YOUNG MEN SPEAK:
A STUDY OF MID-ADOLESCENCE AND MASCULINITY

Christine A. Barrett
B.A., Dip.T., B.S.W.

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement
for the degree of Master of Social Work
in the School of Social Work, Faculty of Arts,
University of Melbourne

January 1999
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Declaration of Authorship</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. INTRODUCTION  

2. RELATED THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND RESEARCH  

   2.1 Masculinity  
   2.2 Adolescence  

3. METHODOLOGY  

   3.1 Procedure  
   3.2 Ethical Issues  
   3.3 In-depth Interviewing  

4. FINDINGS  

   4.1 Friendship Groups  
   4.2 Intimacy  
   4.3 Dominant Masculinity  
   4.4 Homophobia  
   4.5 Intergender Relations  
   4.6 Coping with Stress  
   4.7 Role Models  
   4.8 Fathers  
   4.9 Music  
   4.10 Substance Use  
   4.11 School  

Young Men Speak  

ii
## Contents

5. DISCUSSION 84
   5.1 Implications for Social Work Practice 92
   5.2 Researcher Reflections 96

6. CONCLUSION 98

LIST OF REFERENCES 99

APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>Information for Participants</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>Consent Form</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C.1</td>
<td>Discussion Starters</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C.2</td>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C.3</td>
<td>Scenarios</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Declaration of Authorship

I, CHRISTINE ANNE BARRETT, declare that this thesis comprises only my original work, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text to other materials used.

This thesis does not exceed 30,000 words in length, exclusive of bibliographies, footnotes and appendices.

Christina A. Barrett

Date: 18 January 1999
I thank the young men who agreed to be interviewed for this study, and consequently shared their stories and ideas in a very personal way, and with great thoughtfulness and good humour.

I am exceedingly grateful for the support and encouragement of Dr Dorothy Scott, and for the opportunity to learn from her. I thank also the School of Social Work, University of Melbourne, for the support and advice of lecturers, and the financial support for data collection and conference attendance. I value also the helpful comments of colleagues, the support of friends, professional peers and other research students at various stages throughout the process.
Abstract

This study investigated the effect of dominant notions of masculinity in the lives of mid-adolescent males. A qualitative research design, based on the analysis of transcripts of in-depth interviews with eight sixteen and seventeen year-old young men, confirmed the existence of a harsh masculine culture that impinged significantly on their behaviour and attitudes.

The findings are identified a possible turning point in young men’s lives, where they begin to develop highly valued close relationships with a small group of friends or mates, with whom they share and emotional bond, and around whom they feel less pressure to prove their manliness.

While they described the possibility of sharing thoughts, and feelings and experiences, there were nevertheless limits to what was allowed to be spoken even between the closest of friends. These restrictions were attributable to the sanctions that operated to maintain an environment significantly influenced by dominant notion of masculinity, and in which these friendship groups were embedded. The young men conformed to the tacit restrictions on intimacy, from fear of exposing themselves as weak or poorly skilled.

Nevertheless, participants demonstrated a developmental readiness for intimacy, and were beginning to experience emotional engagement with male or female peers. The study suggests the need for a new concept that values and acknowledges a sense of emotional connectedness in the absence of sharing verbalised thoughts and feelings.
With intimacy constrained, and little discussion of personal issues, young men had inadequate knowledge of the complexity of problems that might confront them, and few models of coping strategies. Consequently, they risked feeling isolated and unresourced in times of stress. Similarly, while they recognised signs of stress in others, they had few helping skills. In any case, dominant masculinity required that young men handle their own problems, without showing any vulnerability. Counselling was seen as an ultimate failure of manliness.

There were indications of intergender rivalry, and despite attempts to be fair and equitable, an underlying belief that men should be in control in families and relationships.

Rock music was clearly a potent positive element in the lives of young men, and served a variety of purposes. Alcohol gave individual and group release from the debilitating restrictions of masculinity, removing the need for self-control and allowing greater intimacy. The young men showed they were able to discriminate between “real life” and media or sporting images of masculinity, and had independently identified personal role models from within their own family or friendships circles.

This study has shown the importance of understanding the adolescent male world from his own perspective. In particular, it demonstrates the degree to which masculinity impacts on the adolescent behaviour and attitudes, and highlights the necessity for Social Work practitioners to factor the masculine code of behaviour into case and programme planning. Moreover, it is suggested that Social Workers take a proactive approach to teaching young men the language and skills to understand masculinity, and to pursue identity formation and the establishment of positive relationships despite its impact on their lives.
Social Work, along with other fields of professional practice, the popular media and academic literature, is noting the apparent rise in the indicators of adolescent male distress. The reasons are complex, but may be related to the concepts of masculinity to which young men are exposed, and which they adopt as the set of criteria against which to establish their own identities.

The current research emerges from reflections on my work with adolescent males, aged 10-19, within a youth counselling and support program in an outer suburban growth corridor of Melbourne. The program is part of a family services agency that also provides: financial counselling; family counselling; sexual assault counselling; alcohol and drug counselling; foster care; and in-home family support.

Social Work strives for well-being and social justice for individuals and groups within society. One of its contemporary challenges involves the development of counselling and other intervention models that meet the needs of adolescent males and their families, in a social climate where issues related to boys and men are becoming more popularly explored. Such considerations in the Social Work discipline should occur within a framework that has benefited from post-structural feminist theory, practice and research.
As I prepared my research, I was uneasy about an apparent contradiction between my feminism and a research focus on masculinity. After many years as both teacher and social worker with a special interest in developing programs that meet the needs of women and girls, I found myself apologising for the fact that the intended study did not fall into the scope of ‘Feminist Research’, and I resisted rationalising that any investigation of masculinity from a feminist stand-point would ultimately improve the position of women and girls in both the personal and political spheres.

My personal integrity required that the research would give insight into the experience of young men, while being respectful of the roles of women in their lives. Additionally, it should not suggest that equity for young women is no longer a priority. A personal challenge and commitment was to respect, analyse and learn from the voices of men. Paramount was my desire not to adopt an approach that would reinforce the ‘backlash’ against women, as demonstrated in the ‘victim’ mentality and ‘woman-blaming’ of certain sections of the men’s movement.

The great contribution of feminist research, besides rewriting women into the story, has been its exploration of the interaction between the powerful and the subordinate (Cornwall & Lindisfarne 1994; Chesler 1995). Additionally, I found reassurance in the perspective of pro-feminist writers representing a cohort of men who are applying stringent analysis to the men’s movement. Pro-feminist men work ‘as allies with women in a struggle to transform hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal relations of dominance’ (Pease, 1996, p.1). As a woman, I might contribute usefully to the interface between men’s and youth studies, and thereby to Social Work practice.

Specialising in Social Work with adolescents, I am constantly confronted with their resilience and potential. It is therefore satisfying and rewarding, although some consider
it a difficult area of involvement. Parents, referral agencies and other adults tend to assume that adolescent males are unwilling and unable to express themselves, especially to a counsellor, but my experience indicated this to be a false generalisation.

Analysis of presenting problems suggests that anger features in boys' stories as a disturbing influence in their lives. This manifest aggression, on further assessment, is linked to other indicators: the inability to connect with the learning environment at school; disruption of family and other relationships; problematic drug and alcohol use; criminal activity; depression; and suicidality.

A common thread is conflict with parents, who have been brought up in a societal context where the authority of the adult and the obedience of the child were the assumed power dynamic. Young people today do not necessarily collaborate in giving power to the parent. The resultant power struggle with a son may signify adolescent striving for independence. It may also reflect wider power struggles in interpersonal, inter-generational or inter-gender relationships.

While adolescent boys in counselling can give the impression that anger is the only emotion they are able to express, their stories go beyond that focus, revealing more pervasive pressures that determine behaviour and emotional expression. A twelve year-old boy is guilt-ridden and confused by the fact that his peers applaud him for verbally abusing the mother he loves. A fifteen year-old male has a crush on a girl, admiring her kindness, humour and intelligence, but only tells his best mate about her physical attributes and potential sexual performance. A thirteen year-old can't tell his mates that he thinks Pamela Anderson is ‘fake’, for fear of being laughed out of the group. A seventeen year-old and his mother, despite their love for one another, seem to be repeating the patterns of her abusive marital relationship.
This study explores whether young men recognise a construct of masculinity, and if so, how its demands impact on their lives. How do issues of power and intimacy influence their experience? The research aims to describe the relationships important in the lives of young men, as they help to reinforce concepts of masculinity, or as they are affected by those very concepts.

In particular, I planned to document the voices of young men. While older men share valuable insight through their personal reflections and academic writings, little is known directly through research of how young men see their adolescent years in relation to the perceived norms of masculinity.

The ultimate question of the research is: How can Social Work respond with helpful interventions to support young men? The aim is to propose strategies that demonstrate both generalisability and adaptability in response to the multiplicity of meanings by which young men make sense of their lives.
The burgeoning of theoretical literature on the matter of masculinity reflects an ever
deepening analysis of the phenomenon whereby patterns of behaviour appear to be
associated with maleness. The concept of behaviour and attitudes linked exclusively to
maleness can seem alternately as nonsensical, when deconstructed, as: ‘Slugs and snails
and puppy dog tails: that’s what little boys are made of’ (Trad.); or as sinister as a
politically motivated construct designed to maintain the oppression of women.

The discourse has changed to include the plurality of co-existing masculinities, but is
still predicated upon the assumption of peculiarly male behaviour. The extent to which
this behaviour is learned or innate is highly contested. Concurrent with the development
of theory is the proliferation of material attempting to redefine masculinity, in order to
support men to be more fulfilled in their personal lives and relationships.

The double jeopardy faced by adolescent males may lie in their challenge to measure
up to some idealised notion of manliness, as they strive for adulthood under a patriarchal
structure that maintains the dominance of older men over women and children, and as
yet denies young men access to the privileges of manhood; within a social environment
where young people find it increasingly difficult to access the work and income
traditionally associated with independence and adulthood.
MASCULINITY

Masculinity has multiple meanings, including both culturally determined standards of how men should behave, and individual male behaviour or characteristics. Connell (1995, p.71) defines masculinity as:

simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture.

Pleck, Sonenstein and Ku (1998, p.308) define ‘masculinity ideology’ as: ‘beliefs about the importance of men adhering to culturally defined standards for male behaviour’; whereas ‘masculine gender-related personality traits’ refer to ‘the degree to which an individual actually possesses the characteristics expected in men’.

Clatterbaugh (1990) further demonstrates the foundations of contestability within the discourse of masculinity by delineating six major perspectives through which commentators and researchers analyse the social reality of gender, particularly for men. Each brings its own assumptions and biases to the discussion.

Debates about essentialism and constructionism have also made significant contributions to theory and research. Essentialist theories of gender assume that masculine and feminine traits are innate, and biologically determined (Buchbinder 1994). Martin (1998) shows language itself promotes essentialism, since categories such as ‘gender’ are laden with assumptions about similarity rather than difference. An essentialist approach to research will attribute common characteristics; mask diversity; and discourage further research (Martin 1998). Additionally, such bias exaggerates gender difference; minimises within-group variability; minimises similarity between male and female (Hare-Mustin & Marecek 1998); and explains apparent variance in terms of gender rather than, for example, hierarchical position (Hare-Mustin & Marecek 1998; Eagly 1998).

Some reviews of research conclude that essentialist bias has claimed gender differences that were very small, and not reflected by substantial numbers within the samples (Maccoby 1998; Manstead 1998). Maccoby (1998) argues that behaviour changes
contextually and cannot be expressed in summary essentialist terms. Despite recurring
evidence of invalidity, traditional quantifiable research measures of masculine and
feminine personality traits, characterised by global polarities, have been maintained
over many years (Morawski 1998).

Even biological factors are complex, and not necessarily essentialist in their effects.
Miedzian’s (1991) study of male violence was inconclusive in its review of research
into the effects of testosterone, and to what extent they were mediated by socialisation.
In fact, hormone levels may be affected by the environment (Miedzian 1991; Connell
influence of testosterone and brain functioning, and the commonality of male
experience, rather than its diversity.

Current patterns of empirical research in the health and behavioural sciences suggest a
complex interaction of biological, psychological and social factors in much of human
experience. Pallotta-Chiarolli (1997) suggests a continuum between the essentialist and
constructionist polarities, allowing for multiple and subtle influences.

Constructionism holds that through interaction with culture, men learn to behave
according to gender imperatives (Buchbinder 1994; Pleck et al 1998).

the important fact ... is not that they are biological males ... our identity as men is
developed through a complex interaction with the culture in which we both learn the
gender scripts appropriate to our culture, and attempt to modify those scripts to make

Connell (1996, p.210) refers to the ‘dynamics’ of masculinity, in order to emphasise
that particular masculinities change over time, and can be replaced. While the
constructionist perspective is reflected in the fluidity of masculinities in on-going
cultural interaction, the association of masculinity with males in particular, would
appear to render such theories simultaneously in the domain of essentialism.

‘Hegemonic masculinity’ is:
the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (Connell 1995, p.77).

While large numbers of men support hegemonic masculinity, it does not necessarily reflect the real lives of many men, who nevertheless benefit from the subordination of women (Carrigan, Connell and John 1985; Connell 1987). ‘Subordinate masculinities’ prescribe dominance and subordination among men (Connell 1995, p.76-8).

Fuller (1996) describes masculinities as socially defined and varying across time, place, class and religion; and unified by the shared imperative of the unequal power relationship between men and women. The pro-feminist position acknowledges that all men and women share the full range of human abilities, the potential of which is culturally limited for men to a narrow subset by masculinity (Clatterbaugh 1990).

Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994) are critical of the constructionist position because it still assumes the polarised categories ‘men’ and ‘women’. They challenge the notions of masculinity and femininity, as socially learned constructs that have necessarily inherent relationship to biological sex. They point to ambiguities, contextual differences and simultaneously competing notions to show that there is no coherent, concrete image, nor a consistent abstract concept of masculinity, so that hegemonic masculinity refers to ‘privileged forms of masculinity which masquerade as unitary’ (Cornwall & Lindisfarne 1994, p.20).

Men's studies writers who are attempting to redefine masculinity have been criticised for their assumption that maleness and masculinity are intrinsically connected, thereby giving minimal consideration to the complete range of human abilities, emotions and potentials, excluding certain aspects of reproductive behaviour, that are socially, but not biologically-bound (Christian 1994; Cornwall & Lindisfarne 1994).

The concept of androgyny, whereby individuals easily switch between masculine and feminine behaviour (Golombok & Fivush 1994), is based on the essentialist assumption
that there are separate, definable and measurable qualities called masculinity and femininity, associated with males and females respectively.

I. Harris (1995) locates in ancient times the origins of traditional myths about masculinity. His research rejected the assumption that popular culture and the media are the strongest influences on male behaviour. He claims the rules of masculinity are directly taught and implicitly modelled, especially within the family, with the father being the most powerful teacher.

Clatterbaugh (1990) describes relentless pressure, beginning in boyhood, to conform to the ideals of masculinity. Investigating male domination in adolescent relationships, Curran (1996, p.35) writes:

> The lesson taught, modelled, and taught again in a hundred thousand ways contains, among others, a central theme which is ancient, traditional, and lifelong. Simply stated, it is, ‘Don’t be a girl, don’t be a sissy, a fag, a baby, a wimp.’ Don’t be emotional unless it’s anger. Don’t care. Don’t cry. Be tough.

Mothers also influence their sons through teaching, modelling and rewarding certain behaviours, which may be consistent with dominant notions of masculinity, or encouraging expressive traits usually associated with women and therefore providing conflicting messages about being a man (Harris, I. 1995).

**The Australian Setting**

In the Australian context, Huggins (1997, p.8) summarises the demands of a ‘hard’ masculinity, for a man to be an: ‘... excellent provider(s) ... a totally coping individual with no apparent vulnerability: a person who is in control, confident, competitive, aggressive ... a winner’. McLean (1997, p.15) describes adolescent masculinity as:

> a masculine culture of hardness, competition, the obsession with strength and power, emotional distance, and boys’ determination at all costs not to be female.

McGrane and Patience (1995) further delineate the ‘hard culture’ of masculinity, where the expression of feelings is restricted to anger and aggression. With young people often unable to recognise and express their emotions, and cultural approval for male
emotional inexpressiveness, young men risk never learning how to engage in successful and intimate relationships.

Intimacy is sought in sex, the only situation in which most men allow themselves to experience closeness. Homophobia is associated with the rejection of heterosexual male intimacy, and friendships, rarely sources of deep sharing and support, are neglected. Homosexuality is perceived as gender betrayal (Flood 1995; McGrane & Patience 1995; Radican 1995). Homophobia is also linked to embarrassment, fear and homoerotic desire, as well as to violent attempts to eliminate homosexuality, which is seen as undermining masculinity (Gilbert & Gilbert 1997).

Successful heterosexual performance is seen as confirmation of masculinity and hierarchical status (Connell 1996; Flood 1995; Radican 1995). Men tend to expect women to read and respond to their unstated needs, without doing the same in return (Flood 1995; Radican 1995).

Radican (1995) reasons that despite the differences mediated by culture, class and race, there are constants within masculinity. These include: the valuing of men who strive to achieve the acceptable form of being male; and the devaluing of women and those men who don't strive to meet the dominant standard. He continues that boys and men live in fear of not achieving the standard, while being taught that feelings of fear and inadequacy are unacceptable. Power and violence are used to force others, as well as to deny their own feelings of vulnerability (Radican 1995).

Edgar (1997) points to the apparent elision of masculinity with power, whereby words associated with maleness seem also to imply ‘power, possession, control’, so that themes of confidence, control, including self-control, and prowess imbue talk of masculinity. Edgar claims that young men learn that self-control and the denial of honest emotional expression are necessary to survive hierarchical competition with other males.
In summary, the writers above characterise hegemonic Australian masculinity by elements which appear to be linked to the dual themes of power and intimacy:

- the valuing of men in pursuit of the masculine ideal
- the devaluing of women, and men perceived as weaker
- approval for the exertion of power and dominance
- homophobia
- lack of permission to express emotions other than anger/aggression
- rejection of intimacy
- denial of vulnerability
- heterosexual performance prowess
- the equation of sex and intimacy

**Intimacy**

A fundamental paradox of masculinities, including some homosexual subordinates, is their simultaneous requirement for the rejection of the ‘feminine’ and the domination of women; and the striving to achieve intimacy in relationships with women.

Writers on gender and men's studies talk about the value of consciousness-raising for men, as the opportunity for them to give voice and value to their thoughts and feelings, and to engage emotionally with other men (Christian 1994; Seidler 1991; Farrell 1993; Pease 1997b; Tolson 1987). Intimacy refers to interpersonal closeness that goes beyond spending time and doing things together, and includes emotional engagement and the deliberate shared analysis of experience.

Women may feel more comfortable describing intimacy within a wide range of relationships, whereas men tend to avoid emotional engagement, unless in a sexual context.

A fear of intimacy has held men in terrible isolation and loneliness ...Usually men have few close personal relationships; we grow up learning to be self-sufficient and independent...Often it is only in the context of sexuality that we can allow ourselves to be close and intimate (Seidler 1985, p.160).
Lewis (1978) cites several studies that document men’s lack of self-disclosure and the absence of love and care for male friends. There nevertheless seems to be a longing in men to experience uncensored intimacy with other men:

...many of us already know that the traditional masculine role allows much less emotional expression with other males than we want, and that we must seek more (Pleck and Sawyer, cited in Lewis 1978, p.110).

Bergman and Surrey (1998) confirm that men enjoy the companionship of their male friends, which rarely includes the mutual empathy found with a female confidante. Barriers to intimacy between men include competitiveness, fear of vulnerability and homophobia (Lewis 1978; Maccoby 1998). Maccoby (1998) suggests that women and girls have learned facilitative communication styles that enable intimacy.

The fear of emasculation by women has its origins in boyhood and adolescence, and implicates intimacy.

McLean (1997) describes the conflict between the simultaneous fear of and longing for intimacy: boys recognise women as the most likely source of emotional connection, but feel threatened by their emotional power, and so try to dominate them, believing it is unmanly to fear women.

The Australian tradition of mateship, forged in past times in the bush and on the battlefield (Morton 1997; Edgar 1997), endures at least in Anglo mythology, but does not allow the intimacy for which many men are searching. Men are:

closed, guarded ..unsympathetic ..inarticulate ..There is an untold story of isolation and emotional poverty at the heart of Australian masculinity (Morton 1997, p.209-211).

Edgar (1997) suggests that men are more likely to disclose their secrets to women, since even their mates are seen as competitors and therefore not quite to be trusted. The pleasure that young men find in ‘macho bullshitting’ and humorous story-telling, might be seen by older men as superficial, rather than indicative of true friendship (Edgar 1997).
**Power**

The concept of power has been influenced by post-modernist thinking, replacing notions of authority intrinsically held, with a discourse about a realm of dynamic social interactions. Foucault (1978, 1984) describes a multi-faceted complexity of power, established, sustained and extended within the particular hegemony where it operates at a given time, by a system for the production, regulation and distribution of statements we name as ‘truth’.

Feminist scholars have considered Foucault’s philosophy useful but limited (Harstock 1990; Martin 1998). Foucault claims that despite the popular concept of power as only ever repressive, it can induce pleasure, knowledge and discourse (Foucault 1984). Harstock (1990) challenges Foucault for his standpoint as one of the dominant, and his failure to explain systematically unequal power relations. She criticises the notion that individuals are constantly and simultaneously exercising and undergoing power, as if there is some level of equality, even for those who experience group or class domination.

McLean (1997) links men’s inability to identify with the concept of ‘male power’ to the lack of control that many experience in institutional hierarchies; and to their perception that women hold emotional power in relationships. Seidler (1994, p.201) draws the connection between power, self-control and masculinity.

It is often important to persuade ourselves that we are in control, even if we are not, since otherwise our very sense of male identity is threatened.

Morton (1997) uses a detailed journalistic exploration of the men’s movement in Australia to contextualise power and disempowerment, in the personal and structural spheres. He acknowledges men’s personal difficulties, but challenges claims of gender equality, equivalent male suffering and disadvantage at structural or political levels.

**Alternate Directions in Masculinity**

Australian writers Edgar (1997), Morton (1997), Pease (1997) and Tacey (1997) consider the possibilities of reconstructing masculinity through personal reflection;
listening to women and other subjugated groups; and through active engagement with
men in particular, but also with women. These writers have much usefully to say about
breaking down restrictive models of men’s being, thereby supporting the development
of healthy men, and simultaneously overturning structures that dominate women and
disempowered men.

Bly (1990) claims to be supporting the personal development of men, yet shows his own
intolerance for those he describes as soft men of no resolve who are neither happy nor
undercurrent of negativity towards women. He takes a deficit approach to men’s
development, with credit given to clichéd assumptions that reinforce patriarchal
structures.

Learning to be man is a difficult task when young men are being asked to consider
alternatives in a world where there are rarely models for non-patriarchal masculinity
even for men well beyond their adolescent years (Tacey 1997). The demands of
masculinity operate concurrently with the bio-psycho-social needs of the adolescent
male, but his voice is relatively absent in the discourse of masculinity.

ADOLESCENCE
Adolescence is the transition period between childhood and adulthood, when biological
and psychosocial changes predominate. Erikson (1963) proposed that with the onset of
puberty, the young person strives for personal, sexual and career identity, clinging to
peer affiliations rather than to the family. The psychosocial tasks of adolescence
include: separation from the family; formation of a sense of self; consolidation of
values; selection of career path or work role; establishment of sexual identity; formation
of intimate relationships and community connectedness (Harris, S. 1995); and pursuing
autonomy and self-regulation through decision-making (Shulman & Seiffge-Krenke
1997).
Adolescence is socially constructed, albeit with coexistent discrepancies, according to: social, biological and psychological theories of adolescence; cultural and subcultural imperatives; the economic and social realities of the time, including assimilation policies exercised against Aboriginal young people; exclusion based on class, gender, poverty, ethnicity, sexuality or disability; the development of the welfare state; and recently, a global market imperative, expressed through economic, rather than social rationalism.

In their adolescent years, boys learn to behave like men, in particular to despise all that is ‘sissy’ or feminine, within an anxiety-provoking setting that threatens sanctions for failure rather than the opportunity to learn from positive models (Harris, I. 1995; Clatterbaugh 1990).

**Initiation**

Cross-cultural studies indicate a phenomenon of rites of passage commonly associated with adolescence. In the absence of formal rites for spiritual and psychological growth, young people may attempt premature adult behaviour and create their own inadequate initiation ceremonies among peers, in the absence of elders as teachers, who would also formally acknowledge their change of status (Delaney 1995). Traditional initiation rites generally separate young men from the world of women and children, to induct them into male-dominated society (Gilbert & Gilbert 1997; Tacey 1997). Meade (1993) conceptualises male initiation as healing rites at various points of transition in the life cycle, and which protect men from wounding others.

**Intimacy**

Towards the end of adolescence, with identity formation under way, the young person is ready for intimacy and commitment. Focus on sexual intimacy or promiscuity, without progression to psychosocial intimacy, may indicate poor identity development (Erikson 1963; 1968).

In their search for nurturing independent of parents, young men may engage in highly emotional first loves (Harris, I. 1995). Siegel and Shaughnessy (1995) concluded that
the powerful need for love, along with inadequate skills for emotional intimacy, lead to reliance on physical intimacy.

Buhrmester (1990) and Richey and Richey (1980) showed that intimate friendship was of great importance to adolescents (cited in Lundy, Field, McBride & Field 1998). Both genders were developing skills with the opposite sex as they grew older, although males developed intimacy more slowly (Lundy, Field, McBride, Field & Largie 1998; Sharabany, Gershoni and Hofman 1981 cited in Lundy et al, 1998).

**Social Support**

Social support describes the many different ways in which people render assistance to one another, and can be accessed through the natural helping networks of family and friends, or through professional services (Tracy & Whittaker 1990). Sharabany, Gershoni and Hofman (1981, cited in Lundy et al 1998) stated that males focused on instrumental aspects of support in times of trouble, meeting specific material needs, rather than affective roles such as emotional support, understanding, trust and loyalty.

Berndt (1982) concluded that friendship played a critical role in the adolescent years, as dependence on the parent as confidante diminished, and peers became the base of the new social support system (cited in Siegel and Shaughnessy, 1995). Research has indicated that young people who had a good bond with their parents were most able successfully to achieve disengagement from parents; identity formation; and relationships with peers (Field, Lang, Yando & Bendell 1995; Grotevant and Cooper 1982, 1986 cited in Meeus & Dekovic 1995; McCallum 1994; Meeus & Dekovic 1995). Shulman and Seiffge-Krenke (1997) showed that relationships with parents changed and developed, but were not replaced by peer friendships.

Kids Help Line (1998b) showed that Australian adolescents could nominate more than one confidante, and would talk to parents if they had a problem, or to friends, especially in Years 9-12. Weston (1997) reported that the well-being of the adolescent was enhanced by the ability to approach either parent or friends as confidantes, whereas low well-being was associated with confiding in friends only. These studies do not indicate
whether the concept of ‘confiding’ had different meanings according to individual or groups of respondents.

**Parents**

Traditional notions of male identity centre around work and the dominant notion of father as provider rather than nurturer (Cohen 1993; Huggins 1997; Pease & Wilson 1991). Cohen’s (1993) research concluded that restrictive assumptions about parenting inadequately explained the range of expressive relationships between children and fathers, many of whom were actively trying to avoid the repetition of unsatisfactory father-son relationships. Pease and Wilson (1991) warn that such men may yet be trapped by the stereotypes of father-as-provider and mother-as-nurturer, due to the patriarchal structural dominance that affects both individual biases and institutional inflexibility.

Father-absence is a popular topic of debate, although it is perhaps difficult to define, given varying degree and nature of both physical absence and emotional distance. Research yields discrepant results as to whether father-absence in itself, rather than the quality of family relationships and social factors such as poverty, causes adolescent difficulty. Kagel, White & Coyne (1978) found no intrinsic relationship between father-absence and adolescent disturbance: more significant were less warm and supportive family relations; less emphasis on personal growth; and less successful extra-familial involvement. Downey and Powell (1993) found no advantage in boys and girls living with same sex parents after separation, except that fathers were more able financially to support education. The research of Young, Miller, Norton and Hill (1995) showed that adolescent sons’ and daughters’ perception of maternal and paternal support and closeness were equally important in predicting life satisfaction.

Others claim the crippling effects of fatherlessness are: aggression, violence, over-compensatory masculine behaviour and behaviour that can be damaging or fatal to self and others (Biddulph 1997; Holman 1998).
Beaty (1995) showed that father-absent adolescent males rated low on both masculine self-concept and peer adjustment. Masculinity was rated against a set of descriptors, such as: aggressive, independent, self-confident, domineering, reckless and uncaring. There was no evidence that failing to demonstrate such characteristics necessarily lead to adolescent distress, life incompetence or dissatisfaction. Dominant notions of masculinity, rather than father-absence, may well cause poor peer adjustment for those who are excluded from peer groups. Qualitative methodology may be more successful in identifying nuances of cause and effect not accessible through essentialist instruments of measurement that assume stereotypical masculine behaviour traits.

Fathers were less likely to have intimate involvement with their adolescents (Harris, I. 1995; Shulman & Seiffge-Krenke 1997; Weston 1997). Shulman and Seiffge-Krenke (1997) take a positive view, by claiming their research indicated that fathers facilitated adolescent separation by modelling relationships where closeness and separateness, love and aggression were balanced. They argue that the adolescent son’s attitude wavers between submission and self-assertion, within an inter-generational power struggle, with the father seeking additionally to eliminate childish or feminine traits in his son. On the other hand, I.Harris (1995) describes boys who mask the pain of emotional distance from fathers by romanticising their relationships with them.

Barker and Loewenstein (1997) revealed that young people of Brazil saw their fathers as incapable of expressing emotion or demonstrating caring or empathy. The small minority of progressive young men who were able to question traditional machista notions of manhood, were likely to have had a nurturing role with younger siblings, and a meaningful relationship with a role model who presented non-traditional gender roles. Hardesty, Wenk and Morgan (1995) concluded that while increased time of father involvement resulted in increased traditional orientations in sons, non-traditional orientations were more probable where fathers have had a close, nurturing, on-going father-son relationship.

Biddulph (1995, 1997) reveals his own bias about women and masculinity, by claiming that ‘father-hunger’ creates ‘macho-maniacs’ or ‘Mummy’s boys’. Biddulph argues
that research shows fatherless children suffered more. He acknowledges the poverty and low socio-economic status of such families, but assumes father-absence to be the causal factor. Biddulph describes the ‘father-son bond’ as the key to masculine mental health, minimising the evident well-being of many men who have been raised by women. Such positing is in stark contrast to Pease (1997a) who explores the range of possible meanings in mother-son relationships, including separation and closeness, with a view to honouring mothers and moving closer to partnership with women.

Silverstein and Rashbaum (1994) eschew the ‘mother-blaming’ that intimidates women into believing that they need to distance themselves from their sons, and trust their development to male role models, as if by virtue of their female gender they are incapable of modelling a wide range of positive human characteristics. The maintenance of intimacy skills, modelled by women or men, will not prevent the healthy separation and individuation of the adolescent male. Burke’s (1996) study of gender supports the belief that rather than male role models, sons need a range of mentors with fully developed human potentials.

**Hierarchy and Dominance**

Adolescent male peer groups are characterised by hierarchical arrangement. Savin-Williams (1980) had shown a link between dominance status and physical attributes. His intensive observational study of eleven older boys, average age 16.3 years, showed that hierarchies were now related to non-physical traits, perhaps attributable to their more consistent pubertal maturity. Verbal ridicule was the most common form of asserting status, while physical and verbal threats appeared only one-third as frequently as in younger adolescents. The later study of Weisfeld, Bloch & Ivers (1983) used a much larger sample, with quantifiable instruments for the measurement of popularity and hierarchy, and did not support Savin-Williams’ findings.

**Stressors in Adolescence**

Social Work intervention with young men is based on the understanding that intra-psychic identity formation is established during a time of biological change and growth, and within an interpersonal and social environment that presents constant challenges.
Adolescents face problems related to family, school and friends; legal stress; gender role; loneliness; illness; abuse; and depression (Hendren 1990; Holman 1997; McDonald Culp, Clyman & Culp 1995).

In depression, girls showed more emotional type symptomatology, while males tended to demonstrate behavioural problems such as: not wanting to be with people; trouble with motivation and school work; and suicidal tendencies (Donnelly 1995). Hart (1998) includes as risk factors in adolescent depression: genetic predisposition; low family cohesiveness; and a youth culture that encourages isolation from parents and greater reliance on and acceptance from a peer group.

Studies of resilience and protective factors have found adolescent males to be at greater risk of health and behaviour problems, given the same stressors as adolescent females (Werner & Smith 1982, 1992; Hawkins & Catalano 1993). In the Australian context, concern about the malaise and suffering of young men takes an increasingly central role in popular and academic literature.

The rate of adolescent male suicide in Australia is the second highest in the world, with the rate for females increasing; depression present in almost two-thirds of all cases, and substance abuse also common (Carr-Gregg 1997). The Suicide Prevention Victorian Task Force Report (July 1997) notes the decline in the indicators of the well-being of young people, along with the increasing prevalence of depression, self-harm, drug misuse, family conflict, eating disorders and homelessness.

Siegel and Shaughnessy (1995) propose that the emotional turbulence of the adolescent years is related to lack of preparation for the intensity of new experiences. Sometimes this emotional confusion leads to distress including suicidal ideation and recklessness. Among the complexity of possible factors relating to suicide, Tacey (1997) suggests the significance of a failure to understand the symbolism of initiation, whereby the soul seeks change through letting the old self die. Heavy metal music has been blamed in popular media and public outcry as causing negative behaviours, depression and
suicide, especially in adolescent males (Carr-Gregg 1997; Ballard & Coates 1995), although Ballard and Coates (1995) found no empirical evidence to that effect.

**Problem Behaviours**

Pleck et al (1998) concluded that problem behaviours related to school, alcohol and drugs, delinquency and sexual activity were significantly associated with how society defined masculinity. The researchers acknowledged that the behaviours were also associated with individual trait masculinity, although they inadequately deal with the idea that ‘problematic behaviours’ are culturally and historically determined, and not restricted to males. Among many unanswered questions implicit here, the most relevant to the current study is how the experience of all young men, including those not engaging in problematic behaviours, is affected by masculinity ideology.

**Substance Use and Abuse**

Research with young people consistently concluded that fun, friendship, happiness, overcoming boredom and confidence were the top reasons for substance use (Broadbent 1994; Davey 1994; McCallum 1994).

Broadbent (1994) found that young people from inner Melbourne did not see their alcohol use or abuse as problematic. Those aged 16 and above were able to link alcohol consumption with risk-taking or aggression, although they saw this as reason for safer, rather than less drinking. Adolescents saw their substance use as consistent with adult social practices in a society that actively normalises and encourages substance use (Andrews & Alchin 1994; Broadbent 1994; McCallum 1994). Excessive alcohol consumption is associated strongly with masculinity in the Australian culture (Huggins 1997).

Beman (1995) concluded that adolescent males were at greater risk of substance abuse, and particularly susceptible to the need for peer acceptance. Family and peer influences were also mediated by individual characteristics; poor academic achievement; motivation; developmental factors; and depression.
Page (1990) found that boys who were shy were more likely to use illicit substances, and that the use of hallucinogens, marijuana and cocaine increased with those who were shy and also had high need to be with other people. Substance associated risk-taking increased with both previous experience (Finken, Jacobs & Laguna 1998) and the extent to which the drug use activity was for the purpose of fun (Lee, Su & Hazard 1998).

Despite the strong influence of peer behaviour at the time of experimentation, parental attitudes had the enduring effect (McCallum 1994; Zhang, Welte & Wieczorek 1997). Adolescents associated binge-drinking or ‘getting wasted’ with personal stress or family dysfunction (Broadbent 1994). Supportive parenting was associated with sensible drinking, and the parent-child relationship was more important than family intactness or socio-economic position (Shucksmith, Glendinning and Hendry 1997).

Tacey (1997) proposes that in the contemporary Australian setting, illegal drug cultures with their secrecy, alienation, and excessive alcohol consumption hidden from parents, may parody traditional initiation. Just as elders sometimes gave drugs to initiates, adolescents use them:

- to help dissolve the boundaries of the self, to expand to a fuller or different identity and
- to gain an ecstatic experience that links them to a wider cosmos (Tacey 1997, p.118).

**School**

Through the formal and informal environments, schools implicitly teach boys that certain ways of being male are more highly valued, and that power should be exerted over other males and females in order to maintain dominance (Connell 1996; Kenway 1997).

Despite continuing harassment and gender inequities at school, home and wider society, it appears that many girls were achieving better than boys (Biddulph 1997; Gilbert & Gilbert 1997; Pallotta-Chiarolli 1997), although academic disadvantage may have been more affected by socio-economic status and other barriers, rather than gender alone (Gilbert & Gilbert 1997; Teese, Davies, Charlton & Polesel 1997). Boys tended to
choose from a narrow range of subjects, with an aversion to any curriculum, such as literacy, with any feminine association (Gilbert & Gilbert 1997; Connell 1996).

The qualitative research of Teese et al (1997) highlighted that boys were more negative about school, although less so between Years 10 and 12. Girls self-reported higher motivation. They also found that boys tended to reject notions of women’s disadvantage in the labour market.

**Help-Seeking Behaviours**

Studies of adolescent help-seeking behaviours vary in their conclusions about gender characteristics. Young adolescents who do not ask for help indicated that they were responsible for solving their own problems, which they saw as lacking importance (McDonald Culp et al, 1995). Heppner, Reeder and Larson (1983) concluded that males fail to seek assistance when they find themselves struggling to cope with stress, although the study of Greenberger and McLaughlin (1998) found that boys engaged in instrumental support-seeking and planful action as much as girls, but were less likely to seek emotional support.

While there were similarities in actual coping mechanisms, girls were more likely to seek and give social support; and to accept fatalistically their condition, perhaps engaging in some wishful thinking. Boys were more private and aggressive, likely to stand their ground and make light of the situation, using humour or physical diversions to avoid a problem (Frydenberg & Lewis 1991; Frydenberg 1997). Young men were more likely to ask for advice rather than help (Frydenberg 1991; Hurst 1997).

Young and older Australian men tend not to seek counselling (Carr-Gregg, 1997; Gibson 1998). Hurst (1997) and Huggins (1997) link masculinity at all life stages to failure to access available help, which would be considered a sign of not being a ‘real’ man.

While some research shows that adolescents had poor knowledge of available formal support services (McDonald Culp, et al, 1995), this was especially true for boys (Kids
Help Line 1998b). Kids Help Line (1998a) found that young males were willing to access the assistance of peer helpers trained and available in the school setting.

The Professional Relationship
Work with adolescents tends to be seen by therapists themselves as more challenging and less fulfilling than work with adults or younger children (Biever, McKenzie, North & Gonzalez 1995). Sercombe (1998) reminds us that the relationship between young people and their workers needs to include an appreciation of the power dynamic, and Barmby (1997) writes that working with adolescents can be stressful for social workers who find their adult authority challenged.

Rolph (1997) showed that young people were more willing to engage in counselling when it was clearly their own choice. They reported that counselling had helped them through times of family crisis, and provided opportunity to talk about issues and make difficult decisions. Young men were less likely to use counselling than other services. Considering the needs of young African-American men, S.Harris (1995) specifically urged the counsellor to establish a positive bond, in order to assess the nature of the conflicts between subcultural masculinity and the psychosocial tasks of adolescence.

In Australia, Broadbent (1994) and Kids Help Line (1997) concluded that young people had no confidence in the support services available to them, and doubted the ability of adults to understand their situation, and treat them with respect. This might be counteracted by Kenny’s (1996) proposition for practitioner research, cooperatively with young people, who are facilitated to explore relevant issues, thereby discovering the wider social and political implications of their personal experience.

Conclusion
The review of theoretical literature and research reveals comparatively little that expressly documents the experiences and attitudes of young men. Much of the foregoing information is drawn from within wider studies that consider neither the effects of dominant notions of masculinity nor individual male behaviour. Although theoretical assumptions about masculinity may underlie some of the discussion of
young men, research studies tend to describe outcomes, rather than explain the
imperatives that shape adolescent male behaviour and coping. Listening to the voices
of young men themselves may help us better to understand their challenges.
The objectives of the research were to describe masculinity as experienced by adolescent males; and to demonstrate how their perceived code of masculine behaviour impacts on their lives. The ultimate purpose was to inform Social Work practice about the challenges and contradictions of adolescent masculinity, and to propose contextually appropriate interventions that serve the needs of young men, and support their emotional and intellectual growth into adulthood.

For the purposes of the research, definitions include the following:

**Masculinity**: culturally defined construct specifying standards for male behaviour.

**Hegemonic masculinity/dominant masculinity**: a construct of masculinity upheld as ideal, and determined by a set of culturally specific, learned, dominant imperatives.

**Subordinate masculinity**: a pattern of masculinity, different from, perhaps contradictory to, and measured against the construct of hegemonic masculinity.

**Intimacy**: Interpersonal closeness facilitated by the sharing of time and activities, emotional engagement and the purposeful discussion of experience.

**Power**: A transaction whereby an individual, group or class is enabled to control, at some level, the experience of others.

**PROCEDURE**

On the assumption that those in the situation have the most knowledge about the dynamics of their condition, a qualitative research design would document the stories of eight sixteen and seventeen year-old males, using an in-depth interview process, with findings and discussion based on thematic analysis of transcripts.
Taylor and Bogdan (1984) defined in-depth interviews as:

face-to-face encounters between the researcher and informants with the purpose of understanding informants’ perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words (cited in Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander, 1995, p.68).

The methodology was predicated on the assumption that behaviour can be understood in terms of the way people define their own experience; with the aim of developing theories that are grounded in the informants’ construction of their own social reality (Minichiello et al, 1995).

The study would seek quite personal information about a small group of males, in order to make sense of how they behave, think and make meaning. (Ambert, Adler P., Adler, P.A. & Detzner 1995). Additionally, in-depth interviews would give the participants opportunity to shape research that had been proposed from my stand-point influenced by: age, gender, education, politics, personal and professional experience. Because of their less powerful position in society, age and educational status, young people have very little direct influence on academia or practice research. Hill (1997) contends that qualitative research may well offer children some direction over material prepared by adult researchers.

**Sampling**

It was anticipated that the stories of a small group of eight young men would be adequate to shed light on masculinity. I recruited participants through workers in the localities of the research. Six participants were initially approached by these intermediaries who outlined very simply the purpose of the research, and with permission, passed on to me phone numbers of young men who were interested. I approached two personally while they were painting a mural.

Sampling introduced representatives of four separate peer groups. Participants were aged 16 or 17: average age 16.7 years. Two were from a non-English speaking background. The only parameters for selection were that they should be young men...
who were currently in Years 10 or 11 at a cluster of secondary schools in neighbouring localities across the boundary of two Local Government Areas. These localities are linked by relatively easy public transport access which facilitates the social interaction of young people out of school hours. One private and two state schools were represented.

The area is one of high growth and new housing, but includes a significant number of Housing Commission properties. Employment and average income rates tend to be higher than some other areas of Victoria, because many residents have moved in specifically to buy their own housing, although those in work tend to have low paid jobs. There are exceptionally high numbers of children and young people in the area.

**ETHICAL ISSUES**

As a Social Worker in counselling settings, I need to exercise ethically my advantage in the power dynamic, which is due to my skill in eliciting from children and young people secrets that they had not intended to divulge. This necessitates that my goal is always the welfare of the young person, rather than any range of motivations including: my ‘cleverness’ as a counsellor; the request of the family; or the needs of the agency.

Working with adolescents over many years, I had reached the conclusion that power results from an interpersonal dynamic, rather than being exercised by adults. This does not imply that the young person has equivalent opportunity to control the power dynamic. In fact, I am most often cast into the dominant role because of: the developmental and support needs of the young person; cultural assumptions about adult-child relationships; structural hierarchy; my own skills and confidence.

According to Sercombe (1998, p.21): ‘a power relation is legitimate where power has been ceded voluntarily and without coercion’. Corruption is the unethical exercise of the given power, to further one’s own interests to the detriment of the other. It could be argued that power is only ever exercised in the interests of the dominant, since it always
maintains the subordination of the ‘other’. The exercise of power may therefore always be judged unethical since it is evaluated within the regime of the power relationship.

My need to perform successfully, including my need to stay in control of the research process, would be highly significant, due to the critical nature of academic assessment. Even given informed consent and other ethical requirements, I would be more than usually susceptible to corruption, and thereby needing to be vigilant about the well-being of the interviewees.

Consistent with my practice, where I argue that young people should be compensated financially for the time they spend as consultants in the development of an agency’s services or other research activities, each interviewee received twenty dollars as compensation for expenses incurred. While this can be a significant coercion to an adolescent, no participant appeared unduly pressured by the financial bonus.

Since essential to the data collection phase would be the investigation of personal stories, the well-being of the interviewees was of prime importance, although it was not intended to elicit distressing stories or problems. The interactive interview minimised the risk that might follow disclosure of upsetting material, and allowed participants to resolve not only relationship or personal issues, but also intellectual dilemmas arising from inconsistencies in their stories. I made affirming comments when necessary, mindful that it might risk influencing their selection of particular material to present. There existed the option for activating support within the young man’s community. Professional Social Work ethics operated alongside research ethics to ensure the welfare of the participant was paramount.

The research was conducted in the belief that the potential harm to participants could be minimised, and that the research outcomes would be of high value to Social Work practice with young men.
**Informed Consent**

After my initial phone contact, and if the young men chose to continue, I mailed the ‘Information Sheet for Participants’ (Appendix A) and the consent form (Appendix B) which also required the signature of a parent. Verbal and written information, and the consent form included the statement that participants could withdraw at any stage.

Parents have legal and moral rights to legitimise the consent of a young person, to whom is denied the right to give independent informed consent. The process clearly reinforces the less powerful position of the adolescent, who is additionally considered less capable of making decisions. Implicit in the assumption of joint parental consent is the notion that the parent will act in the best interests of the child.

While invaluable to the discovery potential of qualitative research, the unpredictability of responses mitigates against the granting and acceptance of absolutely informed consent. Interviewees knew in advance the general area of questioning, but could not predict the actual details they might find themselves divulging, nor the potential harm that might be caused.

**Confidentiality**

The unidentified raw data, including tapes, and all other related writing was kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office. Tapes and transcripts will be held for five years, by the supervisor, in a locked cabinet, with access limited to the supervisor and the researcher.

The identity of the participants and others was protected in all writing, including the transcripts and the final report. Pseudonyms have been used. Locality and other identifiers have been disguised, without changing the meaning of the stories or the results.
Gender Considerations

I questioned whether women can validly research young men's lives. Both men and women risk the bias of their particular standpoint, in the choice of topics, research design and analysis. As a female researcher in the area of masculinity, I am potentially no more or less necessarily biased than a male, but differently biased. Buchbinder (1994) acknowledges that women and men come from different positions on the issue of gender politics, due to the greater power of men. Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994) add that male researchers may, moreover, be bound by a vested interest in resisting change.

Balancing the risk that young men would define themselves as opposite to ‘feminine’, and in contrast to their perception of a female interviewer, is the tendency for men and boys to confide in women. Chesler (1995, Preface) is quite explicit in her discussion of the gender implications of her ability to elicit accurate information.

...How well I played the part of mother-woman totally determined how tense, how relieved, how replenished most men, upon being questioned - or involved - felt .... men are used to revealing certain things about themselves only to women. Most men expect women in general to keep male secrets, cherish male frailty, forgive male cruelty...

Adolescent males might feel under pressure to give the answers they think a woman would find proper. I anticipated that with careful preparation, and skilled interview technique, I would be able to encourage male interviewees to be confidently open and honest.

My personal experiences and emotions would also come into play throughout the research process. I recognise my membership of a structurally disadvantaged group, and have suffered personally and professionally by virtue of my gender. By the same token, I have been compassionate in my dealings with young men, and have generally enjoyed working with them. I remember only one instance where I declined
counselling a young male who had sexually abused another female client. My personal experience, both positive and negative, would help create the perspective through which I viewed the data about being young and male. Chesler (1995, Preface) warns:

... it is almost impossible for a woman’s knowledge of men to be ‘objective’ or sterile.

Female knowledge of men always partakes of the intimate, the relational, the ‘subjective’...

Although I trusted my analytical ability and capacity for empathy, I nevertheless recognised that my vision would be limited by never having been male, and therefore paid heed to the written and spoken wisdom of men. As a woman, I can empathise with the structural disadvantage of youth. A feminist perspective is appropriate for the interpretation of the world view of young men.

Patriarchy is about generational as well as gendered power differences. It is the ‘rule of the fathers’ over the sons, as well as men over women (McLean 1997, p.13).

Data Collection
Data collection and analysis began with guided, but open-ended and interactive in-depth interviews, which were focussed, but conversational, friendly and good-humoured. The interviews were conducted in a private, colourful, ‘youth-friendly’ room in a community agency.

I had begun establishment of rapport with the initial telephone call, and continued with the chat before the interview, covering: personal statistical details; a reminder of the purpose of the research; the repetition of the right to withdraw completely at any time or pass on any question; and confirmation of permission to use audio-recording. The interviews lasted around 75 minutes, with another 20 minutes or so taken up with orientation and closure.

Interview Structure
The interviews were structured into four segments. A page of statements based on the theoretical principles of hegemonic masculinity, as proposed in the literature review

Young Men Speak: Methodology
32
phase of the research, was presented as discussion starters (Appendix C.1). Secondly, I asked a small group of set questions (Appendix C.2). Thirdly, a set of scenarios was presented for hypothetical reflection (Appendix C.3). Finally, I asked the interviewees: ‘Considering my goal is to find out about the lives and experience of young men, what other questions should I have asked?’

While the structure gave specific focus to the interview, open-ended questions and invitations to relate anecdotes and examples introduced a flexibility allowing the presentation of individual interpretations and meanings. More probing questions were used to clarify; to elicit further detail; or to shed light on apparent discrepancies. The process of analysis began with listening. I was alert to pursue relevant, new or ‘interesting’ themes as they emerged within any interview.

The format of the interview gave repeated opportunity to return to themes, in anticipation that should interviewees be reticent, it would facilitate the most complete telling of the story. Additionally, if ideas were in formation, the repetition of topics would reveal on-going cognitive processing or inconsistencies. Such repetition also allowed for further exploration of the narrative where the interviewee might be prone to selectivity within content, due to recency or emotional potency of experience; deliberate censoring for personal reasons; or the desire to give ‘acceptable’ answers.

**Analysis**

Content analysis was thematic and interpretive, began during the actual interviews and has been described as ‘emergent’ (Stinson 1991) Data collection and analysis were occurring simultaneously, so that emerging themes and ideas influenced not the actual structure, but the emphasis of ensuing interviews, through more probing questions designed to test ideas and possible conceptual linkages. Early speculation was followed up in later interviews and ultimately refined then tested against the data in its entirety.
The transcription of interviews recorded the exact words of the interviewees, including incomplete sentences; stuttering and other vocalisations; pauses and laughter, that were part of the researcher-interviewee interaction; and tonalities (‘whispering’, ‘angrily’, etc.). I had at times reacted to non-verbal cues and latent content, giving opportunity for their meaning to be checked and made part of the audio record. One interview was partially transcribed and augmented by field notes, because of equipment failure.

The difficulty of the transcription task cannot be over-emphasised. The audio-tapes revealed the extent to which young men can mumble away to nothingness; suck words into their nasal passages; and perform at a base pitch that seems to rumble beyond the range of the recording equipment. I recognised some phrases only by their context linked with the rhythm of the idiom, before multiple re-listening to check the actual word content. An unexpected advantage of repetition within the interview was reference to earlier indistinguishable comments. The possibility of major distortion of meaning within a story, by virtue of mishearing just one word or small phrase, became evident during the first transcription.

Data analysis is the process of systematically arranging and presenting information in order to search for the ideas that will indicate the meaning it holds (Minichiello et al, 1995). I began ‘exploratory’ analysis during the interview and developed it further during transcription.

Through content analysis by manual coding of both manifest and latent content within transcripts, I more systematically defined themes expressed through the basic units of phrases and sentences, followed by more intensive consideration of particular words, which had the capacity to multiply the thematic content of their context. Notes were made directly on transcripts, and page references to themes collated simultaneously on separate ‘post-it’ notes which could be sorted.

The initial process of open coding to label concepts and uncover categories and sub-categories, was refined through axial coding. Further developing hunches;
reorganising; questioning; intellectual and intuitive reflection, led to the emergence of core issues which became the focus of further analysis and testing, through the search for both confirming and variant examples. The practicalities of the process included the display and rearrangement of themes, concepts and categories on colour-coded ‘post-it’ notes on a large blank wall.

The central issue emerged as I asked the question: *What is the key concern for the young men I interviewed?* This led to further selective analysis of transcripts, and ultimately redefined the key points in the findings. Before cutting out useful quotes, transcripts were reprinted on to different coloured paper. This made it easy to guarantee that conclusions were adequately supported across the sample group. The quotes were filed according to categories in envelopes, then sorted into sub-categories.

At various stages, including while actually writing up the results, the ‘Find’ and ‘Go To’ functions in ‘Edit’ on Microsoft Word 6.0 were used to check the context of particular words, and to ensure the data consistency across interviews. Disconfirming examples or inadequate support resulted in the rejection of some tentative conclusions.

The results reflect the application of both deductive and inductive modes of reasoning, representing respectively: the testing of theories of hegemonic masculinity; and the development of theory about the lives of young men.

*Validity*

The internal validity of the research was enhanced by an interactive method, returning to themes and cross-checking data; and exploring nuances of the story. This allowed further development of an incomplete picture or unexpected theme, thereby increasing both the accuracy of the information generated and my understanding of it. Especially where interviewees were more verbally hesitant, I used summarising and paraphrasing to check my interpretation of meaning. The qualitative research process, including in-depth interviews and on-going emergent analysis which informed data collection, contributed towards ensuring both internal and external validity of the research.
As similarities and non-conforming cases were identified and explored, the external validity was enhanced, although small sample size and sampling method potentially decreased generalisability to other settings. Additionally, the elements of truth as given to me by these young men, may have been limited not only to their subcultural context, but also to that particular moment in their own lives.

The interpretive nature of content analysis renders the findings subject to personal and professional theoretical predisposition, and therefore susceptible to researcher bias. Essential tools in the quest for validity were empathic knowledge of the participants’ world view; acknowledgement of my own bias; application of intellectual rigour; and the breadth of illustrative examples from the transcripts. The in-depth interview and analysis process ultimately helped to decrease the effect of researcher bias and facilitated optimal correctness of results.

**Reliability**

The reliability of this research may not be high, as other researchers, representing different standpoints, and conducting research in different localities or cultural settings, may find somewhat different results. Researcher characteristics, such as: gender; personality; and level of familiarity with youth issues and idiom, may well influence data and introduce different bias into analysis.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of Research Design**

The breadth of inquiry of the study was both its strength and weakness. The questioning which led to an overview of the impacts of dominant notions of masculinity on young men’s lives revealed interesting new information. However, that overview also showed several areas that need greater depth of research.

The in-depth interview method allowed the young men to introduce their own subtleties of meaning to the issues discussed, and produced unexpected and valuable outcomes in the findings.
The sample size and methodology did not allow the consideration of the complexity of potential mediating factors related, for example, to: indigenous, ethnic, socio-economic and other sub-cultural factors; youth sub-cultures; territorial or locality imperatives. However, as researcher, I was able to manage the complexities of the material generated by the small sample, finding repetition of themes from the early stages of data collection.
Friendship Groups

Intimacy

Dominant Masculinity

Homophobia

Intergender Relations

Coping with Stress

Role Models

Fathers

Music

Substance Use

School
The findings interpret the stories of eight young men who talked about their experiences as they moved towards early adulthood. Representing four separate peer groups, they were: Jesse (Year 10); Carlo and Robert (Year 11); James, Peter, Barney and Adam (Year 11); and Rick (Year 11).

The central issue consistently presented by participants was the formation of small, highly connected groups, based around friends or mates, and where they identified the opportunity to engage in intimacy. All expressed high levels of satisfaction with this quite recent phenomenon in their social relationships.

The small groups were embedded within a social context of dominant masculinity, which shaped the characteristics of the groups, but from which some deviation was allowed. Members were restricted by the imperatives of masculinity, which mitigated against the practice of confident and open intimacy, and impacted upon coping strategies. Subcultural elements, especially in the areas of music, substance use and school were also significant.

The participants identified individual and group maturity as significant factors in the formation of small groups, and were able to distinguish changed patterns in their experience. They associated these changes with their increasing age, and the transition period around Years 10 and 11. They recognised in younger boys, especially in Years 7 to 9, many aspects of their own earlier behaviour and attitudes, including a desperation to prove their manliness.

... they don’t have to, but they do tend to act differently in front of their mates. They have to show that they’re more ... more manly. It seems to be all happenin’ with little kids (Peter).

I think as you grow up you become more mature. When you’re younger, like, Year 8 and that, there was like different groups that didn’t like other people. And they’d fight and argue and stuff like that, but as you get more older, and get more mature, you seem to calm down a bit and get along with everyone (James).
While there was no clear evidence of the precursors in the pathway from wider peer
groups to smaller friendship groups, some indicators were given. Members have usually
had connections within a wider peer group located within a school or neighbourhood, and
based around activities such as adventure and risk-taking; alcohol and marijuana experimentation; or sport.

_We spent a lot of time together. Like we built a skate-board ramp together over the
holidays. We were together every day doing that, and, you know, team-work and all
that kind of thing... bonding...and figuring out problems and all that together...We were
still hanging out a lot, but we didn’t kind of know each other ... as well as what we do
now... (Barney)._

**FRIENDSHIP GROUPS**

Every young man interviewed recognised that he had moved from identification with a
wider, more generalised group of males, into a smaller group that could stand apart from
the wider male community and perhaps even the code of masculine behaviour.

... _from Year 10 to year 11 is for some reason a really big jump. Everyone thinks more
mature and stuff. So all the big groups this year have managed to sort of split up into
their own little groups.... last year when I (was) with the big group... with all the good
mates and all the popular kids together... it was fun mucking around with everyone, but
it wasn’t really what life’s about ... not feel comfortable, to always have to look good in
front of them. Where even now it’s a little group, it’s sort of, it’s a bit more open,
really... (Adam)._

... _what makes ’em your friends ’n’ stuff.... we have things in common totally, and by
now we’ve been friends so long, we just, you know ... we’ll have ‘in jokes’... and we’ll
be all on the same wavelength, basically, which is not always a good thing..... You get
together and once you’ve been together for so long you laugh at the same things (Rick)._

Responses referred to inner circles of four to eight members, with perhaps within that
number, one or two especially close friends with whom closer intimacy might be shared.
‘Cos we’re real close, we sleep over each other’s house ... just talk about girls and everything like that (laughs). Steve and I, we talk about almost anything. If anything’s on our mind we tell each other... (Robert).

I have one male friend who I’ll talk to about all that.... he understands .. I can tell him anything, I suppose ...uhm... I don’t know why that is, because I have another friend and we’ve been friends just as long, and .... we don’t talk like that. It’s just mainly ... joking around and being friends or whatever (Rick).

The small friendship groups and the opportunity to engage in activities and talk together was highly valued. While they interacted with young men outside their own circle, participants showed no understanding that other males might be members of small groups that shared similar characteristics.

I think my friendship with my friends is one in a million. I don’t think there’s many guys out there who’ve got mates ... like they can get along with as well as mine (Barney).

... Most people I see, I don’t think they do anyway, have that closer relationship where they talk about things, ‘n’ talk about emotions ‘n’ stuff ... Some do, but not as much. They’d rather not (Rick).

‘Doing stuff together’

Essential to the maintenance of the groups were shared activities and time spent together, either with the whole group, or with a sub-group of two or more. Skate-boarding and music were the linking factors for two groups, but members of groups also enjoyed together pastimes such as: parties, swimming, basketball (Robert); drinking, kicking the footy, chatting (Jesse); basketball, drinking, conversation (Adam); alcohol, chatting and ‘in-jokes’ (Rick). Fun and laughter were essential ingredients:

... just telling stories and spilling our guts out and laughing, and ... you know, talking to each other and playing drinking games... (Barney).
INTIMACY

The essential characteristics of the small groups were: their formation around mates or friends; and the opportunity for intimacy. Although they did not use the term intimacy, the young men described their emotional closeness, and claimed to share ‘deepest thoughts and feelings’.

Mates/Friends

While the description of an inner circle was consistent, there was no clear distinction between the general usage of the words friend and mate, which were used interchangeably, with degrees of closeness implicit in the context of a particular statement, rather than in the word itself. Within the inner circle there may have been one best friend or best mate. Mates or friends were defined according to emotional engagement rather than shared activities, and highly valued.

*My close friends know my weaknesses and I don’t try to hide them. And I know my close friends’ weaknesses as well, so it works both ways... but the rest of the males, you don’t really let much slip (Jesse).*

*Probably trust...you can always tell ’em something, and they won’t, like, tease you and stuff about it ... they’re always there for you when you need like a friend close by (James).*

Limits to Intimacy

Unrecognised by the participants was some inconsistency in the depiction of the nature or extent of intimacy. Implicit limitations precluded complete open-ness and honesty in sharing thoughts and feelings.

*... we don’t really talk about families. No, not really. That’s, like banned (Robert).*

*Actually, I’m ... yeh, I’ve got good friends, that I’m really good mates with, but we usually just talk about what’s going on the weekend instead of what I feel inside .... Don’t go into intimate things. Might go into technical things, talking about the world, and what’s happening and things like that, but deep conversations, not really (Adam).*
Even though he has deeper feelings he really doesn’t want to say them, unless he feels like he’s undermining his masculinity and that sort of thing (Jesse).

The association of intimacy with substance use, as loss of inhibition facilitated emotional engagement, perhaps indicated a failure of intimacy skills in everyday settings.

*You’re more honest with yourself when you’re drunk, and ...uhm... when you’re more honest with yourself then it’s a lot easier to be honest with other people (Jesse).*

... you’d get on a subject and ... a friend might start talking about something that you’ve never heard before, and, like ...uhm... open up to you and stuff like that (James).

Further evidence of limitations to intimacy emerged as the young men discussed the importance of music in their lives. Because young men rarely shared their problems with their friends, the lyrics served to remind them that others had experienced the same problems, and had survived difficult times.

Irrespective of any suggested limitations to intimacy, there was no question that the young men found great comfort, pleasure and pride in their membership of these groups that allowed for greater emotional engagement than had been possible prior to their formation. However, because of the limitations to intimacy, there was also a restricted capacity to support one another in times of stress. Given that the young men in the study valued so highly the intimacy that was possible at this stage of their personal maturity and friendship group formation, it’s worth considering the factors that counteracted intimacy. In so doing, we may develop strategies to help young men to develop the skills that will maximise their potential for self-support in already established groups.

**DOMINANT MASCULINITY**

The formation of small groups allowed the young men to find support for developing their own personal styles that were nevertheless intrinsically linked to the prevailing code of masculine behaviour. Essential features of dominant masculinity were the exercise of
power, competitiveness and the establishment and maintenance of hierarchical status. The minimisation of intimacy was both the result of this power dynamic, and a specific requirement, in its own right, of masculinity.

Not only did James not feel personally pressured to behave in a masculine way, he did not recognise the adolescent male’s world as dominated by some construction of masculinity. Consequently, he did not believe that other boys were limited by such restrictions. His close friends, however, described strict rules for masculine behaviour, even if they were able to act independently of some of them. It is uncertain why James saw their social environment so differently from his peers.

Rick, Jesse, Adam, Barney and Peter, consistently described an adolescent masculinity that seemed fairly harsh in its requirements and sanctions. Robert and Carlo presented a somewhat ‘gentler’ interpretation of the same basic features, with more tolerance for deviation. The origins of these subcultural differences were unclear.

**Power**

The requirement for power was exercised through self-control and domination, in an environment of competitiveness, where the demonstration of strength was essential. The responses of these young men indicated that they were answerable to dominant notions of masculinity, and yet at the same time, at an age where, with the support of friends, they might be able to separate a little from the harshness of its requirements.

**Self-Control**

No participant thought he had to be other than his true self in order to comply with masculinity. Nevertheless, all but James gave examples of a requirement for self-control. This was manifest firstly in the need to look strong, both physically and emotionally, and included aggression as an external indicator of strength. It was essential not to show weakness, even if that meant pretending, in order to cover some deficit. Alternately, rather than falsely claiming to be strong, it might require that any sign of weakness was hidden. This included taking care when and with whom any vulnerability or distress was
revealed, for fear of any unpleasant response, such as ridicule or abuse that might relegate the offender to a lower position in the hierarchy.

Such self-control in this competitive setting could not co-exist with the open expression of intimacy, which would have risked the disclosure of vulnerability.

You’ve always gotta look good in front... of the guys. To fit in, I think... So if you wanted to have a sook in front of everyone...you know what I mean...you gotta be a guy. You can’t... Yeh, you gotta try ‘n’ look good. You wanna be the masculine one (Adam).

Not for me personally...... For most other guys ... don’t show that you’re weak. Yeh, it’s always a strong facade... just basically that you’re a strong person and you can mostly take anything...with young men in general .... it doesn’t matter whether you show mental strength as much as, yeh, the physical side of it. But yeh, it’s equally important .... I’d rather be mentally strong.... You often have to go on with it, whatever’s going on, pretend to be strong, go on, yeh, be strong (Rick).

There were hints of ambivalence about needing to be strong.

I think it’s more acceptable now, for a man to be able to cry....Oh, it’s never easy to come out and say it and show it. I suppose you don’t really have to go to the same extent to hide it... Admitting weakness is something that most males ... it’s just something they don’t like to do (Jesse).

It doesn’t worry me if I show you’re weak to someone else... (laughs)... like, in fights. If you don’t want to fight, just walk away. That’s what I’d do... it’s probably weakness to other people, but to me it’s probably smart not to get your head kicked in... it’s just, like, the looks you get: ‘You’re gutless, weak’ (Robert).

The data provided evidence of the prevalence of anger and aggression. Anger might be: situationally appropriate; directly related to the pain or confusion of a personal or family problem; the means of establishing or maintaining status through domination; or a facade concealing other emotions or personal characteristics that might indicate vulnerability.
Responses indicated that a wider range of emotional expression may be allowed, although they lacked certainty, and there was no real consistency.

You can’t show as much emotion, you’re not expected to show emotion like on a wider base, like to a wider group of people... (Jesse).

Like, I’ve got a close friend, he really loves his girlfriend, like, he’s saying all of that. It’s good in a way (Robert).

I think it’s good to show anger if you are angry. It’s no use trying to hold it, you know, inside and then all of a sudden you can explode. It’s good just to tell someone what you think and be honest. I think they don’t show affection much ...uhm... fear, oh they show fear... (Barney).

Love and care and that... Oh, just being friendly towards other people, accepting them for who they are... (James).

... anger and aggression comes pretty naturally.....You can be depressed or pissed off if, you know, something’s going wrong with your girlfriend at the time.... that’s all right..... If you’re getting sad and upset about something stupid, like someone else’s teasing you or something, it’s not exactly the best thing to do. You don’t get away with it (Rick).

Jesse showed how he specifically used anger to assert himself.

If I’m angry, anyway, then I find that not many people really get in my way ... I’ve been told I just get an expression on my face or just a look in my eye or something...(Jesse).

**Domination**

Domination of others, to establish hierarchical status, was achieved through: physical presence; verbal threat or assault; and physical force.

... I’d say me and a group of my friends, five or six of us, are pretty much in control. We can handle pretty much anything that arrives... If people have a problem... with someone else... they’ll come to see us, see if we can sort it out for them... and I suppose some people would call it dominate, but I really wouldn’t call it dominate, but I’d put it
more in terms as intimidate. And we’re seen as the people who keep things in order. I’ll admit to that ... It’s nice to know sometimes that people have a little bit of fear for you... I don’t think I use intimidation all the time. But I do use it if the situation arises and I feel I can use it to my advantage and I will (Jesse).

.. you’d see someone who knows they’re ..like.. bigger for a start .. and knows they can handle themselves, and they’ll walk past and push a little kid over and they know the little kid can’t do nothing to ‘em.... it happens all the time, they just know nothing can be done to ‘em. They’re stronger than ‘em for a start (Peter).

At the group level, domination was supported through positive praise for the exertion of power.

... you stand up and tell them or put them in their place you’ll get: ‘Well done’, and encouragement and that sort of thing (Jesse).

There was evidence that such praise was now moderated.

... not so much. I don’t think praise. You’ll sort of say, you know: ‘Good on you. He deserved it. But that’s enough’... We’re not gonna tell him off for it, but ... we’re not happy ... Oh, well, if someone’s trying to dominate over one of my friends, I support my friends. But if my friends started a fight with someone, I think: If you’re stupid enough to start a fight, I don’t want to help you out. ‘Cos everyone’s gonna get hurt in the end. So don’t start fights because I’m not gonna help you. Even though if there was something happening I would help them. I could say I wouldn’t do it but I would (Adam).

Domination through group and individual bullying was linked to younger boys, or characterised merely as a ‘joke’. Barney and Robert both referred to having been bullied when they were younger, although it was unclear by whom, and they did not refer to it as funny. Younger boys were currently bullied by Year 11 boys.

Oh, yeh, just ... not serious bullying like: ‘Give me your lunch’. Just givin’ them hell for a bit, just for a joke, kind of thing... just for a laugh, nothing serious.... because they’re not proving much, picking on something who’s this big...most of the young kids these days get smart back to you anyway, so .. hah!.. it’s even funnier (Barney).
...Uhm... Younger, they (bully) a lot, especially if there’s some difference, like if they’re overweight or something. Like, these days I’m older, people ... tip-toe around it, well ... the younger kids go up and say it to their faces and go make ’em sook and cry around the corner, and not feel any guilt about it... I don’t know how they can really do it (Adam).

Adam linked bullying to hierarchical status and maturity.

Personally ... I’m always one to stick up for the ... weaker guy, or whatever way you want to put it. But ... uhm... a lot of the time, the ones in the less popular groups, those guys will pick on the other guys ... I don’t know, if it’s to make themselves look good ... or they’ve just got angry with them ... I’m not sure why they do it, but it does happen a lot (Adam).

The competitive atmosphere, requiring both self control and the domination of others, was a compelling threat to self-expression and behaviour.

... everyone’s pretty competitive these days in school marks or in sport, or positions in uni, or... but whatever it is even in just marks in Maths tests or anything at all... it’s competitive. And to admit weakness is like admitting defeat, I suppose. ..... personally I’m not very good at basketball, so when all the guys are playing basketball I’ll get out there and I muck around and that sort of thing. I won’t really get into it as seriously as the other guys will simply because I’ll be beaten and I don’t want to admit that. But when it comes to something like football which is more my area, not so much the other guys’ area then I’ll... they sort of won’t sort of take it up as seriously as I (Jesse).

Sexual Prowess

There was inconclusive evidence of the requirement for the establishment of status through sexual prowess. Participants consistently agreed that in earlier years they had joked and perhaps even lied about their exploits. They now joked less, but appeared a little unsure as to how open they actually were on this topic within current friendship groups, although there was recognition of a certain privacy on the matter.

... you don’t want to hear it rumoured back that you’re, you know, ’he’s a dud’ or whatever. It’s not really talked about that all that much anyway. ... So it’s not really like out in the open ... It doesn’t really bother people that much (Jesse).
There was me and Steve, and his girlfriend and another two girls... we were playing ... Truth or Dare. Like, they ask you questions, and you get all embarrassed and you don’t know what to say ... like, if you haven’t done it enough, or you’ve done too much ... there’s not that much pressure. It’s just like you don’t know what they’re gonna say...... (laughs) you try and change the subject (Robert).

The evidence of dominant notions of masculinity and the apparent existence of an adolescent code of male behaviour, especially the requirement to show strength rather than weakness, were in stark contrast to, and enforced limitations upon, the experience of friendship and intimacy as it was described by the young men of the study.

HOMOPHOBIA

All but James expressed negative attitudes towards homosexuality, some quite strongly, for example in words such as ‘disgusting’; ‘not natural’; ‘dirty’; and ‘it makes me sick’. There was a noticeable personal element in responses, including reference to morality, and open admission to a level of discomfort that appeared to come from an inability to comprehend a sexual orientation that made no sense, because of the immediate reality of their own heterosexual feelings, experience and urges.

Maybe people are afraid of what’s different, or maybe they just think they’re weird for one reason or another, but I’d just say the main reason is people just fear what they don’t understand. If you are not a homosexual, you can’t really understand homosexuality. Like, I have absolutely no idea why a homosexual would want to do what they do (Jesse).

Exacerbating this inability to understand someone else’s different sexuality was the lack of relationship with self-identified gay young men, and therefore the absence of opportunity to dispel stereotypical thinking and develop a real knowledge of the multiple ways of being gay.

... a .. puny little quiet person could be thought of ... as gay. You know, who does ... acting... art and all that kind of thing (Barney).
Two argued for the validity of this interpretation of homophobia, by saying that girls of their age find it similarly difficult to comprehend lesbianism, so that it was not necessarily linked to masculinity issues.

Even though the question of homosexuality was raised in the context of a discussion of masculinity, only two verbalised a connection with diminished manliness, one direct and one implied.

*... guys have gotta sort of prove their manhood, and ... well, if you like other men then you’re not even there (laughs). You’ll be disliked (Adam).*

*Oh, he’d .. like .. wear cardigans and stuff like that... like ... normal ... most boys don’t wear things like that.... He’s always hanging around girls and talks like a girl (Peter).*

Adam demonstrated the pressure he felt to prove his heterosexual status:

*I could never say: ‘That guy’s good-looking’. I’d just say, you know: ‘He’s not ugly’ ... even though that’s probably what I mean. I know the difference between an ugly guy and a good-looking guy!... I’d never do it because it’d sound poofy. I know I’m not going to be a poof (laughs) so I don’t want anyone to think it. I want to prove that yeh, I do like girls (Adam).*

Adam expressed a greater apparent intolerance of homosexuality in comparison with his friends. There may have been a clue to the reasons for this in his reference to his father:

*... Well, actually, if I were to be homosexual, I think he’d beat me up ... he’s always said, you know: Don’t you dare get an ear-ring or whatever, it looks ‘girlie’ ... he... want(s) me to be fairly masculine, because he was always a good sportsman in his day (Adam).*

Robert was strongest in his antipathy to homosexuals, and referred to the maintenance of the heterosexual purity of his friendship group:

*We make sure that we don’t know any gay person (Robert).*
Ambivalence

The participants had been asked to respond to the proposition that young men are supposed to hate homosexuality. There was an underlying ambivalence in responses, reflecting personal distaste in conflict with the principle of giving someone the freedom to be who they are.

... just don’t like looking at it ... two guys holding hands... It’s not really like anger (I feel), it’s just like ... disgusting ... It’s not their fault ... I s’pose if they wanna be gays, probably better to let ’em be gays. They can’t change ... I just don’t like it (Robert).

... if I were to see homosexuals kissing in front of me or something, I wouldn’t say nothing to them, I wouldn’t abuse them or anything. I would be disgusted. I’d turn my head the other way. I’m just not into that... if I know that a guy is homosexual, I could, you know, just go up and have a chat to him, and it wouldn’t really bother me (Adam).

A couple of days prior to the interview, Rick had been called upon to justify his idolisation of Bono.

... he cross-dresses and stuff.... So I’m always trying to fight people, saying: ‘Come on, he’s not gay’. I know he’s not, I mean he’s married; he’s got kids. But just ’cos he’s a little effeminate... he can get away with it. He’s a rock star. You know, they can do what they like (Rick).

Rick demonstrated the concern of young men with apparent homosexuality, and his own need to deny the possibility. Rick seemed to recognise the freedom of self-expression through subordinate masculinity that is allowed to a man of high status.

Harassment

All but two said they would not harass homosexuals, although they recognised that terms such as ‘faggot’ were used as insults against those perceived as gay, and as put-downs for assumed heterosexual males, although this was characterised as no more than a joke. Robert presented a picture of collusion to make fun of a student perceived as gay, but did not acknowledge the baiting as harassment.
... just as a joke they’d go up to him and talk to him and like see if they’d try to crack on to ‘em ... other people just sit back and just watch him and just crack up laughin’ (Robert).

Jesse admitted to trying to throw a gay couple into the pool at a party, but decided that for him personally, it was more for fun than deliberate harassment, as he would have been into throwing anyone into the pool!

Clearly there was evidence of harassment based on homosexuality, but without an intensity of homophobic venom. Attitudes to homosexuality appeared to be linked more to lack of knowledge and understanding than to a notion of masculine purity.

INTERGENDER RELATIONS
Mothers were quietly present, but did not feature strongly in the stories. James described a particularly close relationship with his mother, but the members of his group also privately confirmed that their mothers were always available, influential and supportive. Jesse didn’t mention his mother at all; and Robert confided more in his father. There seemed to be no gender conflict or other problems in relation to mothers. Barney acknowledged his mother as helping him develop a calm personality. Peter recognised that his mother had taught him some things about being a man:

... just talking to her over the years...she’s like sort of taught me how to talk to girls... don’t be rude in front of ’em and stuff like that.... like, I’ve been walking around with her and I like spit on the ground. She goes: ‘Oh, you know your girlfriend won’t like that’. She used to say things like that (Peter).

Although mothers, girlfriends and female friends were mentioned respectfully in various parts of the interviews, as having admired traits and as trusted confidantes, there was some tension between the desire to portray men and women as equal, and an inherent male belief that men should be dominant in relationships with women. Some participants actually had insight into the discrepancies in their presentation, and attempted to grapple intellectually with the issue during the interview.
All but one focussed initially on the equality of the genders. Barney was direct and consistent in his disapproval of gender equality.

Oh yeh, I think they should (dominate women), but they never do. The girls have got them under the thumb. I think it’s wrong! ... I’d like it to be (men dominating), but it’s never going to be ... but not the women in control (Barney)!

Barney was really fed up with girls and their behaviour, but his words might indicate also his developing communication and relationship skills:

I mean, girls deserve respect who deserve respect. But I haven’t come across many who deserve it, so... they... stuff you around. They don’t say what they mean... they mess you around ... confuse you...(Barney).

Power
Further probing with the others, especially in the area of relationships, soon raised inconsistencies, and overted common views about male dominance in gender relations.

I’d say that most guys would like to think they are in control in a relationship with a girl... I suppose there comes different aspects in a relationship, sort of where the girls are better and where the guys are better... Yeh, I suppose guys would like to think they’re the more dominant partner (Jesse).

I always think that men want to be more in control of things... Men always want to be more powerful than girls. They just feel like it’s supposed to be... say, in a family... most of the time the man would be the one in control in the house (Peter).

There were clues that this control could, if necessary, be exercised through verbal and physical violence.

... in some circumstances I can understand why guys can hit girls... I don’t have it in me to do it, but sometimes girls do deserve it and I think it’s all right (Adam).

Say she’s done something that she shouldn’t have done for a start, like, you’d never hit ‘em, but you might use some language towards ‘em you wouldn’t normally use (Peter).
There was some evidence of a gender conflict around relationships. It might have been that girls were trying to assert their power, but there was no clear evidence for any particular interpretation.

That’s how I am with my girlfriend, because I just make sure I’m in control. Huh (slight laugh)! I don’t treat them badly or nothin’... I’ve seen how some other girls treat my friends, and I just don’t like it, and I wouldn’t want it to happen to me, so .. I just make sure it never happens. Stand up for meself (Peter).

It’s no different from some of my other friends who haven’t got girlfriends... they’re the same as me. They’ve got all ready to go out to the movies with a girl... they’ve got all dressed up, put the after-shave on... and they’re about to go and they get a phone call, you know: ‘I’m not going tonight’... (Barney).

‘Putty’

The salient issue of contention in this conflict seemed to be summarised by the notion of ‘putty’. Rick was initially too embarrassed to say the word, so potent was it! It had been applied to Rick because he was judged as letting his girlfriend tell him what to do.

I’ve been told I have a thumb-print on my forehead because she’s holding me down (Rick).

Peter was scornful of someone who had ‘gone soft’, by showing affection to his girlfriend in public. Barney claimed that it was ‘topic number one of conversation in (his) group’, adding further support to the notion that boys will exert pressure on one another not to be dominated by girls.

... like, we’re going out one night to the footy or something, his ... girlfriend didn’t want him to go... so they try to (run) his life and turn him against us sort of ... like, someone who can’t talk to us... we’re playing basketball every lunch-time, and he won’t come up to us in case his girlfriend gets angry ... she’s trying to change him into a different person... I wouldn’t care if that was his decision... but most of the time it’s her the one, like telling him what to do and when to do it (Peter).
.... once we had a big dispute about... I thought ... she’s trying to change me. And ... I’m not gonna be. She’d always wanted some guy that’d flatter her and bring her flowers and chocolates, like every girl wants, but she knows I’m not the type of guy ... So she was always trying to change me.... But, no, I never wanted to be that person. I thought: I’m in a relationship: it doesn’t mean I have to change who I am...(Adam).

Adam’s sentiments about individuality probably represented at this particular time loyalty to his mates and his gender in the struggle to prevent girls achieving domination over males.

Rick mistakenly assumed that the heavy emphasis on male control in relationships was peculiar to his ethnic sub-group at school. In fact, there was consistent requirement for male control, although sanctions appeared to be less severe in other schools.

It was interesting to note that the three who talked of their actual relationships with girlfriends, showed a more relaxed attitude to decision-making.

I’ve never been a bossy type of guy: I usually go with the flow, see what happens, and .... she’s the type of person to be the one making up what’s going on, organising things, stuff like that (Adam).

**Intimacy**

There was perhaps a competitive element in the tendency of participants to criticise girls for their handling of relationships and intimacy, and to praise boys for their directness or honesty.

The guys don’t really get into that, they don’t gossip or anything like that. Sometimes the girls do it in front of us... Sometimes you overhear it... Boys don’t usually do that. They’d just say it straight out (Carlo).

Obviously guys... just say they’re angry at someone, they’ll say it to their face, with girls they’ll say: ‘Oh, how are you?’ You know, be nice to them, and then behind their back: ‘She’s a bitch’... Mm. I don't know, I think boys with their friends are closer than girls with their girlfriends... they all want to... be nice to each other .. but not open, kind of thing. Like: ‘Oh, how are you?’ ... never ... open up to each other (Barney).
Peter recognised the intimacy possible with girls, but James and Rick relied further on female nurturing and intuitiveness.

... there’s always someone there and that, for me. She’s nice and I can always talk ... about anything. I’ve become dependent on her and stuff like that.... Like, she’s always there for me when there’s something wrong (James).

If I tell her something, she’ll know whether or not she can repeat it to someone else. 
Or she’ll know even if I really want her to repeat it even if I’m saying, like: ‘Don’t tell anyone’. She’ll know. And she does, so that’s good (Rick)!

Three weeks prior to the interview, Adam had broken up with his girlfriend of two and a half years, and seemed ambivalent about his relationship with her, which he alternately described as trusting and intimate, and then tried to discount.

I think everyone thought we had an equal relationship, but... a lot of the time it was her... not orderin’ me around, but putting the ideas into me head... expectin’ me to follow ‘em...... yeh, I could talk to her a lot. I wouldn’t go too far. Like I’ve got my limits with what I’d tell her. As her being one of the girls, she’d probably go blabber it to somebody else. (Laughs) But, yeh, I could talk to her. I felt comfortable talking to her... And she always just trusted me with what I wanted to do and stuff, so I always trusted her. And, yeh we had a good relationship actually (laughs). Pretty open with each other (Adam).

Peter reflected that he was quite inexperienced, not having had ‘too many serious girlfriends’, serving as a reminder that adolescence is a period of remarkable learning, with skills and attitudes in development.

At this stage of their adolescent development, connectedness and loyalty to mates might be in conflict with the development of significant inter-gender relationships. In fact, boys’ friendship groups were at risk.

.... As you grow up it’s not as much: boys stick with boys; girls stick with girls. ‘Girl germs’ all that child stuff.... You mix the groups. It might break down the groups a little bit, but you have your friends of both genders (Rick).
Choosing intimacy with a girlfriend rather than spending time with mates might have been interpreted as an act of gender-betrayal, perhaps implying a failure of the male-male intimacy which was so highly valued. Mates actively tried to reign in those deemed to be spending excessive time with their girlfriends.

*I’m in a relationship now, and I wouldn’t hang around with the boys and play sports at lunch-time and do stuff like that. I’d just sit down and talk to girls and that. And they were on my back for a while but it’s sort of calmed down now (James).*

*That’s what I get into trouble for .... because I care too much about my girlfriend, and when I say that I get ...uhm... pretty much teased... (laughs)...... It’s like why do you care so much? Come on, just go out with us ‘n’, you know... I think it’s just to control you a bit more (Rick).*

Nevertheless, neither was excluded from the group, which perhaps exemplified both secure friendship bonds and tolerance for deviation from group norms.

A fear of emasculation may be linked jointly to the threat of domination by a female, and the unwillingness of young men to admit inadequate skills or weakness in the area of intimacy.

*I’d rather be a boy.*

The participants consistently saw various advantages of being male in today’s society.

*... males do come across to be more powerful... like, say the Crown Casino, Kerry Packer, Lloyd Williams ... all the people who own the big businesses seem to be male. And they aim to succeed..... like you’re both going for the same job, the male and the female, say they’re looking at your resume, they’re both as good as each other. I’d say generally they’d take the male (Peter).*

*It’s more easy-going to be a boy. Like, you can sit however you want to sit, and act however you want to act... I’d rather be a boy. You don’t have to go through birth or nothing like that (Robert).*
The Classic ‘Stud’/ ‘Slut’ Dichotomy

The classic scenario of adolescent gender inequity, raised in the first interview by Jesse, was unanimously confirmed. All acknowledged the inequity, but demonstrated no real concern about it.

... if a guy goes to a party and say he kisses five or six girls in the one night ...uhm... he’s a bit of a hero, you know, he’s a bit of a gun and ...uhm... if a girl goes out and kisses five or six guys, she’s a slut (Jesse).

In later interviews she was always named as a ‘slut’; one described her behaviour as ‘dirty’. He was depicted as a ‘legend’, ‘stud’ and a ‘funny bugger’.

Oh, yeh. It’s happened a million times... she’s a slut, everyone would talk about her, but if it’s one of your mates: ‘Oh, he’s done well for himself!’ Oh, I’ve seen that heaps of times. That always happens (Peter).

I’ve started to understand it a bit more. The guys like doing it, so why shouldn’t the girls? But, still, I’ll never look at the girl in the same way, if I thought she was a nice girl. I still think of her as that girl running around kissing heaps of guys (Adam).

The ‘Fragility’ of Girls

Besides the obvious indicators of the requirement for the domination of the female gender, were the more subtle signs of the perpetuation of the notion that they were weaker than men; needed protection; and therefore worthy of only the lowest hierarchical status. Their physical weakness in comparison to men was never questioned.

Well, physically, I think males are (stronger)... probably mentally as well when I think about it. Guys can block things out of their minds, just look the other way while girls will you know maybe cry about it, whatever... actually maybe it’s not they’re softer, maybe it’s just they’re more open, I think. Mentally (girls) are more open to things like that (Adam).

Adam recognised his stereotypical use of descriptors such as ‘nice and petite’ and ‘fragile’ as he applied them to girls, who were ‘there to look good’. He struggled to understand the discrepancies in his thoughts, but was nevertheless bound by the image of female weakness.
The participants did not show any understanding that respect, when given to girls in particular, was not simply courtesy but might also imply that females need protection.

*Oh, you try to be nice... I always do, anyway... Oh just, like you watch what you say. ..Like.. I wouldn’t swear or very rarely swear in front of girls (Peter).*

Jesse demonstrated how hitting a girl could relegate a male to a low hierarchical status, and gave opportunity to define the strength of the enforcers/protectors.

*There have been cases at our school where a guy has hit a girl, but they haven’t walked away very far before they’ve been jumped on by a fair few guys as well (Jesse).*

Peter, on the other hand, brought the matter into the arena of morality by seeing violence, whether against women or men, as unacceptable.

*Oh, that’s shocking... I just can’t think men should hit women, or women should hit men, or...shouldn’t be done. I don’t know why, but......it’s not the right thing to do (Peter).*

We can imagine that in the course of classroom discussion, relationships with girls and women, media exposure and other pressures, the young men of today have learned that they ‘should’ respond to questions of gender in terms of equality. The fact that they were unable to sustain this, despite the desire of most to do so, indicates that the requirement of dominant masculinity that men devalue women was well entrenched in the attitudes and behaviour of the adolescents in the study.

The strength of negative attitudes towards girls may have its origins in the need to protect newly formed groups from outsiders who threatened to disturb highly valued mateship bonds. Girls, with their intimacy skills and ability to influence males, were a danger, and there was evidence that boys would actively pressure fellows who seemed to be drifting away. Just as boys are separated from women and girls at the time of traditional initiation practices, and inducted into the community as men, so too might the young men of this study have been taking steps to isolate themselves as they come to terms with sexuality and relationships, and their potential roles as men.
Establishing such connectedness within their communities is one of the psychosocial tasks of adolescence. Another is the establishment of their own identities, distinct from family. It may have been an unspoken commitment to support one another in their transition to adulthood that motivated these young men to exhort their mates to resist the influence of girls. A man who can be swayed so easily may not have the strength of character to be fully functional in adulthood. Again, there is a resonance with traditional rites of initiation, where young men are taught rules of sexuality and relationships, along with lore and customs, by their elders, male or female, depending on the customary group.

There is evidence that the young men of this study had already been inducted into dominant masculinity by the strength of its very existence, and were continuing self-initiation in the absence of deliberate social teaching about adulthood.

**COPING WITH STRESS**

**Stressors**

The participants consistently identified stressors in the lives of young men as issues related to school; family; friends and girlfriends. They showed an understanding of the potential problems faced by other young men, based on their own experience and their interpretation of the observed behaviour of others. They identified resultant stressed emotional states such as: depression, anger, confusion, isolation; and behaviours such as aggression, violence and substance abuse. Early experimental substance abuse was seen as a phase through which a young man passes, rather than a problem in itself.

**Rating the ‘Seriousness’ of Stressors**

There was a tendency to make a judgement about the seriousness of various types of problems, although the rating differed according to the individual. This rating affected any decision about whether a problem was serious enough to mention to a friend, parent or counsellor. These judgements, appeared harsh, and indicated that young men had the
Young Men Speak: Findings

impression they should be strong enough to handle alone almost anything that might confront them.

James admitted that a break-up with his girlfriend would be quite devastating for him, but he would have to cope without any special help. His comments may also imply his understanding that there would be minimal sympathy from mates who saw unacceptable vulnerability after separation from a girlfriend.

Oh, just deal with it (soft, mumbling) I suppose. There’s not much you can do ...’cos you’re still young and you’ve got your life ahead of you, and it’s not as serious as, well I think, as losing a parent, where .... they’ve been there for you since (you) were born and that .... getting abused at home ...uhm... divorce (James).

**Individual Coping Strategies**

Specific coping strategies varied with the individual, although there were some common elements. Girls were described as being able to share their problems more than boys, who were supposed to deal with them alone. Trying to forget about a problem, perhaps with the help of alcohol might be used as a coping strategy.

I just try and forget it really. Just try and block it out of my head ... it just won’t hurt any more. So therefore if I don’t talk about it, I just shut it out, hopefully it will go away (Adam).

Some took time out with preferred activities, to reflect.

The quiet times by meself... I’d just like... sit on my bed and think about the girl... you just wonder what you’ve done wrong to affect it, your relationship. If I’m having problems I’ll go for a ride and think about it (Peter).

Music played an important, but personally meaningful role in reflection time.

...when I get sort of depressed I ...uhm... to be quite honest my sort of self-confidence it can sometimes it just drops when ...it just has like its lapses. Normally on the whole I’m pretty sort of confident about myself and ...uhm... I’m pretty self-assured but ...uhm... just once in a while it just sort of slips and ...uhm... when that happens I suppose I go and confide in my CD collection (Jesse).
For some, the lyrics reminded them that other young men had indeed experienced and survived pain and frustration. The rhythm might change mood, by inspiring calmness or, alternatively, help build confidence and strength to help equip them to face the stressor.

Violence or aggression might be the immediate expression of anger or distress related to a particular unresolved problem. Adam recounted:

> You’re not angry at anyone, you’re just ... something inside you but it’s angry... especially one friend ... his father just left for another girl. And lately he’s been drinking a lot and throwing punches at his good mate... He’s rough... I said:....: ‘When did he start , you know, fighting and stuff?’ They go: ‘Oh, you know, probably this long ago’ ... ‘When exactly?’ So yeh, that explains exactly how one of my friends is (Adam).

On the other hand, Jesse deliberately used aggression to overcome distress, by exercising a physically explosive outlet as a way of ridding himself of the intensity of the feelings associated with the problem.

> ... so after I’ve gone and listened to a song that’s made me sort of sad but realise, you know, that it’s happened to other people... then I can put on a more aggressive type of song ... and go out and just smack the crap out of the punching bag (Jesse).

**Talking to Mates**

There was ambivalence about the types of problems that can be discussed with mates, and precedence given to the notion that they should be able to solve their own problems. The participants identified themselves as enjoying the opportunity to talk to their friends about deep and personal issues, but this appeared not to apply to stress, especially family problems. Those who said they would talk to their mates recognised certain limitations.

> ... particular boys, like, comfort you, but like if you’re talking to someone else, they like tease you and that. So it just depends on the individual itself (James).

> Family problems, but not as openly... just mention that something bad’s going on at home.... and your friends probably won’t go any further than that.... (Rick).
The results are exacerbated feelings of isolation and distress. Not only had they missed the chance to ‘normalise’ the experience of problems, they had very few real models of coping, successful or otherwise.

*No-one really sees anybody else ...uhm... you never really sort of think that they could be as ... that they could be feeling the same thing as you are or having troubles or whatever...* (Rick).

The ambivalence about talking to mates was seen in the continuation of Adam’s story about his friend, whose worsening behaviour was becoming less tolerated.

*A week or two ago he’s throwing another tantrum. He goes: ‘None of youse knows how it feels having your Dad leave’. But he got stuffed up, because one guy goes: ‘Yeh, I do, my Dad’s left’. (laughs)... So you know there was probably five people sitting there and three of the other guys said: ‘Yeh, my Dad’s gone!’ ... ‘My dad’s gone!’... ‘My Dad’s gone!’ Like, he was good friends with them. He knew that their fathers didn’t live with them. Because they haven’t talked about it, he just didn’t think about it. He just didn’t know he could talk to them if he wanted to* (Adam).

Despite Adam’s last comment, it was not completely surprising that his friend did not feel comfortable to talk to his mates, considering the ambivalence of the rules of intimacy in relation to personal problems. Neither had any of the group offered support, even given their understanding of the problem. Rather than actually talk to him, it was easier to observe the downward spiral of a mate’s distress.

**Helping Others**

Without language and skills to discuss problems, young men had limited capacity to help others. Participants identified sources of stress; showed signs of recognising those in emotional pain; but demonstrated a level of detachment, or discomfort with excessive display of vulnerability. Nevertheless, they seemed to feel a compassion that had no real mode of expression. Adam recounted a hypothetical conversation between two mates:

- ‘Oh, you know, me auntie died the other day.’
- ‘Oh yeh, you right?’
- ‘Oh, yeh, yeh, no problem.’

*And really it hurts a lot, yeh* (Adam).
... I know if it happened to me it’d be too crushing... So he’s had all his anger, he’s started, you know, trying to throw punches at his closest mates, and everyone now is starting to dislike him, because we do feel for him, we know that he’s having a hard time, but still he’s taking things too far...(Adam).

There was ample evidence of recognition of distress, but little sign of their knowing how to help one another. In any case, supporting a mate was not valued as highly as the principle of solving your own problems.

... usually I’d leave him alone, just let him... do what he wants to do, let him sort it out for himself.... cos, yeh, when you sort of butt in and get into it, is when trouble starts happening. You interfere, and you complicate things....it might not work out the best for ‘em.... If I didn’t have confidence that they could (solve their problems) I might ... step in and just talk about it, I suppose, see what’s going on..... Yeh, we’re expected to handle it more on our own (Rick).

Considering the strong bond between mates in their small friendship groups, it was surprising that they believed so strongly that they had to stand alone to cope with stress. Lack of skills exacerbated the situation. However, perhaps most potent was the competitiveness of dominant masculinity, which required in particular that young men collude not show weakness: neither their distress, nor their inability to solve the problem. Ultimately, the significant discrepancy between the participants’ belief about their level of intimacy, and the actual practice of intimacy in the context of friendships embedded in masculinity, contributed to the barrier to effective coping and helping.

**Attitudes to Counselling**

Participants consistently resisted the suggestion of counselling, preferring to talk to friends or family.

You’re supposed to be able to handle yourself a bit better, and maybe talk to a friend or something, but, yeh, not go as formal as finding a counsellor, till you actually leave school.... I’ve known people to go to counsellors ... but most of them, yeh, they’ve had like, yeh, a problem. Like a bad problem, whether it be like abuse, or (laughs) smoking too much (Rick).
Rick revealed a possible conflict between wanting to be supportive and the unacceptability of counselling.

*If your friends can see that, you know, there’s something wrong and you really, you know, need it, they’d most likely be behind you. But... I mean if you've put on sort of a good face around them... and all of a sudden you tell them that you’re going to a counsellor because you’ve got depression. I don't know, they won’t believe it, and...uhm... they wouldn’t be as supportive at first. You know: ‘You don’t need a counsellor!’* (Rick).

Barney attempted to explain why counsellors were considered deficient.

*... a counsellor will no way ever be, you know, as good as a real friend would be. You know, they’re just a person who knows their stuff, but doesn’t know you* (Barney).

Carlo explained the reluctance of a young man to talk to a counsellor as rebellion against interference in his life.

*Cos they keep telling him that, the parents and teachers... Like they keep saying: ‘Oh, he won’t (talk to a counsellor).... he won’t do that’... And he’ll just keep on: ‘Oh, I won’t do that, then’...* (Carlo).

Confidentiality was the most important requirement of counselling, if it were to be accessed. Peter and Rick drew a comparison with the research interview.

*You just need to know they’re not going to go out and tell everyone what you’ve been saying... like, I know it... might be published, but my name’s not going to be used. ‘Cos I don’t want people knowing what my problems are* (Peter).

*(Laughing) This is counselling in secret* (Rick)!

There was no suggestion that counselling was not a successful strategy for young men coping with stress, and no-one described it as being more appropriate for girls. Only Barney attempted to show that counsellors were outside the sphere of the young man, and therefore would not know him as well as his friends. The conclusion is that
according to dominant notions of masculinity, counselling is stigmatised as one of the ultimate signs of weakness for a young man.

ROLE MODELS

Peter’s description of learning to be a man as occurring gradually, as if by osmosis, was insightful.

_Around your mates ... gradually you would know ... what to say and what not to say in front of them ... It just comes naturally, really. Just learn as you go along (Peter)._ 

Popular Images of Masculinity

Most identified the media, especially television and movies, and sport as containing messages about how to be a man. They consistently demonstrated that at this time in their lives they were able to see the unreality of fictional Rambo-style stereotypes.

_As I was younger, I’d watch, say, Rambo, and then ran out and got me gun and pretended to shoot me brother or whatever.... now I look at it and think: Gee, you know, that’s bull-crap, you know, you couldn’t do that in real life. Analyse it and figure it all out, and not really take much notice of the influence it’s trying to give (Adam)._ 

Jesse, with a strong sense of his own ability to intimidate, saw the unreality of the media representation, but still had some admiration for the male power that was depicted:

(...) you see ‘im and he’s shooting people and dodging bullets and he gets shot and, you know, he fights the pain and beats it and all this sort of other crap. And although it’s completely unrealistic you sort of think: Now, that’s cool! ... (Jesse). 

Jesse identified Drew Carey as representing a subordinate and unacceptable masculinity.

(...)his parents are interfering... he hasn’t got any control over his life... he’s always in trouble with his girlfriend... You wouldn’t want to be in that position... I suppose when you see that sort of thing you laugh and say: ‘Ah, sucker!’ (Jesse).
The young men were able to separate the sporting prowess from the personal qualities of sporting heroes, clearly identifying them specifically as sporting rather than personal role models.

*I just like his talent with football... watching a game I’ll go: ‘I wish I was as good as him’. I would always say things like that. That’s how you idolise him (Peter).*

*Oh probably like James Hird or Wayne Carey, but not as a person, as a footballer (James).*

**Personal Role Models**

The participants understood well, and sometimes introduced themselves, the concept of ‘role model’. All but one participant were easily able to name their personal role models, showing clear understanding of the significance of having someone to admire and from whom to learn. James specifically said he had no role model, and he seemed to recognise that he was missing something of value: he saw it as ‘hard sometimes’.

Rick alone opted for film characters and musicians rather than ‘real life’ role models. He had developed a personal style that allowed him to stray a little from dominant notions of masculinity, which may have influenced his choice of role model. Rick admired Bono, lead singer of ‘U2’, whom he described as an ‘effeminate show-off’, for his honesty, political commitment, and personal style. But he also admired the ‘tough guy’ gangster characters played by Lee Marvin, Robert de Niro and John Travolta for their ability to ‘handle things’ in a ‘cool and collected’ way.

The other participants named a significant person from their own lives.

*... my best friend Mal is a bit of a hero to me ... and without trying to be sound sort of too up myself, I think that sort of works a bit the same... we both have, like, points about each other we just really like... You know you’d like to be just like him (Jesse).*

Robert, Adam and Peter described their older brothers as role models:

*... he’s almost been like my second Dad. I was always talking to him ... like he was the one who I got told, like all about girls and everything like that (Robert).*
...we've all turned out like our older brothers......I always liked the music he liked. He used to ride a skateboard, so I rode a skateboard. Actually, I still do to this day... yeh I pretty much did what he did. I wasn’t one to... follow him around or whatever, but I’d subconsciously just take in what he does... (Adam).

Rick no longer idolised his father, and his brother now represented the antithesis of his own goals.

I learn what not to do. (My brother) ’s moved in with his girlfriend now... she’s pregnant, she’s due next month... I look at that and I see, I don’t know how he could do it.... I don’t plan on staying (here) for the rest of my life. And he’s already got the house and the kid on the way, and she already had a child before that. I mean, he’s ready to settle down. He’s 20! And there’s no way I could see myself doing the same thing.... (Rick).

Barney’ grandfather had been an influence in his life:

He’s just a calm old farmer guy... He’s always laid back... I used to sleep around his house all the time and muck around with him... just play cricket... play cards and all that when I was little... so he’s probably my biggest role model (Barney).

The participants showed a depth of understanding of the contribution of their role models, identifying shared time, talking and activities. They described a range of admired personal characteristics, such as wit, calmness, social skill, and discretion that are not linked to males exclusively.

It may well be argued that male subculture is so imbued with media models of masculinity that they cannot fail to be influential, even where mediated through adolescents’ primary ‘real life’ role models. There was no evidence of the comparative influences of media representations of stereotypical masculinity and personal role models, although the participants appeared to recognise the latter as having the stronger effect.

The young men were asked about their role models in the context of a study about masculinity, which may account in part for their not suggesting women as role models.
**Being a Role Model for Younger Boys**

The young men were at first hesitant to see themselves as role models for other males, but with very little probing, most remembered that there was someone else who looked up to them: a younger brother, a neighbour, a girlfriend’s brother. They were a little surprised, and had not considered the implications of being a role model themselves.

> ... he comes over every morning before school ... he just wants to be around me wherever I go... he’s always going: ‘Can I hang around with you and your mates?’ He’s got a problem with ADD... other people... might just ... be rude to him, and just tell him where to go... we just be a bit nice to him... he always asks me things about girls and I just ... I tell him, but ...if I know he’s not ready for it I just won’t tell him at all (Peter).

**FATHERS**

Only Jesse named his father specifically as a role model.

> He’s never really been just a stand-over sort of a father. He’s always been a talk-to-you kind of guy... I suppose he has taught me about how to be sort of ... if not a masculine man, how to be a really decent, just good, honest man (Jesse).

Jesse expressed deep, but conditional respect for his father, inferring that there was a shortfall of some sort in his perceived masculinity, which appeared to be based on Jesse’s perception of his physical weakness.

> ... I’m already a fair bit taller than him. I weigh more than him and I’m just bigger than him and he hasn’t been really able to physically discipline me since I was about 12... I remember one day he just hit me and I hit him back. And that was it, he never hit me again. And I think it’s probably because I hurt him more than he hurt me (Jesse).

It’s notable that Jesse, who presented as thoughtful throughout the interview, was nevertheless more driven by his construct of masculinity, than by his ability to explore other meanings. This may be seen as consistent with the psychosocial task of individuation, whereby he clearly identified himself separately from his father, despite the acknowledged traits he had learned from him.
Others did not see their fathers as role models, but identified aspects of their influence.

Business-wise, you know, I don’t follow him... I think I follow him, like when he was my age, (I’m) probably, like, not too bad at playing sports, like he was. Oh, he’s told me a few stories. I think he thought he was the adventurous type when he was younger, and ...uhm... actually, yeh, (laughs) quite adventurous! ..... He has been an influence I think. I mean, every father is, but not so much that I really notice it (Adam).

James saw his father on alternate weekends, and expressed negativity towards him.

...we used to get along really well, but as I’m growing up I’m sort of doing me own thing whenever I’m over there. I don’t see him so much anymore...(he’s) an alcoholic... He gets in stages where he’ll be nice and then he’ll be like ... just mean and just ...won’t talk to us and stuff like that (James).

Carlo represented a cultural background with a strong emphasis on family, and the closeness within his family appeared currently to be enhanced by the birth of his nephew on the day prior to the interview. Carlo and his friend Robert were the only participants who described spending a lot of time in activity and conversation with their fathers.

All but James expressed high positive regard for their fathers, even though there were also signs of emotional disengagement; lack of time for the family; or authoritarianism that they recognised as deficient.

... he built an extra room on the house, and put his office in it so he could work at home and maybe spend more time with us, but ... it didn’t work. He still just sits at his computer all day. Even though he’s at home with us, we still don’t talk very much .... We never really bonded together because he was working so much ... at this age it’s sort of strange to talk to me, like he doesn’t know what’s going on in my life really..... This morning he woke me up at seven o’clock ... to get up for school (laughs). He doesn’t even realise that (because of swat-vac.) I’ve finished school (Adam).

He hasn’t really got that much time. Like, he goes to work at 6:00 in the morning, comes home like about 7:00, has his tea and he has to walk (the dogs). He watches about two hours of TV and just goes to bed (Robert).
He’s a stress-head… like, everyone’s too scared to talk to him because he gets, you know, his back up over nothin’. So… no-one says much to him really (laughs)… He’s got no tolerance. Like, he’s not violent or anything. He’s just, you know, always… Oh, you know: ‘Oh Grrrr’ (growling). Doesn’t scream or anything, he’s just always ‘Grrrr’, keepin’ it in. Always (Barney).

They did not want their fathers to be criticised, and hastened to add positive comments if I referred to their fathers’ apparent lack of closeness. This might simply have satisfied their need to be loyal to their fathers, or to stand up for men in general when challenged by a woman. It might also have represented the collusion, even between sons and fathers, to suppress intimacy; resist emotional expression which might be construed as weakness; and deny poor relationship skills. Nevertheless, all but James gave the impression they were genuinely confident in their fathers’ love and availability should they need them.

I mean, I know he loves me; I know he knows I love him. Even though we don’t talk that much, it’s still all right… Oh yeh, he’ll always be there for me. We just don’t talk about it (laughs) … (Adam).

I know he cares for us and everything, it’s just he doesn’t show it as much or anything. It’s understandable, I suppose….. he comes from Italian background, sort of strict, he had stricter parents … it was probably the same in his family, like …uhm… his Dad wouldn’t talk so much I suppose, so he’s just, yeh, just doin’ what he knows… I understand, I mean … I dunno, we probably aren’t that like similar people …uhm… enough to like hold a conversation or anything …uhm… Yeh, we don’t have the same interests or anything.……. I know it’s not his fault as much as I don’t communicate with him. I don’t go out of my way, anyway. So it goes .. works both ways (Rick).

With a somewhat jaded air for one so young, Jesse identified Al Bundy of the television programme ‘Married With Children’, as illustrating masculinity and father-as-provider.

... he’s just sort of he’s a father, you know, and he’s got his wife and he’s got his kids that he used to love but after how ever many, twenty odd years or whatever it is, he’s sort of got sick of it, but he’s too loyal … like to leave her but … he’s not enjoying it
It is anticipated that during the individuation process of adolescence a young man will experience a healthy separation from the family, and may distance himself from his father. The results of this study indicated that fathers tend to be unlikely to be interacting closely with their sons. On the basis of my interpretation of transcripts and the emotional content of interviews, I concluded that most participants indicated a longing for greater closeness with their fathers. At this stage these men still enjoyed the love and respect of their sons, despite their clear understanding of some of the deficits in the quality of the father-son relationships.

The effects of inadequate father-son relationships were not clear. These young men presented themselves as confident; with interesting and attractive personalities; and with the ability to conceptualise issues related to their lives. They enjoyed the support of mothers, role models and peers, and if not actively their fathers, then at least trusted that their fathers were there for them if needed. In the immediate moment, a sense of sadness for what was missing may have been the most significant effect. In the longer term, the continuing resistance to emotional engagement modelled by their fathers, may lower the potential health and well-being of these young men.

For five of the eight young men in this study, fathers demonstrated poor communication; lack of engagement in family life; focussing on the ‘bread-winner’ role; dominance; or other masculine stereotyped traits. By virtue of their sons’ need for their fathers’ love; their ability to interpret things that are unsaid; and their willingness to see the caring that might otherwise go unnoticed, fathers were redeemed for their failings. Despite, in many
cases, their apparent best intentions, fathers were not connecting fully with their sons. Jesse’s encapsulation of the life of Al Bundy may, in fact, be the image of unsatisfying fatherhood that many young men hold.

The father, when he is present in the family, is highly influential in a young man’s learning how to be a man, a partner and a husband. The fathering model presented appeared to be restrictive, and perpetuated traditional patriarchal ways of being a man within a family. The young men were not old enough to have slipped on the mantle prescribed by dominant notions of fatherhood and masculinity in the context of family responsibilities, but they were insightful enough to see that models of disengaged fathering may be far from adequate for personal happiness. When an adolescent son contemplates his father, he sees his own destiny. It might be a confusing, even dreadful image for the young man, one of whose tasks is to begin to see himself in the context of romance, intimate relationships, commitment and family.

**MUSIC**

_Music. I love music. I’ll always love music (Adam). I live for music. I love it (Rick)._ 

As an apparently elemental part of youth sub-culture, music was associated with fun, great memories, and simply enjoyed for the rhythm and melody without consideration of any deeper relevance. However, music also had far greater meaning to these young men.

Every participant expressed the importance of music in his life. Robert described _rap music_; its associated fashion in clothing; and its sub-cultural connection with skateboarding as a significant linking factor within his group, which included Carlo. The lyrics were not important to Robert, and he described his enjoyment of the overall sound. Carlo was also a member of another friendship group, based on the band in which he played.
James, Peter, Barney and Adam worked together as musicians and roadie in the same band. Heavy Metal was a shared favourite, but their individual tastes also represented a wide variety including punk, The Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, Red Hot Chilli Peppers and Faith No More.

While there was consistency in their love of music and the high value it had for them, there was variation in the meaning it held individually. For those who appreciated the lyrics of the songs, there was recognition that rock bands, especially Heavy Metal, were singing about real life for young men, and acknowledging the problems and experiences that they were reluctant to talk about:

    Well I like listening to ’em and ... the stories that are behind the actual songs, and what they mean and that ... growing up and stuff like that, and all the problems you face and that, in your life (James).

    ... if I’m depressed, just not feeling very good about myself, or just I’m sad about something or whatever it is ... it’s good to know that someone sort of knows about it, or knows what it’s on about... it’s good to know that someone else has been there... you know, it’s happened to other people (Jesse).

This study has found that young men do not talk to one another about their problems, so that they are at risk of feeling isolated, poorly resourced and unsupported when personal troubles strike. These young men showed they purposefully used music and reflection time for self-therapeutic purposes. Besides reducing feelings of isolation, the lyrics gave hope for positive outcomes.

Even if the lyrics were not significant, there was consistently a recognition of the connection between music and emotions.

    Like I think for just about every feeling I’ve got a song going with it... I listen to music to motivate myself... songs that, just for me, that inspire me.. (Jesse).

    Some can calm me down, like, say Jimi Hendrix  often can calm me down, and ...uhm... a Sepultura song could fire you up (Barney).
I was just listening to (The Beatles) one day when I was a bit upset and that ... whenever
I get upset I always listen to ‘em ... lift meself up and that... when I’m happy I’ll listen
to ... me usual (heavy metal) music..(James).

Those who played instruments or sang could enjoy the creative emotional expression and
the sense of personal satisfaction in making music.

.... a lot of heavier music can help get out your aggression and stuff. I mean if you
have an instrument, or you have an instrument such as drums or something you can get
a lot of anger or emotion out through that. Singers as well. I know a few people who
sing and they can sort of get their emotions out through that, sometimes (Rick).

Four participants demonstrated the remarkable commitment required to learn to play an
instrument and perform in a band.

I think it’s more of a mind thing, like, if I sit down and maybe even try and learn how to
do something. Oh, I just can’t work it out and I just concentrate on the music, playing
the music and that’s about it (Adam).

Every day (practise).... for about an hour or more. I’ll be around the house, I’ll just
pick up my guitar and go to my room, play for a while. Sometimes I’ll just keep
playing for ages, like for about three hours. Sometimes I’ll just play for like twenty
minutes, intending to go back ‘n’ play (Carlo).

Carlo linked an interest in music, and the commitment it required, with issues related to
being male.

‘Cos like if I’d have liked wrestling, it would have been different... I would’ve been
concentrating on getting bigger muscles, or better technique, or something like that,
and what I am now, I’m getting (pretty good) fingers or something like that (Carlo).

If rock music is associated with masculinity, and offers the freedom that comes with high
status, then it perhaps represents viable alternative access to the male hierarchy.
Additionally, it allows emotional expression through a creative art form not primarily
associated with females or homosexuality.
Although this study has shown that young men restricted their emotional expression, there is no doubt that they were able to recognise and describe their own emotional states in relation to their music. Perhaps through connecting with the music they were able to reflect on and share their passions in ways which would otherwise be forbidden by the rules of masculine behaviour.

**SUBSTANCE USE**

Alcohol and marijuana were consistently described as contributing to friendship bonds. All regularly drank alcohol, and had tried marijuana, which they were now less likely to use, even though it was easily available.

Early substance experimentation occurred around 14-15 years of age; was associated with male peer group settings; and seemed to be pleasantly experienced. Only Rick suggested that they had been too young, and driven by trying too hard to show a tough image. Otherwise, peer pressure was acknowledged, but not presented as a negative factor.

> ... a lot of boys, like when they take a drug it’s ... course it’s gonna be peer pressure. Like, they just feel that’s the (accepted) thing between their mates. Act cooler or something ... It wasn’t really peer group pressure when I first tried it. Course there was someone saying: ‘Oh, you should try this’. That wasn’t really the main reason I tried it. I just wanted to experiment. I reckon everyone has... (Peter).

> I suppose I felt I had to try alcohol ... to fit in. But I was pretty fortunate there. When I did drink, I did enjoy it, and so ... even though I was kinda pressured into it, in a way I was sort of glad I was because it was an experience that I liked (Jesse).

Regular marijuana use tended to be more associated with earlier years, and was now left to individual choice rather than peer pressure.

> I went through a stage where I did smoke drugs for a while... It was only a phase... I thought: No, this isn’t my scene... I would have been about 14. The guys I used to
(smoke) with probably still do now. Oh, they do still. But I can accept that they do, and they can accept that I don’t want to... And there’s no hassle with that (Adam).

All of the young men in this group assumed that alcohol was part of their social environment, and that marijuana could be included if they so chose, even if adults disapproved.

I think as you grow up it becomes common-place.... If you don’t want to you don’t have to. And if you do, you can, and no-one will think twice about it....... with underage people drinking they don’t find it as much as an issue, and friends don’t, and people my age probably wouldn’t as much as ...uhm... adults might find that, yeh, young kids drinking is like an outrage, whatever ...(Rick).

Substance use could have a range of personal meanings. Most of the participants described situations of pleasant and non-violent reactions to substance use. Only Jesse described earlier times when he would get recklessly drunk and turn to aggression, in an apparent quest for his own identity, and to prove his manliness.

I sort of calmed down a fair bit now, and... it’s just easier to handle. I still drink a fair bit of alcohol on the weekends... It’s not, like, go out and get recklessly drunk... and hope to find something ... you know, in yourself ... (Jesse).

Marijuana, like alcohol, could reduce stress, and be a distraction at least for a short time:

... you’re just like care-free. Just nothing really worries you. Like all your pressures, like with schooling and all that, and girls. They’re just all gone (Robert).

Alcohol could be used not only to suppress bad feelings, but also to find release for the aggression of someone who had not dealt with his problems, and was trying to control his anger. It removed inhibitions to uncover problems otherwise hidden. Alcohol use linked with aggression was both an indicator of personal distress and an attempt to dispel the pain.

He’d be walking around the school, like, he’s always in a bad mood. He’s always upset about something... Then, like, the weekend, he’ll just go out and get spastic (Peter).
Alcohol could facilitate social interaction skills.

... it makes me more social, like I’ll talk to people more. I’ll just get in there and I don’t have much control of myself, but I... won’t be as boring. Not that I find myself boring, but there’s always that fear (Rick).

Substance use could simply be fun.

... you can go out and just be happy and that, and everyone enjoy yourself (James).

I drink because I enjoy drinking, and I have smoked dope before. And I probably will again. But that’s because I enjoy it, not because I feel I have to, not because I really feel it’s a release thing, you know. Because I sort of enjoy the sensation of, you know, being able to laugh at anything (Jesse).

The heightened level of fun played an important part in the bonding of relationships, as did the diminished awareness of risk, thereby facilitating adventurous activity. Barney explained how hard it was to pull out of a dangerous adventure once a challenge had been set down and accepted within a competitive male peer group setting, emboldened by alcohol. Marijuana use, in itself, could be seen as risk-taking.

... because it’s illegal... if someone told you not to do something you’d probably go out and do it. Because someone says don’t do it, then...you wanna prove that you can do it (James).

... it probably brings you closer, sort of. ‘Cos, like, you have more fun, and you don’t care what happens or nothing like that (Robert).

The consistently emphasised aspect of substance use was its capacity to remove inhibitions to allow the sharing of the inner self in conversation with other young men, and therefore enabling closer bonding and friendship.

Oh yeh... I do drink a lot of alcohol, but I don’t always do it to get drunk. I do it to sit back with a few mates, just have a few beers, a chat, whatever... I just sit back with me friends and talk, you know, and chat (Adam).
... just the two of us on a Saturday night we’d get a bottle of Jim Beam... the full 750 ml... We’d just sit there and drink and talk and we did that like every week for about four or five months. It cost a lot of money, but... it built a great friendship and we knew everything about each other. We’re a fair bit similar, and we both got sick of going to the parties, pretending to be cool... just rather sit down with someone that you know and just talk about whatever it is that just comes into your mind (Jesse).

Carlo advised caution against saying ‘the wrong thing’. Rick was more sceptical about inebriated intimacy, which he described as degeneration into a ‘drunk and sorrowful’ state, where statements such as ‘I love you, mate’ flowed all too easily.

... it’s only when you’re drunk that you accidentally say ... you know, let things out and tell people what you shouldn’t say (Rick).

Adam, too, hinted that alcohol-induced discussions might be of questionable value.

We’ve even had a few talks about Christianity and stuff like that... Then the next morning: ‘Oh, we had a good, funny talk last night, didn’t we!’ But, yeh, we can get really serious about things we wouldn’t usually talk about (Adam).

**Conclusion**

Alcohol and marijuana use appeared to represent a complex dynamic involving the requirements of dominant masculinity and the struggle to be free from those very constraints. It at once bound young men to their gender community, and allowed them to deviate from its rules. While substance use was intrinsic to subculture, it also exposed young men’s dissatisfaction with the roles they were required to play, and gave insight into how they would like to be.

While alcohol was associated with aggression and recklessness, it also gave freedom for the expression of positive emotion and the revelation of thoughts and feelings to others. It excused the expression of weakness, and gave clues to the distress that young men may have been hiding from fear of ridicule; accusations of diminished masculinity; or demotion in hierarchical status. Substance use gave respite from the need for self-
control, and perhaps provided a ‘morning-after’ excuse for statements of vulnerability or undue affection.

Substance use also provided a setting for fun and happiness in a world where young men appeared to be struggling with the psychosocial tasks of adolescence in an environment of dissatisfaction with the school experience; confusion about girls; and the constant need to be vigilant to establish and maintain masculinity and status.

SCHOOL

There was strong evidence of young men’s lack of inspiration and motivation at school.

*Some classes, I’d go in there and try me hardest... and other classes, well if I’m not interested at all I just close off and talk to other people (Peter).*

Participants consistently identified themselves as sharing with other young men the frustration of having to attend. They described boredom with inappropriate school subjects that did not reflect their interests. Robert spoke of the male preference for ‘cars... mechanics... trade courses... getting dirty’, and of their desire to get out of their boring school environment and make some money.

*... boys tend not to ... wanna be like ... office jobs and stuff like that. They’d rather be outside ... digging, or doing landscaping or whatever it is... like myself, I don’t do that well at school... lack of interest.... boys just couldn’t be bothered doing it... (James).*

Rick was critical of the school’s emphasis on extra-curricular activities and discipline.

*I choose to stay within (the) boundaries, but ...uhm... other people might not and I can see why they wouldn’t. It’s like some of the rules aren’t exactly the best... the most well thought out.... The school should spend a lot more time on the subjects and the courses and the education, more than ... for example the uniform and the way we look and things (Rick).*

Participants reported that they were now more able to discipline themselves to study in their own future interests, even though they still found no real inspiration in their work.
... in the whole broader picture I couldn’t really see where ... why it was so important or where it fitted in ... I can see now why we go to school ... it just sort of has to be done ... learn to accept that I suppose (Jesse).

I hate it (laughs) but I don’t know what else I’d do. I think that’s why I’m still here. ’Cos if I left I don’t know what I’d do (Rick).

From their current perspective they were able to consider their own experience, and identified slackness and overactive social life, rather than conflict with teachers, students or discipline regimes, as the barriers to learning. Jesse identified and analysed his earlier misbehaviour at school.

I suppose I was just pretty much bored, probably took on ... those roles as something to fill in the time in class... I don’t know, maybe a little of it was just for self-identification as well. Sort of: Am I the clown? Or am I the hero? Or am I the leader? Or am I a follower or what? (Jesse)

The naming of ‘social life’ as a key factor interfering with males’ education especially in early secondary years, may have referred to the range of peer interactions that are part of the establishment of the male hierarchy, and the strongly felt need to be accepted. Jesse’s questions about his role reflected considerations of his hierarchical status. The increased ability of the participants to focus on learning towards Year 11 may have been linked to maturity, and the decreased need to prove oneself, as young men found their smaller friendship groups, and became comfortable with their status.

The strongest statement about the link between notions of masculinity and schooling came from Jesse, as he spoke about the competitiveness and associated fear of showing weakness that characterise young men’s lives.

... for some guys they’re sort of afraid. I know a couple in my class, they know if they try and they fail, then... they’ll be looked down on pretty badly by other guys... They’re just afraid of failure. For that reason they say: ... ‘I just don’t need to try’... they’re just too afraid of failure to chance it I suppose (Jesse).
An element of short-sightedness in the male view of schooling was also suggested.

... their social life’s taken over on their school life. They’re sort of worried about having a good time instead of worrying about what’s going to happen in the future, like for their education (Adam).

... they’re not thinking straight, they just think, you know: Oh, this is more important than that, because it’s more fun, and school’s boring. Just pretty much slacking off (Barney).

Most participants identified girls as more able to organise their studies. Adam also referred to lower status males:

Girls will sit and do homework for hours and get top marks, where guys’d rather go out and grab a few beers or whatever... I don’t think girls are smarter than guys, but I think they put in a lot more effort with their subjects... I’ve always gotta be goin’ out somewhere... girls... they’re happy just to sit at home on a Friday night and do homework. There’s no chance you’d see me on a Friday night doin’ me homework! ... there may be guys who... don’t have such a busy life; they will sit at home and do it. They’ve got the time on their hands (Adam).

While there was clear evidence of the lack of connectedness to school and motivation for learning, there was little in the data to indicate how to change this situation. These young men seemed to have reached an age where they had grudgingly accepted that they would be seriously disadvantaged if they continued to give their education low priority. It seemed that the only redeeming feature of school was the social setting where friendships with peers could be established and nurtured.

While the accepted psycho-social view of adolescence includes the need to begin the establishment of career identity and other preparations for adulthood, the inability of young men to engage with their schooling seriously risks their well-being.

Rick, sporting a new, bleached goatee beard, gave an interesting analysis of the contradictions of the school environment, supposedly committed to the preparation of
young men for adulthood, and yet apparently determined not to allow them actually to take on adult roles.

... They want it to be like Disneyland, you know, where people that work there aren’t allowed to have facial hair... they want their sense of conformity and everyone to be the same.... and to have that young appearance at the school..... It’s stupid ... you have some Year 12 students who’ve turned 18 already. Legally they’re allowed to drink or whatever. But, you know, they can’t leave the school on their own, they can’t sign their own (consent) forms, and they can’t do anything. Even when they come in their cars, they have to leave their keys in the office (Rick).
DISCUSSION

The study documents the actual voices of young men, as they described in broad overview some of the influential factors in their adolescence. Their stories confirmed existing masculinity theory, and laid the foundation for new ideas that invite greater depth of research. The small sample, while it generated consistency of results as well as non-consistent examples, is seen as a limitation. Further research would investigate more widely in different subcultural and geographical locations, to ascertain the level of consistency across a more generalised population of young men.

Some findings of this study were directly related to its being a ‘snapshot’ in time of males between the ages of 16 and 17 years. Data from different age cohorts, say 11 to 21 years, would trace the factors that impact on their development during the cycle of male adolescence. Of great interest would be follow-up research to discover how the young men portrayed in this study negotiate intimacy and power in their relationships with men and women as they progress into adulthood.

Further research might explore the connection between problematic behaviours or emotional difficulties and masculinity, since no attempt was made to differentiate between young men according to such criteria.

Other studies will no doubt continue to investigate possible biological determinants of masculinity. At no stage did any participant explain adolescent male behaviour in terms of testosterone or other male biology. Rather, they behaviour and attitudes to psychosocial imperatives. That is not to say that there were not biological antecedents.
Related research might explore the degree to which some of the findings may in fact be consistent with the experience of young women as well as young men, and influenced by adolescent, family and social factors, rather than, or additionally to, masculinity.

It would be useful to investigate the precursors to situations in which the very same features of: alcohol, adolescent mateship, masculinity, assertion of strength and the domination of women, come together to produce horrendous violence, such as that perpetrated against Leigh Leigh in Newcastle in 1989 (ABC 1996). In the light of such a reality, the Classic ‘Stud’/‘Slut’ Dichotomy presented by the young men of this study, becomes more chilling.

With the changing nature of society, and economic rationalism, rather than social imperatives bringing about changes that increase poverty and unemployment, especially for young people, research might trace the relationship between adolescent male distress, masculinity and other social factors

‘Maturity’
The study isolated within male adolescence a significant turning point, which participants themselves attributed to ‘maturity’, and where they felt decreased pressure to conform to subcultural notions of manliness. Significant restructuring of social groupings accompanied the change. Research might confirm and ascertain the origins, psychological and cultural, of this turning point.

Friendship Groups
The primary finding that small friendship groups of young men separated from the wider male community, around 16-17 years of age, appears to be new information that has not been specifically noted in the literature surveyed. The young men had grouped themselves according to non-physical characteristics and used ridicule rather than more threatening jostling for hierarchical position. These findings were consistent with those of Savin-Williams (1980) rather than Weisfeld, Bloch and Ivers (1983). There was no identification of the factors that bring young men together, although shared moral code
and complementarity of personalities were indicated in the data, but inadequately researched.

**Dominant Masculinity**

The study on the whole affirmed the characteristics of masculinity as presented by Australian commentators (Connell 1996; Edgar 1997; Flood 1995; Huggins 1997; McGrane & Patience 1995; MacLean 1997; Morton 1997; Radican 1995). The participants depicted a dominant masculinity that prescribed harsh guidelines about the necessity to demonstrate strength and encourage the exercise of power, in a competitive environment where weakness was scorned, and where females and less powerful men were relegated to low status.

Contrary to the views of Flood (1995), McGrane and Patience (1995) and Radican (1995), attitudes to homosexuality were based on a complexity of personal and social factors. Homophobia could not be characterised simply as the result of the fear of diminished masculinity or gender betrayal. There were indicators of the need to prove manliness through sexual prowess, especially in younger years (Connell 1996; Flood 1995; Radican 1995), but this now appeared to be mediated by group norms that were yet to be clearly established. The study did not support the harshness proposed by commentators in these particular areas, but a more detailed study of attitudes to sexuality would be more conclusive.

While there was a consistent portrayal of dominant masculinity and its impact on the young men, none of the participants could be described as behaving strictly in accordance with its requirements. On the other hand, only one might have been seen as living by a subordinate model, since he seemed personally untouched by the demands of dominant masculinity. Differences in individual and group behaviour, attitudes and coping, indicating other co-existent influences on development, might be uncovered by research.
**Intimacy**

The requirements of masculinity, including self-control and competitiveness, mitigated against the achievement of intimacy (Bergman & Surrey 1998; Lewis 1978). The study indicates a period when young men see the potential for intimacy with friends, whereas most writers have focussed on the disillusionment and isolation of the adult male who craves closeness with other men (Seidler 1985).

Edgar’s (1997) conclusion that adolescent male talk and behaviour might be seen as ‘superficial’, is not consistent with the high value the young men themselves placed on their friendships. Irrespective of any outsider’s evaluation, these young men felt ‘connected’ to their mates.

The study supports other research that has shown the importance to adolescents of intimate friendships (Buhrmeister 1990 cited in Lundy et al 1998; Lundy, Field, McBride, Field & Largie 1998; Richey & Richey 1980, cited in Lundy et al 1998). The results are in keeping with those of Sharabany, Gershoni and Hofman (1981, cited in Lundy et al 1998), who found that adolescent males developed intimacy skills more slowly than females, although they did not link this particularly to masculinity. Consistent with the findings of Kids Help Line (1998b) and Weston (1997) participants nominated at least one friend in whom they could confide. Different definitions of intimacy reduce comparability between the current study and earlier research, and demonstrate the need for consistency in future studies.

Participants indicated an understanding of intimacy, and wanted to believe that they had achieved it with their closest friends, although it was in fact precluded by the sanctions of masculinity. Nevertheless, rather than neglect their friendships to seek out girls to meet their intimacy needs (Flood 1995; McGrane & Patience 1995; Radican 1995), even those who showed signs of dependence on female nurturing and intuitiveness were working to protect mateship bonds. It would be interesting to research qualitatively
with young and older men, the ways in which the simultaneous search for and rejection of intimacy affect sexual and non-sexual relationships.

The definition of intimacy, proposed for the purposes of this study fails to cover the strong sense of emotional connectedness described. It would be unfair to dismiss their emotional engagement because it lacks ‘the purposeful discussion of experience’ required for intimacy. In fact, men have typically expressed their closeness without the verbalised sharing of thoughts and feelings. ‘Male bonding’ may describe the phenomenon, although it has lost its impact with popular usage, and excludes the experience of women who feel similarly connected. There is a need to find a concept that acknowledges and values the range of interpersonal situations that facilitate emotional engagement in the absence of significantly personal talk.

A revised definition of intimacy would include emotional engagement; uncensored self-expression; and fearless self-exposure. This would almost inevitably require the verbal sharing of thoughts and feelings, a skill with which most young men are not yet confident. It is perhaps this level of intimacy that men long to share with other males with whom they already feel a definite but incomplete connection.

**Intergender Relations**

The study confirms that women are to be relegated to the lowest rung on the hierarchy, after disempowered men. The findings support the notion that the continuation of patriarchy and its concomitant problems for women, children and men will continue without decisive action to counteract them.

If women are seen as weakening men by tempting them into intimacy and the expression of vulnerability, thereby undermining their manliness (MacLean 1997), then the protection of mateship bonds is a strengthening factor. As adolescent men learn to define themselves as different from, in contest with, and superior to the females around them, they may yet lack the insight and self-confidence to challenge the contradictions,
both personal and social, that face them as they try to balance dominant attitudes against their natural sense of fairness.

At a personal level, some stories related comfort and confidence about relationships with girls. Others reflected uncertainty, perhaps indicating lack of confidence, even vulnerability; inadequate communication skills; or feelings of disempowerment (MacLean 1997).

**Coping with Stress**
Perhaps the most potent factor in adolescent male suffering is their tendency to isolate themselves when stressed, in the hope of reaching a resolution. Thus alienated, and with no understanding that others have survived similar problems, their situations might easily seem hopeless, and lead them to depression and suicidal ideation.

Poor coping and helping skills were linked to masculinity. The study supported prior findings about the sources of stress in adolescence, its emotional indicators and behavioural outcomes (Donnelly 1995; Hendren 1990; McDonald Culp, Clyman & Culp 1995; Siegel & Shaughnessy 1995). McDonald Culp et al (1995) had shown that adolescents considered themselves responsible for solving their own problems, although the current study concluded that this principle was stronger for males.

There were several types of coping strategies, the qualities of which varied according to the individual, although none described adequate skills in talking through problems or posing solutions. This study found resistance in young men to seeking counselling or other services, which echoes earlier literature (Broadbent 1994; Carr-Gregg 1997; Frydenberg & Lewis 1991; Gibson 1998; Heppner, Reeder & Larson 1983; Hurst 1997; Kids Help Line 1998b; Rolph 1997).

**Role Models**
Young men are able to recognise the mythology of at least the extreme popular media images of masculinity, and appear independently to choose their own real-life role models, appreciating their personalities and strengths, rather than their adherence to
some notion of manliness. Fathers tend not to be designated as role models by young men at this age, although the study yields no information as to whether the father is the most influential over the life-span (Harris, I. 1998).

**Parents**

The longing of sons for closer relationships with their fathers cannot be ignored. The role of fathers is not simply explained. Simultaneously there were signs of their commitment to their families, both affective and, in particular, instrumental; and a tendency towards alienation from the family. Fathers seemed unable to resist the confinement of dominant masculinity.

Participants seemed well-connected with their families, and appeared to be enjoying the developmental advantages of secure relationships with both family and friends (Field et al 1995; McCallum 1994; Meeus & Dekovic 1995). Even where fathers were resident in the family, there was a still a degree of ‘father-absence’, as most provided materially (Cohen 1993; Huggins 1997; Pease & Wilson 1991), but failed to make an intimate connection with their sons (Harris, I. 1995; Shulman & Seiffge-Krenke 1997; Weston 1997). The study implicitly supports the findings of Kagel, White and Coyne (1978), that father-presence or absence is not the most significant factor in adolescent male development.

Biddulph (1995, 1997) urges men to be active fathers or mentors for adolescent males, whereas Tacey (1997) is more cautious: he sees virtually no men who can effectively model non-patriarchal male adulthood. Mothers, who appear to have positive relationships with their sons, may well be complicit in supporting restrictive models of masculinity and fatherhood. While writers such as Biddulph (1995, 1997) rather than Silverstein and Rashbaum (1994) hold popular sway, women, who are already dominated, may further lose confidence in their ability pro-actively to teach their sons how to maintain open, honest relationships into adulthood.
**Music**

The study uncovered the extreme importance of music in the lives of young men, and confirmed the conclusion of Ballard and Coates (1995) that there was no evidence of negative outcomes from Heavy Metal music. In fact, the study revealed many positive effects on well-being, dependent upon the personal meaning attributed to the music.

**Substance Use**

Of most interest, perhaps, and not found in the research surveyed, is the association between alcohol and intimacy facilitated by the loss of inhibition. This finding also represents the dissonance between adult and adolescent perception of teenage drinking, and demonstrates the importance of understanding the young man’s world from his own perspective.

Although early experimentation is associated with male peer pressure (Beman 1995), there is no clear evidence that it aims to prove manliness. Rather, the study supports findings that fun, friendship and confidence are the main reasons for use (Broadbent 1994; Davey 1994; McCallum 1994); while harmful drinking is associated with personal or family problems (Broadbent 1994). Findings confirmed a link between marijuana use, shyness and high sociability need (Page 1990). As Broadbent (1994) had concluded, substance use was seen not as problematic, but as consistent with community values and practice.

**School**

The study overwhelmingly supports earlier findings that males were achieving poorly and feeling frustrated at school (Biddulph 1997; Connell 1996; Gilbert & Gilbert 1997; Pallotta-Chiarolli 1997). Participants seemed to be at school under sufferance, and confirmed the conclusions of Teese et al (1997), that boys were less motivated and more negative, although less so in Years 10-12. However, while they acknowledged girls’ greater capacity to study, some participants of this study independently suggested women’s disadvantage in the labour market, a notion rejected in the study of Teese et al (1997).
IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

While the current study aimed to support young men, it has also confirmed the need to continue working to neutralise the structural advantage and personal power enjoyed by males to the detriment of women. Men are nevertheless disadvantaged by the very construct of masculinity that is integral to the maintenance of patriarchy. As they negotiate adolescence, young men are controlled by an idealised masculinity that tolerates little role variation, and inhibits both personal development and relationships with family and friends. Despite their searching for intimacy, the limitations applied to emotional expression and the simultaneous denial of vulnerability, risk leaving young men exposed and unsupported.

Furthermore, although young men may recognise models of unsatisfactory manhood that lay ahead, they risk being irresistibly drawn towards dysfunctional or unsatisfying relationships, fuelled by their need to wield power and limited skills in intimacy. Irrespective of personal preference, they may find themselves conforming to stereotypical worker-provider models of masculinity.

Batten, Weeks and Wilson (1991) characterise Social Work practice by its commitment to the exploration of the social context in order to understand individual and communal experience, and thereby promote harmony and fulfilment. This study proposes that Social Work practice with young men should integrate an understanding of masculinity subculture, as a key determinant in their social context, impacting on their everyday lives as well as their experience of stress.

However, the social context of masculinity, being dynamic and interactive, impacts not only on young men, but also on women, children and older men. Social Work practice might therefore focus on either gender reform and political restructure; or the support of health and well-being for individual and groups of young men, and their achievement of social justice within the restrictions of the given social context. At the risk of avoiding the issues and questions implicit in the foregoing statements, the following proposals will be in the domain of working with individuals and groups of young men.
This will be consistent with the original intentions of the research, but should not be interpreted as a denial of the necessity for reform, nor the possibility of simultaneously working towards it.

Although young men have as yet underdeveloped personal resources, Social Work practice can be based on the assumption that they are in touch with their own emotional states and social situations. Even if some need a little practice, they are able to express themselves verbally. Young men recognise signs of distress in others, and are willing to be supportive. The apparent longing for intimacy suggests that individual counselling or group work requiring self-exposure can be successful.

The dynamics of the research interviews yield suggestions for Social Workers. Laughter can be valuable in helping to build relationships with young men. Knowledge, respect and perhaps even enjoyment of youth subculture and idiom will facilitate communication and trust; although this is not to suggest that the practitioner falsely assume the guise of a young person! It seems almost trite to say listening skills and commitment to confidentiality are essential, since they are always among the practitioner’s repertoire. However the study clearly demonstrates that despite assumptions to the contrary, young men will talk openly and honestly when those conditions are clearly met.

Generally, young men have poor communication and relationship skills; lack knowledge of the normality and complexity of personal and interpersonal problems; and feel isolated when facing stressors. They have not learned models of coping, and have inadequate language and concepts with which to define problems and propose solutions. With these disadvantages, most young men still cling to the belief that they should deny all vulnerability, and strive to maintain their hierarchical status over females and ‘weaker’ males. Additionally, most have never had the opportunity to develop the language and skills to confront the impact of masculinity on their lives.
While the study generalises for males aged 16-17 years, investigation of individual, small group and subcultural circumstances will inform the practitioner about the nature and extent of subcultural requirements of masculinity and their impact on young men.

Proactive educational approaches to masculinity are recommended as integral to individual or group preventative, early intervention or therapeutic work with young men. Determined repetition may be required to overcome the messages of masculine acculturation.

Since seeking professional help appears to indicate weakness, and therefore a failure of masculinity, the Social Worker needs verbally to acknowledge the enormous step that young men take when they contact a helping service. To facilitate engagement; alleviate the sense of alienation from other males; and engender hopefulness, it may be useful to reassure them that other young men have dealt with and overcome similar problems or issues. They have not spoken about it, from fear of revealing vulnerability. Establishing privacy, sometimes even a back-door escape route, might be important in the early stages of working together!

A problem-solving approach, where young men are empowered to take control of their situations, best suits the constraints of masculinity. Individual counselling or group interventions should be seen as opportunities to teach young men not only the skills for coping with stress, and helping others, but the language with which to conceptualise and describe problems and the means for overcoming them.

Young men themselves will be able to describe their masculine code of behaviour. The constraints of masculinity should be acknowledged and overted repeatedly, so that young men can understand more clearly and challenge the forces that affect them. In group settings especially, and sometimes in individual counselling, attempts to establish hierarchical status through physical or verbal domination; proof of sexual prowess; ridicule; or other forms of competitiveness, can be named and explored so that ultimately young men have increased control over this influence in their lives.
The principle of the domination of women seems firmly entrenched, and attempts to change individual and group attitudes within the social context of patriarchy might seem almost futile. Nevertheless, the study highlights young men’s natural sense of fairness, and their desire to be equitable, as the most likely keys to modifying their attitudes.

Through school and community workshops, young men might be taught that they share with other males the experience of stress; natural support networks; and access to professional help. Friendship groups, with potentially natural helpers, might be an appropriate setting for educating young men how to resist competitiveness and fear of vulnerability. Trust and confidentiality could be explored in the context of the male tendency towards the jokes or ridicule that maintain taboos. They could be taught the personal and interpersonal skills that will effect long-term intimacy and support.

Perhaps at this turning point in their adolescence young men may be ready to explore the meaning of relationships with mates and sexual partners, in an attempt to show that intimacy with men and women is possible, and not restricted to sexual liaisons. Groups should provide opportunity for young men actually to experience and redefine themselves according to a much wider range of skill and emotion than is usually allowed.

Music can be a potent tool in the education and support of young men, given that it is not simply an outlet for the creative expression of emotion, but also helps individual young men to connect with the complexity of their own feelings, and allows them to explore problems and coping strategies.

Parenting education should likewise be designed to take account of the impact of dominant notions of masculinity on both fathers and sons. Fathers will benefit from supporting one another, and it may be advantageous to exploit mateship or other natural groupings. The Social Worker can support mothers to explore their roles, and
to withstand the voices that publicly and privately diminish their importance in preparing their sons for manhood.

Anger management workshops for boys are popular, although this discussion suggests the problem is generally located in the context of masculinity, rather than individual anger alone. Even where boys reveal their ability to listen and share, the potential for lasting change is uncertain when they return to a masculine subculture that holds in contempt some of the very values on which such programs are built. A primary task of the practitioner is to help young men understand their anger in personal, masculinity and other subcultural terms. Importantly, the young man needs the opportunity to respect himself as far more skilled and emotionally adept than the ‘angry young man’ he has been labelled.

The practitioner must consider also the environments in which young men spend most of their time. This has implications for working simultaneously with peer groups and significant adults. It is a priority to present alternatives to teachers and parents who are modelling competitiveness and anger as ways of asserting dominance or resolving conflict.

Suggestions for Social Work intervention with young men should be accompanied by recommendations for the evaluation of programmes, which might be conducted through formal academic research, or practitioner research cooperatively with young men (Kenny 1996). Alternately, practitioners’ reflective processes will open a myriad of contextual considerations, allowing for the input of intuition and the rigorous analysis of the language and thought, including inconsistencies, that shape planning and practice (Fook 1996).

RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS
As a youth counsellor, I wondered whether I had become a confidante, a temporary substitute, in the phase between mother and sexual partner, to help satisfy a male need
for the apparently taboo element of intimacy, especially at times of stress. The study perhaps implicitly supports that intuitive notion.

I had begun to ask questions about the meaning and implications of apparent trends in young men’s stories. Intuition and creative postulating, always among my professional tools as a Social Worker, gave way to the formality of empirical research. As I progressed through the academic task, I was able to strengthen my effectiveness by the integration of new insights into my practice with boys, young men, their mothers, fathers and friends.

As the research continued, I was concerned that the study of masculinities serves only to further the credibility of a social construction whereby patriarchy maintains structural inequity for women in general, and for many men. Even studies of subordinate masculinities necessitate and reinforce the assumption of hegemonic masculinity. Additionally, we perhaps risk exaggerating the notion that there are intrinsically and necessarily significant differences for men and women in their experience of personhood.

I now ask myself whether I could have structured a useful study of male adolescence without recourse to the concept of masculinity. The discourse of masculinity may currently be useful as a tool to help describe men’s structural power and personal ways of coping with the demands of the life cycle. However, perhaps such discourse is merely transitional in the perpetual quest to understand human behaviour.

As I embark on the next phase of my Social Work career, I look forward to some cooperative reflection with peers as I continue to work young people. No doubt I will be grappling to come to terms with language and practice that are effective, without unnecessarily reinforcing the limitations to personhood implicit within masculinity, nor enhancing the inequity of gender relationships.
This study of mid-adolescence and masculinity identified a possible turning point in young men’s lives, around sixteen and seventeen years of age, where they began to develop close relationships with a small group of friends, and around whom they felt less pressure to prove their manliness. While they described the possibility of sharing thoughts, feelings and experiences, there were nevertheless limits to what was allowed to be spoken even between the closest of friends. These restrictions were attributable to the sanctions that operated to maintain a dominant notion of masculinity, in which these friendship groups are embedded.

The young men demonstrated a developmental readiness and personal longing for intimacy, but conformed to the tacit restrictions on intimacy, from fear of exposing themselves as weak, vulnerable or poorly skilled. With intimacy constrained, and little discussion of personal issues and problems, young men felt isolated and unresourced in times of stress. Rock music and alcohol gave individual and group release from the debilitating influence of masculinity.

The study has shown the importance of understanding the adolescent male world from his own perspective. In particular, the study demonstrates the degree to which masculinity impacts on adolescent behaviour and attitudes, and highlights the necessity for Social Work practitioners to factor the masculine code of behaviour into case and programme planning.


Harris, I. 1995, Messages Men Hear: Constructing Masculinities, Taylor & Francis, London.


Hawkins, D. & Catalano, R. 1993, Communities that Care, Developmental Research & Programs, Inc Developmental Research & Programs, Inc, Seattle.


---

*Young Men Speak: List of References* 104


Being a Young Man in Australian Society: What's it Really Like?

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Young people don't get many opportunities to have their opinions really listened to by the adults around them. In particular, it's quite rare for young men to be given the chance to explain exactly what it's like coping with the demands of family, school and peers, and with all the expectations that influence them. What do teenagers learn about being a man? Who are their role models? What is the masculine code of behaviour? How easy or difficult is it to live up to the expectations of being a man?

Chris Barrett is currently completing a Master of Social Work degree at the University of Melbourne. She is a secondary school teacher and youth counsellor of many years experience, and she is now focussing her research around teenage boys and their ideas about growing up in today's society.

Participants in the research will be asked to complete an interview of about one hour duration. Volunteers for the research will be able to withdraw at any stage if they choose not to continue.

The research will presented as a thesis to the university, and shorter papers will be written for professional magazines or public forums such as conferences. Whenever the research is discussed or presented in written form, the identity of the participants will remain confidential. There will be no information that will identify individuals. The aim of the research is to help teachers, parents and social workers to understand better the experiences of young men. Hopefully they will then know how to be more supportive, and offer more programs that will really meet the needs of young men.

If you would like to help out with this research, please complete the consent form and return it in the envelope provided to PO Box 442, Williamstown 3016. Chris Barrett will contact you by phone to arrange the time and location of the interview, which will be easily accessible by public transport. Thankyou for considering being a participant. We're sure you'll find it interesting to answer the questions and give your opinions.
RESEARCH

Being a Young Man in Australian Society: What's it Really Like?

CONSENT FORM

Name: ________________________________________________

Address: ________________________________________________

_________________________________________ Post Code ____________

Phone: _______________________________ Date of Birth: ________________

I agree to participate in the research about young men, conducted by Chris Barrett of the school of Social Work at the University of Melbourne.

I have read the information sheet that was attached to this consent form. I will be able to withdraw at any stage if I choose not to continue.

I agree that the information given by me can be published or discussed publicly, so long as it is confidential, and there is no identifying information that will link it to me.

______________________________________ ____________________________

participant's signature date

______________________________________ ____________________________

parent's signature date

I agree to respect the confidentiality of the participant.

______________________________________ ____________________________

Chris Barrett, researcher date
DISCUSSION STARTERS

(To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?)

1. Young men are not supposed to show their weaknesses.
   - strongly disagree
   - neither agree nor disagree
   - strongly agree

2. Young men are not supposed to show any feelings except anger or aggression.
   - strongly disagree
   - neither agree nor disagree
   - strongly agree

3. Young men are not expected to develop intimate friendships, where they can share their deepest thoughts and feelings.
   - strongly disagree
   - neither agree nor disagree
   - strongly agree

4. Young men are expected to devalue women.
   - strongly disagree
   - neither agree nor disagree
   - strongly agree

5. Young men are expected to dominate other young men perceived as weaker.
   - strongly disagree
   - neither agree nor disagree
   - strongly agree

6. Young men are expected to hate homosexuality and homosexuals.
   - strongly disagree
   - neither agree nor disagree
   - strongly agree

7. Young men are praised by other males for exerting power and domination over others.
   - strongly disagree
   - neither agree nor disagree
   - strongly agree

8. Young men are under pressure to prove their sexual performance.
   - strongly disagree
   - neither agree nor disagree
   - strongly agree

9. Young men value other young men who strive to meet the code of masculine behaviour.
   - strongly disagree
   - neither agree nor disagree
   - strongly agree
QUESTIONs

Where do you get your ideas about how to be a man? How do you learn what a man’s supposed to be?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a young man as opposed to a young woman?

What do you do if you’re ever feeling really ‘down’?

Under what sort of conditions would a young man talk to a counsellor?
Appendix C.3

SCENARIOS

Grant is 12. He and his mates sometimes like to hang out after school in the back shed. They've covered the walls with pin-ups of Baywatch babe Pamela Anderson. Grant says privately that he wouldn't go out with her even if she asked him. He says she's just too fake. But he doesn't dare admit this to his mates from fear of being laughed out of the group.

Bruno is 16. His father left the family about twelve months ago, and visits when he can. Bruno gets very angry with his mother, and has punched lots of holes in the walls at home.

John really likes one of the girls in his Year 10 class. He says she's kind, intelligent and has a great sense of humour. But when he talks to his best mate he just says that she's got great breasts and would be good in bed.

Peter is 15. His parents and teachers have been worried about him because he seems to be unable to settle to his school work, and he's begun arguing with the family. His mother sends him to a counsellor. The teachers and parents think this will be a waste of time because they say there's no way he will open up. When he meets the counsellor he talks almost non-stop for an hour about his thoughts and feelings.

The teachers are worried because lots of the boys seem to be doing badly at school, in all their subjects. They won't work in class, or do their homework, and the teachers can't work out what's going on.

Damien often seems to be angry, and always seems to get into trouble at school. He drinks a lot of alcohol on the weekend, and gets quite aggressive.