consider doing catering, it’s a dead end subject.” But I’m not sure whether it was like deliberate because I was a guy; whether there would have been the same reaction if I was a girl or whether it was just because I was a good student and she didn’t want to lose her best student in the class to catering of all things so who knows. The other guys sort of thought it was a bit odd that I did catering but I sort of justified it and managed to get catering really popular by saying “Well there’s heaps of girls in the class”. I said that in the beginning of year 10. In year 10 I was the only guy in the
class. In year 11 there was a group of 8 of us. So just that one comment
totally shifted the balance and everyone decided yep they would do catering.
So catering in year 11 was about one third guys and two-thirds girls.

Dressing his subject choice in the context of (hetero)sexual possibilities, Justin was able
to gain not only acceptance from his peers but kudos and perhaps envy. He found he
was also able to draw upon this to validate his extra-curricular activities:

**Justin**

I had a wonderful group of girlfriends and I used to spend most of my time
with them and that made the guys jealous because I was spending all my
time with girls and they would just walk away from them if they tried to
come over. The girls would just up and leave. I got quite a bit of a cult status
after a while, sort of like “Oh wow look at all the girls around him” and I
thought that’s not quite the case but, oh well, we can leave this
misperception here, that’s fine.

His peer group of girls gave Justin pleasure and a feeling of comfort but as a method of
‘point scoring’ with the other boys this could have been a risky one. Spending too much
time with girls is likely to cause one’s masculinity to be called into question (Martino,

I have outlined some of the strategies employed by those I interviewed to help them
‘survive’ a schooling experience that devalues or punishes non-hegemonic masculinities
and sexualities. In the next chapter I turn to the educators’ role in creating an
environment which is conducive to the safe expression of a variety of sexualities and
masculinities.
Chapter 7 – What schools can do – Three levels of action

Inventive and resourceful though the young peoples’ solutions may be, the rest of us could do plenty to create and foster an environment in which non-hegemonic identities are no longer problematised or stigmatised. Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997) believe that schools model, permit and shape violent attitudes and behaviours. Through recognising the obvious and the subtle ways schools do this, action can be taken to address it. One of the recommendations of the NCHSR project (NCHSR, 1998) is that schools need to adopt a ‘whole school’ approach to dealing with issues of sexuality in schools. It emphasises providing a safe school culture rather than a focus on identifying queer students. As Epstein and Johnson described it in Britain:

Such possibilities are not fixed or predictable, but can be opened up through creative teaching and the use of micropolitical insights to shift individuals and, eventually, school structures (Epstein and Johnson, 1992: 226).

At the levels of policy, curriculum and visibility, teachers can take action to accept and nurture difference.

Policy – Creating an environment conducive to change

The student who turns to bullying, like the teacher who gets a laugh by calling the boys in the drama club ‘girls’ does so within particular school cultures. Official school cultures and pupil cultures may be divergent; they may even be oppositional at times (see Dixon, 1997) but they are never mutually exclusive. It would be a ‘cop out’ to say that school policy would have no effect on pupil behaviour.
Shifts in attitude will have to occur in both official and hidden curricula; in school and pupil culture. Change is affected in both directions. A ‘ground swell’ of opinion among the student body can result in policy change at the level of administration. Formal curriculum, particularly in the area of sexuality, must take into account pupils’ sexual cultures and its emphases (Epstein and Johnson, 1994). Pupils have a knack of drawing on official school policy when it suits them and ignoring or subverting it when it doesn’t. The complex, relational nature of school and pupil culture is described by Redman:

Existing, as they did, as parallel and over-lapping systems, the pupils’ culture and the official school culture promoted a contradictory and competing mixture of masculine identities that, in different times and different places throughout the school day, subordinated boys who were not academically clever, who were not interested in the arts and humanities, who were not interested in sport, who were not particularly ‘laddish’ or were otherwise coded as ‘effeminate’ or ‘homosexual’, who were overtly middle class, and who were either not English or not white (Redman, 1998: 69).

Most schools would have existing policies to address racism and violence. The harassment that is informed by homophobic discourse often goes unremarked in official policy. By identifying and addressing it directly in policy the silences around sexuality, once removed, can no longer provide a smokescreen for homophobic abuse. Equal Opportunity policy is usually generic, omitting sexuality as a discrimination issue. An example of a school policy which targets sexuality as an area for inclusiveness was that written at a school in the London borough of Ealing in 1987. The Education Committee Policy Statement on Sexual Equality points out:
It is vital that they are reassured that homosexuality is not a disease or “perversion” but simply another variation of human sexuality. Many pupils will also be unsure as to their sexuality, and it is important that they are able to decide for themselves without being subjected to pressure at school. Education also involves encouraging respect for and acceptance of others. In the course of their lives, children may have friends, relatives, or their own daughters and sons who form lesbian or gay relationships. This is why we need to overcome prejudice against homosexuality…we…wish to create an educational atmosphere in which all pupils are able to recognise, with confidence, their developing sexuality. It is also important to dispel the myths built up by the negative and often derogatory images of lesbians and gay men shown in society (in Stafford, 1988).

Anti-homophobia policy in education, at the state level, has been rejected in NSW. Despite lobbying from the Federation of Parents and Citizens’ Associations, the development of such a policy was refused by the Ministry of Education on the grounds of so-called parent opposition (see Beckett, 1998: xii). In 1998 the Tasmanian Department of Education adopted anti-homophobia policy, making it the most progressive state in Australia in this regard. Gender Equity information, published on the Department of Education web-site, promotes an outcome where “The concept of gender construction will be acknowledged, examined and understood at all levels of schooling” (Equity branch, Tasmania Online, 1998). In stark contrast to this, England is yet to overturn its archaic legislation Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988. The Act prohibits local authorities from teaching “the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended relationship” and forbids the “intentional promotion of homosexuality.” This policy of officially sanctioned homophobia, which promotes bigotry and prejudice, undermines the welfare of a great number of citizens.
Creating policy is one thing; implementing it is another. Moving from rhetoric to reality requires that school administration, teachers and pupils actively do something. The design of school programs such as public relations, sports, activities and social events, pastoral care, syllabuses and school aesthetics (artwork/posters in the classrooms, corridors and offices) should all be informed by school policy. Patrick and Sanders (1994: 119) believe that understanding and challenging issues of oppression and discrimination could translate into full school assemblies which mark such events as international women’s day, world AIDS day and lesbian and gay pride week.

Using issues outlined in school policy as a basis for discussion, role-play and creative writing may be useful strategies for teachers to adopt. Children are quick to pick up on insincerity in their teachers. Lessons, which are supposedly inclusive of a range of sexualities, could become counter-productive if the teacher issues looks or asides that belie a genuine conviction. Prejudices, as deeply emotive issues, are unlikely to dissolve as a result of rationalistic solutions. This is no reason to abandon efforts to effect change. The school community must collectively press on and hope that positive attitudes eventually over-ride the stubborn convictions of the odd dissident.

Intervention, through a well-planned and intensive program, at government level has been shown to be effective in Norwegian schools. This particular program, aimed at reducing bullying in schools, claimed a reduction of 50% as a consequence of its implementation (Olweus, 1989, in Rigby, 1996).

The provision of good support for children who are often victimised can reduce some of the adverse physical and psychological consequences (Rigby, 1996). With regard to
reducing the incidence of bullying, Rigby outlines three conditions necessary for effective intervention:

Recognition by the school community that

1. bullying is occurring on a significant scale,
2. peer-victimisation at school can have serious consequences, and
3. applying new policies can substantially reduce the problem (ibid.:115).

Hopefully, the introduction of official policy will translate into a school culture that adopts an anti-homophobic ethos. In order to gain student support for anti-bullying policy the school ethos must change from one in which there is “widespread admiration for dominating and aggressive behaviour to one of concern and compassion for victims of school bullying” (ibid.: 141). In discussing the differences in pupil relations between junior and senior high school, Candy describes a situation where peer regulation serves to reduce the incidence of harassment:

**Candy** yeah, where it is out there whereas a group will persecute one person and follow around that person and call them names whereas, the people who would say it now would probably get more crap than the person they were offending

The role of peer relations should not be underestimated in trying to effect change in school culture. The implications here may be that negotiated policies would be more effective than authoritative dogma. PJ says that within the culture of his school, there is no value placed on physical abuse:

**PJ** In a way there was a backlash against them, I mean bullies at my school aren’t revered or glorified or anything like that. At my school if you solve
any problem with your fists or if you lash out or if you’re at a party and you’re drunk and you hit someone or something like that then it’s not a pat on the back well done mate. It’s not that at all, basically it’s the exact opposite you know what I mean, instead of getting a pat on the back you just get given a wide berth.

Suellen and Paula Fried, in their book *Bullies and victims*, emphasise that changing the setting in which bullying occurs is essential for effective intervention. Among particular strategies they suggest enlisting everyone who has contact with the students to assist in policy implementation. They recommend that school bus drivers, cafeteria workers etc. need to be giving the same message that ‘bullying is unacceptable’ (1996: 156).

Homophobia manifests as a particular form of bullying or harassment. The overlapping power related binaries like strong/weak, masculine/feminine and heterosexual/homosexual make it difficult to pinpoint the root cause of bullying. In general it can be understood as power and status achievement or maintenance. Arthur Lipkin (1995) suggests that, at a minimum, the forbidding of homophobic name-calling is the beginning of positive curriculum change. He believes it implies the value of tolerance in a particular context and mentions that an explanation of who is hurt by such name-calling is imperative. Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997: 129-131) discuss ‘narrative therapy’ as a means of addressing the problems of violence in schools. Their suggestion is that the dominant personal and cultural stories through which teachers and students make meaning of their place in the school can be rewritten or retold to introduce new paradigms. Presumably homophobic discourse can be reworked similarly.

Tackling pupil violence in schools on an individual incident basis, the so-called ‘putting out fires’ approach doesn’t position incidents within the bigger picture of heterosexism and its inherent power relations. Nevertheless, the students I spoke to
indicated that they place enormous trust in their teachers and the school administration to protect them from attacks in school. Students talk of relying on their teachers to ‘not let’ kids get bashed (see Beckett, 1998). Alex is confident that gay bashing wouldn’t be tolerated in his school:

Alex Gay bashing doesn’t go on in our school. It’s not tolerated; any sort of bashing. The students that are responsible would have to leave the school or they’d be counselled or something. They’re very quick to come down on things at my school.

Justin and Alex express similar faith that teachers behave within codes designed by administration to protect them:

WG Do teachers ever tease boys by using names like “Oh don’t be a girl” or..

Alex No, never.

Justin No, that was never..

Alex Teachers aren’t allowed to do that at our school. They wouldn’t be allowed.

Justin If they did anything like that they’d get well and truly trampled on.

Alex Exactly.

Students rely on teachers and counsellors for support but homophobic abuse needs to be understood in the context of the limited range of sexualities and masculinities that has been normalised in the broader society and reproduced in the school. Hyper-sexualising or pathologising the victim focuses the problem on the recipient of abuse rather than on personalities and attitudes within the school culture. Approaches that help the ‘victim’
increase self-esteem and confidence should be coupled with strategies that assist the perpetrator to understand and accept difference.

Curriculum – Shifting from a pathologised representation to a recognition of difference

The school is a site for attitude development in all its classes and all its activities (Misson, 1995: 29).

As long as homosexuality is viewed as an aberrant condition, any behaviours associated with it will carry the stigma of being 'not right'; as deviant. Denman (1993) believes that a fundamental shift must take place if homosexuality is to be seen as a normal state. She sees the persistent view that there is a single true path of development as the major obstacle to breaking down prejudice over homosexuality. The challenge for the school and broader community is to make a paradigm shift to accepting the possibility and probability of more than one satisfactory path of development.

Sexuality education has traditionally been the vehicle through which homosexuality is mentioned in schools. If this is the only place in the curriculum where homosexuality gets a mention then it becomes 'pigeon-holed' and subsequently problematic. This 'addon' approach to dealing with diversity has the effect of equating sexuality with sexual preference and sexual preference with lesbian and gay sexual orientation. Providing heterosexuality with an unremarked status has relegated homosexuality to discussions of deviance and disease.

Eyre (1997) described three pedagogical approaches to sexuality education which attempt to address issues of homosexuality. The teaching strategies she refers to are the
“add-on” approach, the “anti-homophobia workshop” and the “guest-speaker approach”. Although she acknowledges that all three approaches do “fill a void in (hetero)sexuality education by putting bisexual, gay and lesbian identities on the agenda” she finds that “each could be said to contribute to discourses that render as deviant ‘queerness’” (ibid.: 199). Lori Beckett describes a more thoughtful approach to sexuality education as acknowledging “...the complex social processes of sexuality and cultural expressions of what it means to be sexual, depending on age, ability, ethnicity, and sexual preference, for example” (Beckett, 1995: 12).

Redman recommends that sexuality education reposition itself to include discussions of:

- Relationships, cultural beliefs, stereotypes and power relations, sexual identities and so on, as well as sexual activity itself – in short, the wider social and moral context in which sexual activity takes place as opposed to a narrow focus on sex and reproduction (Redman, 1994).

Outside of sexuality education homosexuality is usually silenced through its lack of representation in the general curriculum. There are many opportunities throughout the curriculum for introducing a critique of heterosexist discourse. Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli recommends incorporating discussions of homophobia in the context of “the overall thematic landscapes and narrative treatments of prejudice and social injustices” (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1995: 35). She asks that the acceptance of prejudice or exploitation, on the basis of it being commonplace, be challenged. A look at the shifts in acceptability, over time, of the oppression or disenfranchisement of various races or cultural groups may help to refute the perception that particular prejudices are normal or natural.
Heterosexuality is evident in the great romances of literature, the family trees of historical figures and the relationships that influenced great artists. Few would question the relevance of sexuality, including erotica, in this context yet lessons in literature, geography, science and history frequently edit out the non-heterosexual identities, rituals, desires and relationships which have helped shape the cultures of the world. If a great piece of music was written to express the love or desire for a person of the same-sex then it is entirely appropriate to include this information in a discussion of the composer’s work.

Many efforts to create inclusive curricula that introduce non-hegemonic sexualities and treat them as normal variations have been documented. There are a number of programs, packages and texts from which strategies can be drawn and positive representations made. The teacher need only consult some of the newer, more progressive health and sexuality education texts to glean a few ideas for classroom practice (see for example Clarity Collective, 1992). Gender Equity and Anti-homophobia packs and programs are being developed. Examples like the *No Fear* kit (see Beckett, 1998: xi) and the anti-homophobia kit produced by the New South Wales education department are already in use in some schools (this kit is designated optional, compared with the anti-racism kit which is compulsory for schools). An example in the UK of curriculum material which has taken up important points from recent research into gender and sexuality issues is the National Children’s Bureau’s *A Framework for school sex education* (1992, cited in Redman, 1994).

Anti bullying strategies and resources are outlined in Rigby (1996), Slaby *et al.* (1995) and Fried and Fried (1996) among other texts. Novels that redress the imbalance of sexualities represented in fiction used in schools have been written (see Stafford, 1988
for examples) but appropriate selections are still few. Stories selected to address gender issues and accompanied by activities designed to promote discussion of gender relations are available. *Gendered Fictions* by Martino and Mellor (1995) is one such collection. Whatley (cited in Harbeck, 1992) points out that although progress has been made in gay and lesbian representations in textbooks, exemplars of homosexuality remain “isolated and ghettoised within the larger context of a textbook.” Textbooks can be a non-threatening platform, for students and teachers, from which to begin conversations about sexualities (Martino, 1998). In the primary school, textual narratives which represent a diverse range of expressions of masculinity could be selected rather than the traditional stories which “reinforce ideas of heroism and toughness as essential masculine ingredients” (Town, 1998).

In their review of ‘Project 10’, the United States’ first school-based program to address the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth, Uribe and Harbeck (1992) recommend that major educational efforts should begin in junior high school. The program, resulting in the general school population demonstrating greater sensitivity to and acceptance of diversity and sexual preference, was seen as worthy of wider implementation.

Justin describes a lesson at school that he found particularly reassuring:

**Justin**  Religious education again. I had him year 8, no year 9, year 11 and year 12. And in year 11 he said like, and we were doing like sex education especially after the ball like because of Amber, that’s her name. Because she became gay and everyone was saying she became gay he said “No, that’s not the case, people are born like that and they are gay” and everyone just went “No that can’t be true” and they were like “Isn’t that against religion?” and so we had sort of like a - it was an argument discussion sort of thing. But he was like “some people believe it’s against Christianity and you will find some
people that will argue for it. I can find the passages in the bible that supposedly match it and whatever but I think it’s a load of bullshit.” Everyone’s like “But but” and there was like a couple of really religious people in the class “It’s morally wrong ra ra ra” It was really funny actually I really enjoyed it.

WG What effect did that discussion have on you?

Justin It made me think more about like gay things and made me think “OK well maybe I am” and it just sort of made it into my consciousness and then that consciousness grew over the next couple of years until I finally admitted it in March just this year.

Having heard his teacher saying that same-sex desire was within the normal range of sexualities, Justin was able to view his feelings more positively, placing him in a better position to eventually move on to self acceptance.

Teacher education that includes strategies to increase awareness of gay and lesbian issues in education have been introduced with success. D’Augelli (1992) and Grossman (1993) discuss courses which have been implemented in American colleges. D’Augelli describes the ‘invisibility contradiction’ which tertiary educators should aim to expose, deconstruct and overcome:

They are the “invisible” minority, yet the “hidden curriculum” that devalues the existence and contributions of lesbians and gay men is quite clear (D’Augelli, 1992: 214).

Similar efforts to expand teachers’ knowledge of gay and lesbian issues have been attempted in Australia. Martin Bibby (1998) describes some of the practical and
political issues facing teacher educators in their efforts to expand teacher education programs in this area.

Programs designed to affect attitudes regarding gay and lesbian or masculinity issues need to be informed by research that looks at modes of attitudinal change. Skelton (1993: 297) discusses the lack of commitment to new or progressive ideas outside of the classroom. It’s easy for a student to repeat ‘politically correct’ rhetoric during the lesson but for us to expect the student to internalise these new attitudes may not be realistic. Such changes in beliefs might be inferred from the language students use or by what they write but deeply held convictions can remain. Misson (1998), in his discussion of the limits of critical literacy, uses an example of students’ writing to illustrate the ease with which students may draw upon pro-homosexual discourse and yet still hold heterosexist views as central. He describes this ‘mimicry’ as a “powerful defence against any real incursions into his beliefs that might dislodge the prejudice” (ibid.). In an earlier paper Misson points out that the challenge for educators is to “activate the discourses they (students) have, make those anti-homophobic discourses more central in their lives” (Misson, 1996:121). He is optimistic that engaging in a critique of heterosexist discourse with students, although not necessarily producing immediate affective change, does provide students with the language and the opportunity to question their own and society’s attitudes.

**Role models – The need for visibility and the barriers to change**

Lesbians and gay men are unusual amongst most of the groups discriminated against in our society in that many of us can make an active choice about how clearly we belong to the minority. We can choose how openly lesbian or gay we are in what we say, how we
look and act and where we go. We can also choose to self-censor and to pass ourselves off as members of the heterosexual mainstream (GLAD: 29).

Role models exist in the form of adults – teachers, office staff, gardeners – and peers at school. The invisibility of gay and lesbian role models in school provides the gay or lesbian student with little reference material on which to base emerging feelings and identities. In a newspaper article last year, reporting on Australia’s first national conference “to discuss the rising social problems from the crisis that has overwhelmed the Australian male” (McCabe, 1998), the writer quotes Adelaide youth worker David Denborough, who believes that young men need older men to discuss their longings and confusions in relation to other men. He urges older men to tell younger men that it’s OK to be gay. This sort of passing down of wisdom, taken for granted by heterosexual young people, is denied to gays and lesbians. If older gays and lesbians in school were more open about their sexuality, the young person would hopefully be exposed to a positive role model. At the least they would see that there were others like him or her.

On the difficulties and politics of gay and lesbian role models, Foucault talked about the “institutional crisis of gay authority” (in Halperin, 1995). He believed that the presence of socially recognised authority figures who are openly, visibly gay, unleash a “kind of moral panic” in the public mind. Foucault was sceptical of the value in coming out as a gay authority figure because of the presumptions others will feel justified in making about the person once he or she is ‘out’. We certainly have to retain a sense of the risks of coming out in certain situations but to abandon the notion of providing positive role models altogether would be to pander to a heterosexist agenda. Positive effects upon attitudes towards homosexuality both for heterosexual and homosexual students have been reported as a result of teachers affirming rather than concealing their
(homo)sexuality (Harbeck, 1992: 26). One of the respondents to the NCHSR survey claimed that the most supportive person she spoke to about her sexuality was a teacher at school who was a lesbian (NCHSR, 1998: 56).

Gay and lesbian teachers police themselves, omitting large chunks of their experience from staffroom and classroom discussions. Despite legislation that protects against discrimination on the basis of sexuality being passed in most states of Australia, the risk of derision from colleagues or subversion of authority by students is too great for many of us to chat about our lives in an honest and open way. Taboos around sexuality, recruitment myths and a belief that the absence of information about homosexuality will keep people heterosexual contribute to the reluctance of gay and lesbian teachers to come out. The following ‘advice’ comes from a book written as an honest, informative resource for gay and lesbian young people:

At a time when jobs are scarce, who would wish to limit her/his opportunities further by admitting to same-sex attraction when it is frequently seen as ‘putting off customers’, ‘offending workmates’, or ‘corrupting children’? (Hart, 1986: 13)

If indeed, since the time the above line was written, it “has become increasingly easy to come out” (Kaplan, 1997) I hope current advice to lesbian and gay young people takes a more optimistic view of the possibilities and outcomes of declaring or openly displaying one’s homosexuality.

Researching the area of sexualities occurs, in the words of Robert Deisher, “in the face of a tradition of suspicion and even hostility within their respective professional communities” (in Herdt, 1989: xiii). Marigold Rogers describes this strategic obstacle as
“the touch of scandal that inhibits the conventional career” (Rogers, 1994:32). Linda Eyre (1997) believes that a range of political agendas, from the ‘far-right’ to the ‘new-right’ to those that profess to be liberal, are active in undermining anti-heterosexist pedagogies. Despite statistics on sexual assault in schools showing that the vast majority is of a heterosexual male teacher assaulting girls, the myth of ‘gay equals paedophile’ persists. Gay male teachers are unlikely to “turn up to work in drag or in full leathers and chains with exposed buttocks” as ‘One Nation’ candidate Arthur Hawley would have us believe (see Bell, 1998).

Accusations of a ‘gay conspiracy’ surface from time to time from various right wing factions. American preacher, Jerry Falwell, has called the ‘teletubbie’ (childrens’ TV character) ‘Tinky Winky’ a “gay role model for children.” Because Tinky Winky, a male, carries a handbag, Falwell believes that toddlers are being corrupted by the gay agenda (an assertion cleverly subverted by the appearance of so many ‘Tinky Winkies’ marching in this year’s Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras). The slightest bit of publicly expressed gender unorthodoxy seems enough to incite such a public outburst of homophobia. Personally, I believe there should be more such examples of breaking the gender ‘straitjacket’ in the media.

It has been pointed out to me that there exists a fine line between depictions of sexual diversity in the media and ‘sexual diversity as entertainment’. I acknowledge the risk of socio-political control and manipulation of deviance. To avoid inclusion of sexual diversity in order to allay fears of such control would do nothing to advance community acceptability of diversity. There needs to be careful monitoring of who the agenda setters are so that entertainment is not used to support the heterosexual hegemony.
Chapter 8 – Conclusion

Shifting discourse on sexualities

This year, to celebrate the Melbourne ‘Midsumma’ gay and lesbian festival of arts and culture, the Victorian Arts Centre lit its spire pink. To show its support of the festival the city of Port Philip flew the rainbow flag outside the City Hall. Despite certain factions opposing the lighting of the spire, the event did eventuate. The fact that the Victorian Arts Centre made a highly visible acknowledgment of the festival represents a significant shift in community attitude towards sexuality and difference. The video of the 1999 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras theme song shows scantily clad men dancing with men, women dancing with women and lots of same-sex kissing. That this video appears on weekend morning television, a time slot aimed at young people, shows a shift in attitude in television programming. I’m optimistic that, despite the existence of a vocal and organised ‘right’, young people are growing up in a society that is increasingly accepting of non-heterosexual sexualities. It’s high time schools caught up.

For such gestures to be really meaningful to the gay or lesbian young person, public discourse must adopt more than tokenistic flag hoisting; it must embrace sexuality and masculinity as being as naturally variant as hair or eye colour. Schools, being located within the wider social relations of power, must be changed and they must affect change. They must acknowledge changes in attitudes amongst the broader community and reflect this in school policy and curriculum. Schools have a role not only in reflecting social change but initiating it. Just as racism and sexism are today viewed as social justice issues and have become subjects of critique across the curriculum, so too should homophobia be framed in these terms.
As the NCHSR study found, there are encouraging signs in that one-third of respondents felt unreservedly good about their sexuality (NCHSR, 1998: 71). Obviously with those feeling good about their sexuality representing a minority of gay and lesbian young people we still have quite a way to go. Discussing the reactions of others to their new openness about their sexualities, Justin and Alex made the following comments:

**Justin**  
It’s surprising, most people are positive. Like at the start you’re very scared.

**Alex**  
They make an effort these days. It’s a lot better than it probably was years ago I’m sure. It’s frowned upon almost, a lot of the time now, to be homophobic. Like one to one especially.

The positive feelings about coming out are certainly good to hear but these were made in the context of Alex being ‘out’ to only a few close friends and Justin coming out only after he left high school and moved to another state.

Heterosexual students are afforded the right of constructing their sexuality in an atmosphere of support and encouragement. Young gays and lesbians are busy trying to make sense of their emerging feelings and desires in isolation. Epstein and Johnson describe the almost impossible position students find themselves in regarding their gay or lesbian identities at school. Without the support of the school hierarchy in the face of hostility from the students and lacking the “solidarities of the pupil culture against the heterosexism of the teachers”, gay and lesbian young people may find themselves without allies (1994: 223).
The overwhelming societal paradigm which states that heterosexuality is normal and other forms of sexuality are abnormal stands before educational reform for equity and justice like an enormous roadblock. Annamarie Jagose describes the necessary shift in terms of understanding the construction of naturalised terms:

To denaturalise either homosexuality or heterosexuality is not to minimise the significance of those categories, but to ask that they be contextualised or historicised rather than assumed as natural, purely descriptive terms (Jagose, 1996: 18).

Heterosexuality is constructed as natural because it is placed relationally to the so-called 'unnatural'. Like a myriad of other human characteristics, it is entirely possible to construct the whole range of sexual difference as natural. Sedgewick asks educators to interrogate their pedagogies with the question "In whose lives is homo/heterosexual definition an issue of continuing centrality and difficulty?" (1990, in Eyre, 1997: 201).

Tolerance is not enough; it is tokenistic and implies a superior-inferior dualism. For non-heterosexual identities to gain equality there must be a complete shift in perception. All expressions of sexuality must be seen as normal variants of the human condition. For the theorising of homosexuality as problematic to evaporate, in the words of Denman: "It would mean listening more before making judgements; it would mean accepting that rejected groups might have something of genuine value to offer, and it would require an acceptance of the possibility that cherished parts of the theory might, as it were, need to die (Denman, 1993: 356)."
In the words of students

Growing up homosexual was to grow up normally but displaced; to experience romantic love, but with the wrong person; to entertain grand ambitions, but of the unacceptable sort; to seek a gradual self-awakening but in secret, not in public (De Montaigne, 1995).

Jill, a participant in a study by Epstein (1994), provides a list of ‘things that could have made a difference’:

- Open discussion of homosexuality in class (not addressed as a problem)
- Open discussion of the oppression of lesbians and gays
- Role models (especially ‘out’ teachers)
- Talks by ex-students
- Plays
- Books
- Teachers standing up for you
- Being taken seriously.

In short, what Jill wants is recognition and validation of her sexuality. Other young gays and lesbians have echoed her sentiments. Their wish lists may vary slightly in content but the call for an end to the vilification and the silences around homosexuality are common themes. Jill’s list responds to the paradoxical invisibility and hyper-visibility that occurs around issues of sexuality. She wants to see role models, books and open discussion in order to at least acknowledge, honestly, the existence of a range of sexualities. The silence enforced around sexuality doesn’t serve to erase it from the
school’s charter; rather it pointedly instructs students that it occupies a great deal of the agenda.

**Duty of care**

Meaningful remedies which foster self-esteem and promote security are a bottom-line responsibility of all our schools (Rofes, 1995).

In the USA, lawsuits have been brought against schools for failing to provide adequate levels of protection to their students (Cloud, 1997). Schools that collude with a heterosexist agenda, that don’t act to prevent anti-gay violence, run the risk of paying dearly for it. The mandate to provide a safe learning environment for all students should be taken seriously by schools. The concept of personal safety for the school population should be expanded to include protection from verbal as well as physical abuse.

The special needs and problems of gay and lesbian young people, just like those of other minority groups, should be addressed by school administrators. It is their legal and ethical responsibility to do so. Redman believes that to neglect this responsibility amounts to “state sanctioned child abuse understood as systematic neglect” (Redman, 1994: 133). By providing pedagogical opportunities for all students and teachers to challenge and address homophobic mythology, schools can go a long way to freeing students of the harassment and violence that has come to define their school experience.

Detractors will come up with all manner of moral and religious justifications for not implementing school policy that addresses the existence and the needs of gay and lesbian students. In answer to these critics, Unks says:
They do not broaden the curriculum, they do not “recruit”, nor do they celebrate a particular lifestyle. What they do is extend basic civil liberties to a minority of students who do not currently enjoy them (Unks, 1995: 5).

With all that in mind - Moving forward in schools and implications for further research

Our students can be assisted to gain broader and more understanding visions of themselves and others who co-exist with them in their school, their immediate world, and the world beyond their perception (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1995: 43).

It is important that gay and lesbian young people don’t adopt a ‘straights as enemy’ standpoint. The reality is that there are a great number of heterosexual individuals for whom homosexuality and non-hegemonic masculinities are not aberrations. An ‘us and them’ mentality where ‘others’ are seen as an undifferentiated group of hostile people is unlikely to be productive. In order to move towards a point where people are no longer vilified because of perceived gender unorthodoxy, a better foundation for students would be to teach them about social constructions of gender. Helping students to understand where prejudice comes from might assist them to question their beliefs and behaviour.

It has been widely reported that schooling for the young gay man and for those not complying with hegemonic expectations of masculinity involves a range of negative experiences. There have been some studies that have indicated short and long-term difficulties for the victimised such as declining grades and diminished self-esteem.
Empirical studies looking at the effects of stigmatisation upon the adolescent homosexual are few (Uribe and Harbeck, 1992). Both empirical and sustained ethnographic data need to be collected on the non-hegemonic sexuality or masculinity experience in order to gain a better understanding of the impact of the school on the development of the young person.

Through the comments of the young people in this and other studies we have seen that stigmatised people do manage to negotiate their schooling using a range of creative strategies. More attention needs to be focused on these ‘survivors’, their environments and the pedagogies they have engaged with. Students’ own strategies need to be understood in order to construct meaningful intervention programs for schools. Anti-homophobia packs and programs being used in schools must be evaluated for short and long-term outcomes. On the basis of evaluation recommendations can be made for improvements and future implementation.

Young gays and lesbians are negotiating their sexualities in a role-model vacuum. Teachers need to be able to feel free to be open about their own sexualities in order that young people see that homosexuality and homosexual relationships are normal and acceptable. Students need to know that they are OK and that they are not experiencing their homosexuality in isolation. They need to know that there are others who feel just like they do. For this to happen schools and school authorities have to create an atmosphere where gay and lesbian teachers feel safe. There should be no need for teachers to avoid any discussion of their private lives for fear of losing their jobs or of compromising their personal safety.
With gender relations and masculinities being so inter-related there needs to be continuing communication among those researching feminist issues and those focusing on boys in schools. Since the common interest or goal is social justice through improved gender relations, researchers need not fragment into boys or girls ‘camps’; they should create and maintain an open dialogue. It is important that researchers interact with teachers and education bodies to create practical programs and ideas for school policy and classroom practice.

In this thesis I have elaborated on the issues surrounding masculinities and sexualities as expressed by a small number of young men and women. Through listening to their stories, their thoughts and debates I have gained a more grounded understanding of the problems faced by young people regarding their interaction with hegemonic discourse around sexualities. It has become evident that there are so many factors which impact on the young person’s construction of masculinity in the school environment. Students, teachers, and parents engage with one another in the context of their particular situations and with their unique histories but they all experience the impact of society’s collective ‘baggage’. Deconstructing gender power relations and other culturally produced patterns and expectations can open up new possibilities for young people and the adults to whom they look for encouragement and direction.

And finally

Discourses surrounding boys in schools need to be expanded to include a range of possibilities for being male. The narrow range of ‘acceptable’ options currently available create a great number of disenfranchised young men. Whatever the child’s leaning, whether it be toward football, artistic performance or reading, it should be
acknowledged and valued. The power of hegemonic masculinities to suppress other possibilities must be challenged. Denied the opportunity to express oneself freely, our young people are living incomplete lives. Something at the very essence of their being is refused a voice.

Justin describes the experience of wholeness he felt once he finally felt safe enough to come out. To me, Justin’s account of his own journey and his eventual feelings of emancipation provides all the justification we need to work towards helping all young men be themselves:

Justin

It made me like realise, while I was hiding it, I didn’t realise how much damage it was doing. I stopped feeling, I’m sort of a touchy feely person and an emotional person, and I am again now. But for six years, six to eight years, I lost it. At the beginning of high school I felt numb and I felt that way for years. It felt like I wasn’t connected. Like I used to have a good connection with the environment. I used to go out for nature walks and things and used to like just get inspired by the beauty of it all. Then suddenly that just disappeared. I’d just go out and look and think “This used to have an effect now it doesn’t. What’s wrong?” And just lived that, I don’t know, sort of numbed existence until I came over to Melbourne to start with. And that was like, helped. I started participating in life again. I just didn’t do anything. I didn’t go out to parties that much. I avoided people and avoided situations and yeah and then finally like this year when I sort of came out to myself and realised it was like everything flooded back in I was like on such a high, I was high as a kite. Like I told Tom Ericson, who was the director of residential life of the student village who was gay, I talked to him for about half an hour. I went down to the beach and the beach looked beautiful again. Watched the sunset and it’s like I could see the magic I can feel the magic in life again. It was fantastic and it’s just got better since then like better and better and better.
Appendix 1

Themes explored during the group interview

- behaviours/ mannerisms in boys - what is considered appropriate, what is inappropriate in relation to them being a boy
- treatment of boys whose behaviour is seen as inappropriate - by students, by teachers
- homosexuality in the curriculum - health/ human relations education, in general
- attitudes towards homosexuality - of the students, how they see the attitudes of society

Questions to be put to the group

1. Have a look at the following cartoon (aerobics class p.83). What do think it is about?
2. Are there ways of behaving or acting which you see as inappropriate for a person because he is male?
3. Why are these behaviours inappropriate? Do they indicate something about the person's sexual preference?
4. What sort of things might a boy be teased about? What sort of things do people do or say in order to tease boys?
5. What do these words actually mean?
6. Do teachers ever tease boys or make comments about the way they speak, act or behave?
7. Is a boy who is good at sports as likely to be teased than one who is not?
8. Is a boy who is good at his schoolwork/ seen to be clever as likely to be teased than one who is not?
9. If it is known that a boy has a girlfriend is it still possible that he will be called the names you mentioned before?

10. If a boy is being teased, what can he do to stop the teasing?

11. Have a look at the following cartoon (Awakening p.44). What do you think it is about?
   How does this cartoon make you feel?

12. If a boy is being teased at school what do the teachers do? What could the teachers do to stop it?

13. Do you think that some boys control/alter their own behaviour so as not to be labelled or teased?

14. Are there certain groups of students who are more likely to tease boys than others?
   Why do you think this is the case?

15. Can you think of any characters from TV or movies who are gay? What do you think about them? What do other people, e.g. your parents, brothers and sisters, think about them?

16. Have you seen the Sydney gay and lesbian Mardi Gras parade on TV? What do you think of the people in the parade? What do you think about the people who go to watch the parade?

17. Where do you think our attitudes towards homosexuals come from?

18. Has homosexuality ever been discussed in your classes? If so, which classes? How was the subject dealt with by the teacher and by the students?
Appendix 2

Cartoon 1

...Participant in an aerobics class

From:
Hartigan, Paul (1996)
Who's a pretty boy then? p.83
Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company
Appendix 3

Cartoon 2

At age fourteen, realises he is gay. Wears "Gay and Proud" badge to school. Principal says this is against the rules but will leave the matter to the school captain for peer review

From:
Hartigan, Paul (1996)
Who's a pretty boy then? p.44
Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company
Appendix 4

Multiple Binaries

nerds

jocks

faggots

females

masculine/ feminine
strong/ weak
jock/ faggot
straight/ gay
included/ excluded
Appendix 5

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

FACULTY OF EDUCATION
Department of Educational policy and Management

Consent form from persons participating in research projects

Name of participant: ____________________________

Project title: Masculinities in the Secondary School

Name of Investigator(s): Warrick Glynn Assoc. Prof. Johanna Wyn

1. I consent to participate in the above project, the particulars of which - including details of procedures - have been explained to me and are appended hereto

2. I authorise the investigator or his or her assistant to use with me the procedures referred to under (1) above

3. I acknowledge that:

   (a) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied;
   (b) I can contact the investigators at any time to discuss any difficulties and concerns that I have about the research;
   (c) The project is for the purpose of research and/or teaching;
   (d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements.
   (e) The interview will be recorded on audio tape.

Signature ____________________________  Date ____________________________

(participant)

Signature ____________________________  Date ____________________________

(signature of witness to consent)

Where participant is under 18 years of age:

I consent to the participation of ____________________________
in the above project.

Signature ____________________________  Date ____________________________

(signature of parent or guardian)
Appendix 6

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
FACULTY OF EDUCATION - Department of Educational policy and Management

Masculinities in the Secondary School
INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

Dear Participant

You are invited to participate in a project being conducted by Warrick Glynn, of the University of Melbourne, entitled *Masculinities in the Secondary School*.

The study will involve a small group of students in a semi-structured group interview. This means that your participation will involve discussing a number of issues arising out of the investigator’s questions. There will be scope to explore and discuss related themes which may be brought up during the course of the interview. For example, the discussion may explore what is considered to be ‘normal’ male behaviour and what is not. The discussion is also likely to include issues around homosexuality, heterosexuality and bisexuality.

The purpose of the study is to explore the attitudes of teenagers to a range of behaviours shown by boys at school. The researchers hope to gain a better understanding of how and why some behaviours are rewarded and yet others are discouraged (by teachers as well as students).

The interview will be audio taped, with comments later being written down and compared with observations previously made by other researchers.

All comments made during the interview will remain completely confidential. Your name will not be used in connection with any comments used in the final publication. Results from this study will be made available subject to the usual arrangements of the University of Melbourne.

You are free to withdraw from participation at any time. If following the interview there are any issues of concern you would like to discuss, please contact the investigators (their numbers are given below). Any discussions you have with them will be treated confidentially.

To participate in this project we require that you sign the consent form provided.

If you have any questions regarding the research project please feel free to contact the investigators on the phone number given below. If there are any questions that the researchers have not been able to answer to your satisfaction you may contact Jenny Arnett, Secretary, Arts and Education Human Ethics Sub-committee, University of Melbourne, Parkville on 9344 6099 or 9344 7507. We thank you for your assistance.

Yours faithfully

Assoc. Prof Johanna Wyn
University of Melbourne 9344 9643
7926 (H)  

Warrick Glynn
University of Melbourne 9531

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Appendix 7

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
FACULTY OF EDUCATION - Department of Educational policy and Management

Masculinities in the Secondary School
INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

Dear Student

You are invited to participate in a project being conducted by Warrick Glynn, of the University of Melbourne, entitled *Masculinities in the Secondary School*.

The study will involve a small group of students in a semi-structured group interview. This means that your participation will involve discussing a number of issues arising out of the investigator’s questions and there will be freedom to explore and discuss related themes which may be brought up during the course of the interview.

The purpose of the study is to explore the attitudes of teenagers to a range of behaviours shown by boys at school. The researchers hope to gain a better understanding of how and why some behaviours are rewarded and yet others are discouraged (by teachers as well as students). Although issues of perceived sexuality (namely matters involving homosexuality, heterosexuality and bisexuality) are likely to come up during the course of the interview, it is not the intention of the investigators to discuss the sexual identities of individuals in the group.

The interview will be audio taped, with comments later being written down and compared with previous observations made by other researchers. All comments made during the interview will remain completely confidential. Your name will not be used in connection with any comments used in the final publication. Results from this study will be made available subject to the usual arrangements of the University of Melbourne.

You are free to withdraw from participation at any time. If following the interview there are any issues of concern you would like to discuss, please contact the investigators (their numbers are given below). Any discussions you have with them will be treated confidentially. To participate in this project we require that you and your parent (if you are under 18 years of age) sign the consent form provided and return it to Warrick Glynn.

We thank you for your assistance. If you have any questions regarding the research project please feel free to contact the investigators on the phone numbers given below. If there are any questions that the researchers have not been able to answer to your satisfaction you may contact Jenny Arnett, Secretary, Arts and Education Human Ethics Sub-committee, University of Melbourne, Parkville on 9344 6099 or 9344 7507. We thank you for your assistance.

Yours faithfully

Assoc. Prof. Johanna Wyn
University of Melbourne 9344 9643
7926

Warrick Glynn
University of Melbourne 9531
Appendix 8
THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
FACULTY OF EDUCATION - Department of Educational policy and Management

Masculinities in the Secondary School
INFORMATION FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Dear Parent/Guardian

Your child is invited to participate in a project being conducted by Warrick Glynn, of the University of Melbourne, entitled *Masculinities in the Secondary School*.

The study will involve a small group of students in a semi-structured group interview. Participation will involve discussing a number of issues arising out of the investigator's questions and there will be freedom to explore and discuss related themes which may be brought up during the course of the interview.

The purpose of the study is to explore the attitudes of teenagers to a range of behaviours shown by boys at school. The researchers hope to gain a better understanding of how and why some behaviours are rewarded and yet others are discouraged (by teachers as well as students). Although issues of perceived sexuality (namely matters involving homosexuality, heterosexuality and bisexuality) are likely to come up during the course of the interview, it is not the intention of the investigators to discuss the sexual identities of individuals in the group.

The interview will be audio taped, with comments later being written down and compared with previous observations made by other researchers. The interview will take place at the home of one of the students. The student's parent will be present during the interview.

All comments made during the interview will remain completely confidential. Your child's name will not be used in connection with any comments used in the final publication. Results from this study will be made available subject to the usual arrangements of the University of Melbourne.

Your child is free to withdraw from participation at any time. If following the interview there are any issues of concern you or your child would like to discuss, please contact the investigators (their numbers are given below). Any discussions you have with them will be treated confidentially. To participate in this project we require that both you and your child sign the consent form provided and return it to Warrick Glynn.

We thank you for your assistance. If you have any questions regarding the research project please feel free to contact the investigators on the phone numbers given below. If there are any questions that the researchers have not been able to answer to your satisfaction you may contact Jenny Arnett, Secretary, Arts and Education Human Ethics Sub-committee, University of Melbourne, Parkville on 9344 6099 or 9344 7507. We thank you for your assistance.

Yours faithfully

Assoc. Prof Johanna Wyn
University of Melbourne  9344 9643
7926

Warrick Glynn
University of Melbourne  9531

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### Appendix 9
### REFFERAL AND COUNSELLING SERVICES – MELBOURNE

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<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Address/Contact Details</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action Centre for young people</strong></td>
<td>Clinic, counselling and education services - advice on health issues, STDs etc.</td>
<td>270 Flinders Lane Melbourne 9654 4766 1800 013 952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kids Help Line</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>1800 551 800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Life Line</strong></td>
<td>24 hour counselling service</td>
<td>13 11 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gay and Lesbian switchboard</strong></td>
<td>An anonymous counselling service 6pm-10pm Thurs.-Tues. 2pm-10pm Wed.</td>
<td>9510 5488</td>
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<td><strong>PFLAG, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays</strong></td>
<td>Support group for parents of gay and lesbian children</td>
<td>9511 4083</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Crisis Line</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>9329 0300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA house)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>9344 2210 1800 806 292</td>
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<td><strong>Men’s Centre Against Sexual Abuse (Men’s CASA)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>9428 0404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gatehouse Centre for the Assessment and treatment of child abuse, Royal Children’s Hospital</strong></td>
<td>9am-5pm: 9345 6391 After hours, weekends and public holidays: 9345 5522</td>
<td>9347 6099 1800 133 392 (rural Victoria)</td>
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<td><strong>AIDSLINE</strong></td>
<td>HIV/AIDS and sexual health telephone counselling</td>
<td>9329 8433 1800 015 188</td>
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<td><strong>Women’s domestic violence crisis service of Victoria</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Melbourne Bi-Sexual Youth</strong></td>
<td>Social and support group</td>
<td>9344 6973 (Catherine - BH)</td>
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<td><strong>Young and Gay</strong></td>
<td>6 week discussion group</td>
<td>9865 6700 (Jim)</td>
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<td>Social/ support group</td>
<td>9531 5758</td>
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<td><strong>Boyant</strong></td>
<td>Drop in/ support group for gay/bi-sexual guys under 27</td>
<td>9865 6700 (Jim)</td>
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