

The Everyday Lives of Men: An Ethnographic Investigation of Young Adult Male  
Identity

Peter Gill

Victoria University

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## Abstract

There has been increasing social debate in recent times surrounding men's identities, men's health and wellbeing, and men's place within contemporary western society. The purpose of this thesis was to contribute to new knowledge of these issues through an ethnographic exploration of two small sub-cultures of young adults. Utilising participant observation the researcher described in detail the ways in which masculinities were constructed in everyday life. The researcher spent over 2 years as a participant observer of a small group of men from a gymnasium in Melbourne, which followed a briefer but still illuminating period spent with a group of men from a small community in Australia. An ethnographic approach and a non-clinical and non-deviant sample were used to build in-depth knowledge from a neutral lens that did not assume an existing male deficit or crisis.

The major findings revolved around the complexity of the male social networks, including the men's need for belonging and in particular same sex friendships, the implicit and explicit rules of engagement, rational reflective discussion, and male engagement in their social worlds. In addition this thesis illuminated the salient masculine discourses for constructing and negotiating identities, which included heterosexual attraction, competition and social comparison, and biological predispositions and simplicity.

This thesis also presents a dynamic psychosocial theory of male identity, and illustrates the relevance of this theory to the everyday lives of men. The men were shown to both collectively and individually negotiate and construct their identities by utilising the key processes of identification, sublimation, and reflection. By combining both phenomenological and discursive research methods the researcher was able to illustrate in everyday life the dialectic between the social and subjective elements of identity.

The researcher also discusses the challenges he faced as an ethnographic fieldworker, and contributes to the development of improved understandings of the practical requirements of fieldwork, such as time, support, and flexibility.

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In addition, I'd like to thank all my friends and family for supporting me through this process.

Declarations

I, Peter Gill, declare that the PhD thesis entitled ‘The Everyday Lives of Men: An Ethnographic Investigation of Young Adult Male Identity’ is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except when otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signature.

Date.

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Preface

This thesis contains some strong language that might offend. In order to accurately represent the everyday lives of men, the author included excerpts which sometimes contain strong language.

## Glossary of Australian Slang

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<b>Slang Word/Phrase</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
bowl bronzer	someone who makes a mess on the toilet
butch	masculine female
cause	because
chip on their shoulder	someone who is defensive
cunt	derogatory term e.g. worse than Asshole
dingo	type of Australian dog
doona	blanket, quilt, duvet
em	them
for'em	for them
geez	jesus
get'em	get them
gotta	got to
gunna	going to
muck around	mess around
nuts	testicles
old man	father
on tap	to have unlimited access to
pea heart	mentally weak in competitive situations
putting on size	gaining muscle density
sayin	saying
snubbed	to ignore
soft/weak as piss	mentally and/or physically weak
sorta	sort of
sucked in	taken advantage of
tall poppy	person with high social standing
ute	type of car with a rear tray for storage
wanna	want to
ya	you
yep	yes

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The psychosocial health and well-being of men has been the topic of much empirical research in recent times. Within this body of research some researchers have claimed there is a 'crisis of masculinity' within the Western world (White, 2006). Reports of increased male suicide rates, violent behaviour, and psychological disturbances such as neurotic anxiety, depression, and narcissistic disturbance have all fuelled debates surrounding the health status of men (Francis, 2002; Jagodzinski, 2001; Willott & Griffin, 2004). Within psychology, research has linked male psychosocial well-being to identity development and identity negotiation (Castellini, Nelson III, Barrett, Nagy, & Quatman, 2005; Clare, 2000). In particular, research has posited restrictive male identity roles as a source of emotional and relational impoverishment (Fischer, Rodriguez Mosquera, van Vianen, & Manstead, 2004).

However, there is insufficient evidence to definitively support these claims. In particular there is a lack of in-depth qualitative investigations of the health status and identities of men. To contribute to the development of new knowledge, this study investigated the ways two groups of young men constructed and negotiated their identities. To do so, the beginning point was an inquisitive position that did not assume or deny the existence of emotional and relational problems. Instead, an understanding of young adult male identities was derived from engaging with and learning with the men themselves. This was achieved through a qualitative, ethnographic methodology. The researcher immersed himself in the group dynamics of two small groups of men, one from a small fishing community, and one from a gymnasium in a metropolitan city in Australia. Along with describing the men's lives, qualitative data also highlighted aspects of the men's friendships and group belonging, especially in relation to conceptions of masculinity.

#### *Epidemiological Data*

One of the major factors driving the current academic and public interest in men's lives is epidemiological data that indicates that the prevalence of health and psychosocial wellbeing amongst male populations in Western society has diminished in recent years (Furedi, 2004; Pollack, 2003). This diminished level of health has been evidenced by reports of increases in rates of suicide, violent behaviour, and

psychological disturbances such as neurotic anxiety, depression, and narcissistic disturbance (Francis, 2002; Jagodzinski, 2001; Willott & Griffin, 2004). While there is some evidence suggesting that men's health is in decline, a review of Australian Health statistics (ABS, 2003, 2006) suggested that reports of a health crisis are exaggerated. This data suggested instead that it is some sub-groups of the Australian male population in particular that significantly contribute to the overall reported health problems. Of concern it is reported that young adult men (18-35 years old), and men from rural communities, are two such problem groups (McLaren & Hope, 2002; Tolbert, Irwin, Lyson, & Nucci, 2002; D. Wilkinson & Gunnell, 2000).

### *Gender Role Theory*

Given these indications, it is no surprise that issues associated with male identity have become increasingly identified as a key component of men's health and well-being (Benjamin, 2002; Jagodzinski, 2001; Mac an ghail, 1999; Szajnberg & Massie, 2003; Willott & Griffin, 2004). Predominantly, research has focused on examining the position of the male as masculine (Bourgois, 1996; Hoffman, 2001; Kehily & Nayak, 1997). The primary focus has been on exploring the construct of masculinity as it pertains to young men, and more specifically, men from a rural context (Judd et al., 2002; Wainer & Chesters, 2000). Some researchers have argued that masculine characteristics such as emotional inexpressiveness and stoicism are non-conducive to psychosocial wellbeing (Clare, 2000; Cohen, 1992; Reid & Fine, 1992; Seidler, 1992). In this conception, men are deficient in areas of verbal communication, relationship formation and maintenance, emotional self-understanding, and emotional sharing. It has been argued by Jansz (2000) that hegemonic masculine gender roles promote internalisation of emotion, and the maintenance of emotional distance in interpersonal relationships. As such men are restricted in their emotional and interpersonal repertoires. Burris, Branscombe and Klar (1997) proposed that the hegemonic masculine ideologies of individualism, stoicism, and self-control, have acted to limit men's social connectedness, resulting in reduced health. Within this context the cause of male problems are often identified as arising from gender role socialisation (Watts Jr & Borders, 2005). The roles men are socialised to embody have been described as limiting and even conflicting with 'real life' demands. It follows from this argument that to promote men's well-being we need to promote the development of broader masculine gender roles, in particular, promote more 'feminine' aspects that are more conducive to psychosocial well-being.

Indeed, within psychology it is commonly argued that 'feminine' characteristics such as emotional expressiveness are more conducive to psychosocial well-being (Clare, 2000; Spain, 1992).

Others have argued that masculine emotional and relational styles may not be detrimental to psychosocial well-being, and further, that female emotional well-being is itself in decline and hence feminine styles are not the functional comparative benchmark that some have suggested (Wong, Pituch, & Rochlen, 2006; Wong & Rochlen, 2005). These authors argued that, as yet, little is known of the emotional lives of men, as existing research has been conducted predominantly from a gendered perspective that assumes feminine emotional styles as a point of comparison (Fitzpatrick, 2006; Gard & Kring, 2007). This thesis supports this proposition and further suggests that psychological research on men often assumes that verbal communication and verbal emotional expression are representative of mental health. As such the ways men themselves construct their emotional and relational lives are under-represented in empirical literature. Furthermore, some authors have argued that most research on working class men has focused on the negative influences these men have on society, and has ignored men's positive contributions (Hodgetts & Rua, 2006, 2007). One of the ways to address this is to study men from non-clinical and non-deviant populations, that is, 'ordinary' men, and to report their everyday lives and hence contribute to a broader understanding of men (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2002). This void in our understanding can be addressed through active engagement with, and documentation of, a range of male sub-groups.

### *Developmental Theory*

Some theorists have argued that male identity is significantly influenced by early childhood development (Cushman, 1990; Diener & Diener, 1995; Tolpin, 1971). These authors suggest that to limit male identity to an objective gendered status, where the individual is directly dependent upon external environmental factors for deriving his sense of identity and well-being is overly deterministic. Instead, Kohut (1971; 1977, 1987) and others (Freud, 1991b/1923; 1991e/1914; Sutherland, 1994) have argued that the blueprint of identity is formed in early childhood, with one's adjustment to socio-cultural variables, and vulnerability to psychological distress being dependent on these formations. However, this focus on early development has itself been criticised for being overly deterministic and essentialist, and too centred on immediate familial ties, thus ignoring broader social and socio-historical factors

(Durrheim, 1997; Mac an ghaill, 1999). Rather, these authors have argued that the concept of masculinity is socio-historically situated and constructed. As such there are multiple developmental paths and multiple masculinities.

#### *Social Constructionist Theory*

A significant proportion of recent research into men's health and well-being has also emphasised the process of social construction in understanding male identities and masculine discourses. In this conception, identity is fluid, multi-layered, and used as a social tool according to context (Phinney, 2005). Within this paradigm, it is argued that it is men themselves, within their everyday social activities, who carry, negotiate, and construct meanings and behaviours related to being male. As these meanings are constantly changing, and vary from group to group and from man to man, there is a call within social psychology (Edley, 2001; Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2000; Howard, 2000; Phinney, 2005; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005) for research to continually document these ways of being men. In this conception men are not passive recipients of culture, and their identities are not destined from early childhood.

The primary limitation of this social psychological and social constructionist perspective that has been recognised by Berzonsky (2005) is that it fails to recognise and deal with individual consistencies. It has also been proposed that the tendency for people to strive for unity and consistency in their identities, that is to perceive themselves and have themselves mirrored as whole and coherent, has often been ignored by social constructionist inspired research (Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2003). Hence it was an aim of this thesis to begin to bring together our understandings of men as both socio-historically situated and autonomous. That is to begin to synthesise these understandings in theory, and in research practice.

#### *Dynamic Psychosocial Identity Theory*

What is needed then is a theory of male identity that combines social constructionist understandings, with an acknowledgement and explanation of individual consistency. This thesis proposes that such a theory would be dynamic in that it emphasises the active construction of identity, and incorporates both social and psychological perspectives. This thesis develops a dynamic psychosocial theory of male identity, by adapting Castoriadis developmental identity theory, and by incorporating other key perspectives (Elias, 2000/1939; Erikson, 1980; Freud, 1991a/1920; 1991b/1923; Frosh et al., 2000; Frosh et al., 2003). The central argument

of dynamic psychosocial identity theory is that the core element of identity is imagination and the ability to identify, sublimate, and reflect. From a dynamic psychosocial perspective, early development is important for beginning the reflective process of identity making as members of a collective/s. As such, early development is the process of becoming a social being, and becoming a carrier and creator of the socio-historical network of symbols. It is argued in this thesis that men are socialised so that they can belong to and engage in social networks that define themselves and others. In addition they develop a repertoire of social understandings and identity characteristics that are not only performed according to context, but are performed in the service of representing a consistent identity. This consistency in identity is based on the primary ability to imagine oneself as whole. As imagination is the central characteristic of identity, predicting and prescribing broad trends in masculinity and in men's collective understandings is problematic. Instead we must engage in a continual process of documentation and evaluation.

Therefore, apart from some autistic and psychotic states, the individual and the social are intrinsically connected and inseparable. Further, it is argued that current conceptions of causal links between the individual and society are of limited value and a shift is required in our understanding of human subjectivity. This dynamic psychosocial theory of subjectivity highlights the dynamic nature of the self, of identity, and of identity making, and will be developed as one way this shift can occur. In addition, this thesis argues that a new direction is needed to understand male issues, one that acknowledges the breadth and diversity of male experiences, and one that encourages active engagement with men.

### *Aims*

The primary aim of this research was to address these limitations in the literature by investigating in detail the everyday lives of men. Ethnographic data was used to explore the ways masculine identities are lived within two small sub-groups of men, including men's friendships and belonging. The aim was to describe in detail for purposes of theory development, and to gain knowledge of current male issues and practices. In particular this research addresses the following questions in relation to men and male identity:

1. How do men construct and negotiate their friendships?
2. How do definitions of masculinity relate to these friendships and to the men's everyday lives?

3. How do we best operationalise and conduct research to understand the current status of men?

### *Design*

At the commencement of this thesis, dynamic psychosocial male identity theory had not been illustrated in real life and in the everyday experiences of men. To illustrate and explore dynamic psychosocial identity construction in context, and in order to better understand the current status of men, this thesis utilised a qualitative ethnographic methodology in the study of two sub-groups of men (Griffin, 2000). One was a group of men from a small fishing village in southern Australia, and the other was a group of men from a gymnasium in Melbourne. The researcher documented the processes of engaging with and becoming a member of these groups of men, along with collecting ethnographic data for description and analysis.

It is the primary contention of this research that current empiricist approaches to research in this area have severely limited our ability to gain an informed understanding of men and male identity, as distinct from a masculine gender role perspective. Therefore, this study focused on developing an understanding of male identity as a dynamic relationship between core elements of identity in relation to one's socio-historical environment (both particular and generic: Castoriadis, 1997b/1975). The thesis incorporated two Studies: In study 1 the researcher collected ethnographic data via participant observation within the rural setting. In study 2 participant observation, focus group, and individual interview data was collected from the gymnasium setting to gain an understanding of the men, and some of the socio-cultural variables of each context (i.e. dominant masculine ideologies and stereotypes). It is proposed that improved understanding of the identities and lives of these men is best achieved through the detailed testimonies of individuals in context.

### *Contribution to Knowledge*

The outcomes of this study contributed towards the development of a theoretical understanding of men and male identity. It also contributed to the knowledge of how friendships are constructed within groups of men.

Specifically the outcomes of this study contributed towards:

1. The development of an understanding of the socio-cultural discourses relating to young adult male identity.
2. Providing an understanding of the dynamic nature of identity formation for young adult males.



3. Further development of a qualitative ethnographic methodology that addresses issues of both theory and practice.
4. Illustration of dynamic psychosocial identity theory in context, and further developed that theory.

### *Thesis Overview*

In Chapter two I critically review the existing literature relating to men's identities, and men's psychosocial well-being. I address the major arguments within men's studies such as the proposition that men's health is in crisis due to restrictive gendered identities, and restricted emotionality and connectedness. I also address the particular issues relating to young adult men, and men from rural areas in Australia.

In Chapter three I critically review subjectivity and identity theory, and put forward the central arguments of this thesis regarding the definition of, and implications of, dynamic psychosocial identity theory. I also critically address current conceptions of male identity and wellbeing including the concept of self-esteem.

In Chapter four I discuss in detail the ways in which dynamic psychosocial identity is developed in early childhood. In particular, I highlight the importance of the development of the processes of identification, sublimation, and reflection to identity development and maintenance.

In Chapter five I critically discuss the methodology of this thesis, and offer reflections and practical information for future ethnographic research. In particular, I document my tensions and struggles in attempting to gain an ethnographic understanding of the everyday lives of two groups of men.

In Chapter six I lay down exactly how this study was conducted. As such I offer a straight forward methodological summary of this ethnographic study. I document the data collection techniques used, as well as the types of data analysis and reporting techniques used.

In Chapter seven I introduce the participants of this thesis. Firstly, I discuss my ethnographic experiences with a group of men from a rural location, and secondly I discuss my experiences with a group of men from a gymnasium in metropolitan Australia.

In Chapter eight I describe in narrative form the everyday lives of the men from the gymnasium, and in doing so, I introduce the reader to the stories, friendships, humour, and tensions shared by these men.

In Chapter nine I present the focus group and interview findings of this study in the form of a series of excerpts. These excerpts are analysed in terms of the men's conversational styles, motivations and behaviours, and social discourses including those related to hegemonic masculinity, and as they relate to the men's everyday lives.

In Chapter ten I bring together all of the findings of this study, and discuss their meaning in relation to known theory and understanding of men's lives. In particular I position the findings of this study within a socio-historical context, and discuss the importance of dynamic psychosocial identity.

In Chapter eleven I conclude the thesis and review the findings and implications. The conclusion is presented in light of the initial aims of the thesis, the contributions to knowledge and practice that were made, and future directions in research.

## Chapter 2

## Revisiting the World of Men

Within current clinical and research practice, when a sub-population within our society appears to be disadvantaged, in danger, or in poor health, we look for a solution by separating them out from the broader population. For example, the group in question within the current research study are young, male, and live in both rural and urban contexts. They are therefore assigned certain characteristics associated with men and not with women (Clare, 2000), with being young adults as apposed to being a child or middle aged (Erikson, 1980), with being rural as apposed to urban and vice versa (Judd & Humphreys, 2001), and finally with being young males in contrast to any other classificatory group (Watts Jr & Borders, 2005).

The need for identification as such has been based on the alleged and widely publicised poor psychosocial health of young men in comparison to other sub-populations. Social research on men and masculinities has most commonly arisen within a deficit framework in regards to men's health and well-being. For example the higher occurrences of risk taking behaviours in men (compared to women) have been highlighted and explanations and interventions sought (Courtenay, 2000). It is then the task of those concerned, be it politicians, health professionals, or researchers, to construct causal theories of and solutions for the groups alleged ill health. This is achieved by comparing the group against the broader social, and in the case of investigations into the health and well-being of men, this strategy has had limited success. Research on men has increased rapidly over the last twenty years, but despite this there has been little change in the health status of young men (ABS, 2003, 2006).

The difficulty with this process of didactic comparison between young men and broader society is that it fails to go beyond the recognition of difference. It is commonly assumed that the unique characteristics of young men represent a dysfunction and require intervention (Clare, 2000). As such, little effort is made to develop an in-depth understanding of such phenomena within the contexts of men's lives. For example young men's risk taking behaviours have been identified as antecedents to ill-health, but as yet little is known of the social construction of such behaviours within male sub-groups (Gutmann, 1996). There is some evidence that risk taking behaviours are often conducive to acceptance, and part of the identity development and negotiation processes within male sub-groups (Garot, 2007; Phillips,

2001). However, in some instances this risk taking may be seen as preparation for future life tasks and roles. As such there is a need for research that goes beyond the recognition of specific gendered difference as problematic per se, and searches for more detailed understandings of the functionality of identified behaviours.

The concept of masculinity evolved out of the socio-political viewpoint of the feminine and from major changes to western cultural gendered knowledge, which emanated from the feminist movement of the 1960's and 1970's (Connell, 1995, 2000). Prior to this period the male perspective was rarely reflected upon, as it was the dominant voice (Gilligan, 1982). The male perspective was dominant within all major institutions, including academia, and hence was implicitly adhered to (Francis, 2002). Historically taken for granted, post the feminist movement masculinity has been portrayed as embodying the characteristics related to success, power and privilege in a patriarchal Western society (Boon, 2005). Masculinity has also been associated with stunted emotionality, short sightedness, violence, and war. In addition, masculinity has come to represent the apparatus of oppression for many sub-populations within western societies, most notably women. As such the construct of masculinity is despised as well as envied. On one hand masculine behaviours such as courage, strength, rationality, and drive are elevated as ideals, and on the other hand, aggression, violence, and masculine emotional and interpersonal styles are problematised.

Recently there have been indications of a change towards a men's socio-political movement (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2002; Phoenix, 2004; Wong et al., 2006). This movement is arguing for improved men's health, well-being, and gender relations by extending beyond a deterministic understanding. In order to do this we need to construct a new lens, one that is not tied to the chains of the past. Many of the discourses surrounding masculine characteristics and behaviours are imbued with meanings that require updating. For example, within psychological discourses the feminine emotional aspect has become the central baseline for psychosocial well-being (Cohen, 1992; Gard & Kring, 2007; Reid & Fine, 1992; Wong et al., 2006; Wong & Rochlen, 2005). From this perspective male well-being is problematised for its difference in emotionality in comparison to the feminine.

Psychological discourses commonly promote the cathartic value of verbal emotional expression as having positive health qualities (Tremblay & L'Heureux, 2005). The masculine trait of emotional inexpressiveness or fear of feminine

emotionality is then assumed to be at the core of male psychological problems. Further, there is both an academic and public discourse that proposes the encouragement of male emotional expression as the key for both prevention and counselling of male psychosocial problems. For instance, Tremblay and Heureux developed a tailored approach to counselling men. Importantly, they considered the biasing effects of the social image of the toxic male within the therapeutic relationship, and addressed the difficulty men have in seeking help. However, the approach itself was nothing new. The argument given by these authors was that men take longer than women to open up in the therapeutic context, and hence the counsellor must be patient and non-confronting. They argued that in doing this the counsellor would be able to unlock the doors to emotion. Hence, this approach still assumes that emotional divulgence is an effective intervention with men, and that men simply take longer to open up. As yet there is little known of the emotional lives of men outside of comparisons to female emotionality (Wong et al., 2006; Wong & Rochlen, 2005). As noted by Addis and Cohane (2005), “focusing on difference as an organizing framework is severely limiting when it comes to understanding men’s (or women’s) experiences of problems in living” (p.635). Currently, masculine traits such as stoicism and emotional restraint are often conceived as obstacles to good health. However, to date little reference is given to the requisite adoption of these traits within life roles and tasks. The current thesis argues that the key to understanding men’s issues lies in stepping outside the comparative ‘gendered’ paradigm to build an informed functional understanding of the social construction of men and their groups.

In order to re-address men’s emotional lives, psychosocial health and well-being, we require a more balanced perspective on two levels. Firstly, there is the need to build an empirical understanding of men from masculine as well as feminine perspectives. Second, the socio-historical outcomes and influences of the gender movement need to be understood and addressed in their relationship to our current conceptualisation of men and masculinity.

Research to date has had difficulty in unpacking gendered oppositions and investigations to find a functional male position. This research is problematised by the compounding issues of male guilt, male blaming, and male pride, which has led to the research being presupposed by conceptions of either maleness as all bad (Clare, 2000), or maleness as all good (Beynon, 2002). In order to move beyond this dichotomous opposition we need to begin with a more neutral and inquisitive

position, which includes all the varied cultural manifestations of maleness and their inherent complexities (Fitzpatrick, 2006). The focus of such research needs to be shifted to the here and now, where contemporary male issues can be discussed and addressed.

### *Crisis of Masculinity?*

High crime, suicide and mortality rates, as well as increasing drug and alcohol abuse among young men have lead many researchers and health professionals to proclaim men as suffering from a crisis of masculinity (Clare, 2000). The notion of a crisis involving all men in western societies is extreme, however it has become a prevailing discourse, with substantive evidence indicating that particular groups of men, that is, Indigenous men (Oxfam, 2007), immigrant men (Lopez, Haigh, & Burney, 2004), young rural men (Judd et al., 2002) may be at greater risk. Subsequently, recent research has suggested that while hegemonic masculine stereotypes such as stoicism, aggression, and emotional inexpressiveness are risk factors leading to poor psychosocial health, socio-historical, geographical, and economic factors are believed to compound these issues (Frosh et al., 2000).

Given this complexity in profiling men, I argue it is not only difficult but highly problematic to isolate one, or even a handful of factors, such as notions of masculinity, as being antagonistic factors in identified poor health outcomes for men. As argued by Nardi (1992), the differences between (and within) groups of men and between men in general are extensive and hence generalisation to all is problematic. Howard (2000) proposed that rather than being passive receivers of masculine stereotypes men are often active producers of this frame of reference. From this perspective men are not necessarily vulnerable and dependent on external factors, but can choose to replicate or be in opposition to dominant male stereotypes and behaviours. Indeed, the position taken by any male is often variable and is dependent on their sense of psychosocial identity. More recently, others (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2002; Wong & Rochlen, 2005) have suggested that the prevailing focus on deficits in hegemonic masculinity (relative to femininity) within the literature has been ineffective as a means of promoting the psychosocial health of men. Rather, by problematising masculine traits and behaviours we have perpetuated a culture of shame, guilt, and blame. Consequently we have witnessed the evolution of a normative and potentially problematic aspect of male identity. Indeed, a significant portion of current masculinity research focuses on men's negative influence on their

communities. I would argue that rather than beginning with the premise that men are in trouble or are in some way emotionally or behaviourally deficient, future research would be better placed within a neutral and inquisitive context. The aim of such research would be to build a well-rounded or balanced view of men from a holistic viewpoint. That is, by incorporating consideration of potentially healthy and proactive aspects of male cultural groups, researchers can offer a less pathologised perspective of the concept of masculinity and offset the sense of deficit within the group as a whole. Indeed, we need to broaden our understanding of the concept and construct of male and masculine to incorporate differences and include non-clinical and non-deviant samples.

#### *Men's Physical Health and Well-Being*

Research has shown that in western countries men die on average up to 8 years younger than women. In addition men have higher death rates in the majority of the 15 main causes of death (Courtenay, 2000, 2003). In the United Kingdom more men than women die in every age category below 75 years of age (White, 2006). Courtenay (2003) identified four key categories of health determination; biological, socio-economic, cultural, and environmental factors; health related beliefs and emotional expression; health care; and behaviour. Courtenay (2000) proposed that only the behavioural category could explain these gender differences. Men were found to be less health conscious than women in regards to smoking, drinking and driving, getting health screenings, awareness of medical conditions, taking vitamins, and dietary practices. Hence, it was argued that men's poorer health behaviours predominantly accounted for men's alleged ill health in comparison to women.

White (2006) argued that we should not assume women's health to be the benchmark for men to strive towards. Rather, he suggested that the biological and gendered differences of men and women prevent direct comparisons of health in relation to age and behaviour. As such future research is needed to focus on making improvements in relation to specific aspects of men's health within a holistic framework. One example of this has been recent programs directed towards the early detection of prostate cancer (Gotay, Holup, & Muraoka, 2002). The focus of these programs has been on the early detection of prostate cancer through promoting greater health awareness and greater health responsibility using a variety of male role models. This has resulted in increased rates of men undertaking prostate cancer screenings, and ultimately, improved early detection rates. Thus, rather than castigating men for

their lack of engagement with an identified health problem, the use of a variety of 'respected' male voices was found to provide an effective approach to engaging men in new behaviours.

According to the current debate within the literature, those who wish to make a positive contribution to men's health need to address men's health behaviours as the site of improvement (Courtenay, 2000). However, before going on to discuss the antecedents of men's health behaviour it is necessary to ask the question as to whether we need to address men's health at all. Lumb (2003) suggested that in Australia the media discourse surrounding men's health began gaining momentum from about 1994 and epidemiological data has been discussed in academic circles since the 1980's. It would appear that the emphasis and pathologisation of men's health during this period has not been a reaction to an evidenced or perceived decline in health for men, but rather, the result of a gendered comparison, which emphasises women's bodies as a site of health intervention (Monro & Huon, 2005). Over the last 40 or 50 years women have learnt to perceive many life events, stages, and problems in medical terms (e.g. menopause, maternity, menses, body shape and size). If we do not wish to use women's health or non-health as a site of comparison then it is important to establish sound independent reasons and hence sound strategies for men. We also need to monitor any possible side effects that come from emphasising the body as a site of intervention. The side effects of the objectification of women's bodies are now widely discussed within the literature (Heldman, 2008; Muehlenkamp, Swanson, & Brausch, 2005; Sheffield, Voigt, & Wilcox-Constantine, 2007).

Utilising gender role theory, some theorists have argued that men's more risky health behaviours can be attributed to learnt masculine stereotypical behaviours (Willott & Griffin, 2004). For example, Thompson and Cracco (2008) argued that male aggression and sexual aggression is a direct consequence of learnt masculine roles. In this conception dominant masculine behaviours such as those that emphasise emotional and physical control, stoicism, and the denial of weakness and the need for help, are repeated almost unconsciously. These behaviours are rewarded with both public and private approval while behaviours transgressing the dominant stereotype are avoided for fear of being seen as feminine or even homosexual (Boon, 2005). Others have argued that gender is not fixed and static but rather fluid and contextual (Courtenay, 2000). Rather than being a rigid part of the self, masculine behaviours are



considered to be performed in interaction with others; hence there are many ways of being a man and being masculine.

What is generally agreed upon is that masculine characteristics such as stoicism, control, hard work, and creative intensity are rewarded in Western societies in terms of power, status, and wealth. The behavioural manifestations of these characteristics are also believed to be detrimental to long-term health. These behaviours include working long hours, having limited recreational and family time, eating convenience foods, skipping meals, and taking stimulants such as coffee and cigarettes to increase work output. Courtenay (2000) argued that in some ways the predominantly characterised behavioural aspects of masculinity are incongruent with health promoting behaviours.

Masculinity is also conceived of as hierarchical, with Anglo Celtic masculinity at the top and minority variations lower down. Hegemonic masculinity is associated with success and power and it is often minority groups or the poor who are denied access to this power (Frosh et al., 2000). For minority groups of men lower down the hierarchy, hegemonic masculinity can be perceived as restrictive, unjust, and disadvantageous. In some cases there is the perception of a lack of control over one's life. This is often tied in with restricted access to social resources. These men can be at risk of undertaking hyper masculine risk taking behaviours as a means of deriving a sense of control over their bodies and their manhood. In addition these men are often employed in manual labour industries and perform physically demanding duties, which can have both short-term and long-term health consequences.

Poor health behaviour is also tied up in societal structures such as the legal system, politics, and dangerous occupations. Courtenay (2000) stated that "men sustain and reproduce institutional structures in part for the privileges they derive from preserving existing power structures" (p.1397). Hence, by changing their health behaviours men risk losing their patriarchal advantage and power in relation to women and lower ranked male groups. While some would debate the necessary connection between health behaviours and social power structures, it is clear that hegemonic masculinity is utilised in different ways. Firstly it can be performed in order to gain power and privilege. Those at the top of the masculine hierarchy use their knowledge and mastery of hegemonic masculinity to procure status and wealth. In addition, men learn and repeat behaviours consistent with hegemonic masculinity more implicitly. Furthermore, hegemonic masculinity can also be a site of protest and

can be acted against in opposition. In the case of minority ethnic groups, available elements of hegemonic masculinity can be emphasised and even exaggerated for establishing a sense of masculine identity (Edley, 2001; Frosh et al., 2000; Phinney, 2005; Rezende & Lima, 2004).

It is argued in this thesis that the majority of men share an understanding or at least recognition of the dominant ideologies and behaviours surrounding being a man. However, there is great variation in the ways these knowledges are utilised, performed, identified with, and felt by different men. One of the aims of this thesis is to explore some of the ways masculine discourses are negotiated within sub-groups of men. Of particular interest is the degree of both collective and personal investment in hegemonic masculinity. It may be that those most advantaged by using hegemonic masculinity, and who use it successfully as a social tool, are also less personally invested. That is they stake less of their sense of identity and self-worth in conforming to masculine norms, and see them more as a tool rather than a benchmark to live up to. As such all men will have different investments in hegemonic masculinity in terms of their identity and psychosocial well-being. The behavioural manifestations of these investments may range from overt 'bloke' to a chameleon like 'smooth operator'.

Despite the growing concern for men's health in recent years there has been little in the way of socio-political change. Lumb (2003) argued that of the limited number of men's health policies developed in Australia from 1996, very few have been implemented. The exceptions have been prostate cancer prevention awareness strategies and the improved safety of sexual practices. Lumb attributed this failure to implement policy to four factors. First, the dominance of the medical paradigm means that individual pathologies and diseases are given more consideration than social processes. Second, there is insufficient social research on men to complement and contextualise epidemiological data. Third, there is a lack of men's policy advocates. Finally, the current political ideology of economic liberalism limits the scope for social movements. From Lumb's analysis it would appear that men's health practices could be changed through regulation of public environments. However, any changes in policy and practice need to be guided by research from a social constructionist rather than a medical perspective. Moreover, it should not be assumed that any social movement related to men's health be subsumed within the framework of a women's movement.

*Men's Psychological Health and Well-being*

There is an abundance of mental health statistics relating to deviance from normative behaviour that societies measure and monitor. When sex differences are observed in relation to these behavioural deviations, issues of masculinity and femininity are raised and contested in search for explanation and change. In Australia, mental health statistics have revealed some interesting differences between men and women in terms of illness and disease.

According to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2003):

- The most commonly reported mental or behavioural problems in 2001 were mood (affective) problems (45%) and anxiety problems (45%).
- Females were more likely than males to report a long-term mental or behavioural problem in 2001 (10.6% of females compared to 8.5% of males).
- In 2001 females reported the highest rate of mental or behavioural problems overall in each five-year age group, with the exception of those aged under 18 years.
- Females reported the highest rates of anxiety and affective disorders while men reported the highest number of substance abuse disorders.
- The 18-24 age group reported the highest rates of mental or behavioural problems. This rate reduced at each subsequent age group.

These statistics indicated that women reported a marginally higher overall rate of mental illness. Interestingly this was due to high rates of anxiety disorders (includes panic disorder, agoraphobia, social phobia, generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and affective disorders (includes depression, dysthymia, mania, hypomania and bipolar affective disorder). Men reduced the overall statistical difference with higher rates of substance abuse disorders (harmful use and dependence).

According to this data depression comprised the majority of the affective disorders suffered by Australians. Ninety-two percent of all males and 83% of all females with an affective disorder suffered from depression. Of those with a mental disorder, 38% used a health service for a mental health problem in the 12 months prior to the interview, with 29% consulting a general medical practitioner, 7.5% a

psychiatrist, and 6.5% a psychologist. Women were more likely than men to use services for a mental health problem (46% compared to 29%). The likelihood of using health services for a mental health problem was closely related to the type of mental disorder. For example, health services were used by 56% of those with an affective disorder only; such services were used by just 14% of those with a substance use disorder only. In 2001, 9.6% of the population (1.8 million people) reported having a long-term mental or behavioural problem that lasted, or was expected to last, for six months or more. Of those with a mental or behavioural disorder who used services for mental health problems, 60% received counselling; 60% were given medication; and 32% were provided with information about mental illness and treatments.

In 2004-05 we can observe some consistencies as well as some changes in these statistics (ABS, 2006). The consistencies and changes are as follow:

#### *Consistencies*

- The most commonly reported mental or behavioural problems in 2004-05 were mood (affective) problems (50%) and anxiety problems (46%).
- Females were more likely than males to report a long-term mental or behavioural problem in 2004-05 (11.4% of females compared to 10% of males).
- In 2004-05 females reported the highest rate of mental or behavioural problems overall in each five-year age group, with the exception of those aged under 18 years.
- Females reported the highest rates of anxiety and affective disorders while men reported the highest number of substance abuse disorders.

#### *Changes*

- In 2004-05 females reported higher rates than males for mental or behavioural problems overall in each five-year age group, with the exception of those aged under 18 years *and those aged over 75 years*.
- The 35–44 age group reported the highest rates of mental or behavioural problems.

Comparing the two census results (2001 and 2004/05) the percentage of reported mental or behavioural problems for women increased by 0.8 % and for men

it increased by 1.5%. This might suggest that mental illness in men has increased at a higher rate than in women. However, it may also be due in part to increased reporting rates in men. It may be that men's reluctance to report mental illness has lessened and resulted in an evening up of gendered statistics. The noted general rise in reported psychological and behavioural problems between the two censuses could be attributed to recent social problems such as rising job insecurity and severe drought. It might also represent an increase in reporting mental illness due to a lessening of social stigma around mental illness.

Overall, mood disorders increased while anxiety disorders stayed around the same mark. Most striking was that the 18-24 age group was no longer the most problematic age group (now 4<sup>th</sup>), while the 35-44 group is now the most problematic.

Interestingly when marital status was investigated it was found that those people separated or divorced had the highest rates of mental or behavioural problems. The lowest percentage rate for men was found in the widowed group followed by those who were married.

Those who were most socio-economically disadvantaged had higher rates of mental and behavioural problems than those least socio-economically disadvantaged (16%-9%). They also had higher comparative percentage rates of psychological distress (20%-8%).

The current focus on collecting and analysing psychological census data and the lessening of social stigmas regarding mental health issues diverts attention away from broader social problems. The strain people may be feeling due to socio-economic, socio-political, or environmental issues can be deflected onto psychology as an outcome and as a potential solution. This thesis argues that we are witnessing the appropriation of psychological theory and practice into many aspects of social life. The result is an increasing discussion of, and reliance on, psychological intervention. The mental health figures then reflect an increasing social awareness of psychological states and psychological terminology, and a decreased awareness of the social antecedents of such states (Foucault, 1976).

For example, in the case of rising reported mental and behavioural health problems in men, the socio-political focus has shifted to the men themselves. Researchers have investigated men as 'object', to find the intrinsic elements of the male psyche responsible for ill health. In doing so the eclectic nature of men as a group and the myriad of social influences on their lives are underestimated. What we

end up with is social pathologising of aspects of male psychological experience. For instance, researched masculine commonalities such as stoicism and emotional control become stubbornness and emotional restrictiveness when reported in light of a perceived mental health crisis. The result can be the objectification of men, and male feelings of individual fault and deficiency. Consequently, the normative idea of men as emotionally restricted is contributing to men viewing their emotional lives as potentially problematic.

### *Male Emotions*

Similarly, while few people are suggesting that men's psychological well-being is impoverished, there is a common theme within the literature that men suffer from a restricted emotionality (Castellini et al., 2005; Cohen, 1992; Fink & Wild, 1995; Fischer et al., 2004; Markiewicz, Devine, & Kausilas, 2000; Reid & Fine, 1992; Seidler, 1992; Smith & Winchester, 1998; Spain, 1992; Wellman, 1992; Williams, 1992). This psychological feature of men's lived experiences has been linked to men's overall psycho-physiological health and well-being. Researchers have argued that gender role socialisation results in men fearing being feminine, and hence fearing the expression of felt emotions. The supposed dysfunction associated with fulfilling these conflicting roles has been labelled gender role conflict. Indeed, within empirical research gender role conflict is the most commonly reported cause of men's psychological and physiological problems (Schwartz, Waldo, & Higgins, 2004; Watts Jr & Borders, 2005). According to Watts Jr and Borders, conflict occurs when rigid gender roles result in personal restriction, devaluation, self harm, or harm to others. Gender role conflict has been found to occur across all major areas of life; success/power/competition; emotionality life; interpersonal relationships and affection; and in balancing work and family life. The common element in gender role conflict theory is the need for men to restrict and monitor their emotions and behaviours in line with hegemonic masculine scripts. However, one could argue that social boundaries and restrictions are a necessary part of life for men and women and not necessarily problematic. It is the restriction on expressing sadness that has been identified by psychologists such as Tremblay and L'Heureux (2005) as the problematic restrictive element in masculinity. This has been determined through comparison to feminine emotionality in which crying, affection, and verbal discussions of emotion are identified components.

According to Rokach and Brock (1997), and others (e.g, Seidler, 1992), men are believed to lack a depth of vocabulary, and are naturally reluctant to express feelings of closeness, sadness, need, or loneliness. Hence, they are often portrayed as emotionally impoverished and at greater psychological risk than women. Seidler (1992) suggested that men hide their negative fantasies for fear of rejection. For a man to be reliant on friends was viewed as a failure or a lack of individualism. Seidler suggested that “our denial of our own needs is reinforced within a vision of masculinity that says that men do not have needs” (p.29). Hence male identity is perceived as being highly individualistic rather than collectivistic. Reid and Fine (1992) described male friendships as more side by side rather than face to face. In this conception male friendships are largely the products of and are maintained by shared goals or activities. Male friendships then are rarely nurtured in their own right.

Wong, Pituch and Rochlen (2006) examined the relationship between emotional restriction, repressed negative feelings, and anxiety in men. Unexpectedly they found that restricted emotionality in men, did not predict negative feelings or anxiety, suggesting that men are more unwilling, rather than unable, to express emotions. They concluded that the degree to which individuals value emotional expression is the most salient predictor of emotional expression. Hence, they argued that the psycho-social functionality of emotional expression may be determined by the degree to which a person values such expression (Wong & Rochlen, 2005). Hence, the assumption that men’s psychological well-being is jeopardised by restricted emotional expression must be questioned. It is most likely the case that qualitative differences exist between men and women’s emotional lives and the supposed cathartic qualities of emotional talk for women may not be transferable to men. Wong et al. (2006) found that for men the inability to identify emotions was the best predictor of anxiety. Hence it was reflective emotional intelligence rather than expressivity that predicted psychological well-being. Could it be possible that as a group, men differ to women in the ways in which they experience, negotiate, and express emotion? In particular it may be that psychological research that centres on male verbal emotional expression neglects the complexities of men’s emotional lives.

In problematising psychosocial aspects of men’s lived experiences we run the risk of weakening men’s resilience rather than strengthening it. Fitzpatrick (2006) argued that many once celebrated masculine characteristics such as aggression, initiative, and imagination are now pathologised. He criticised the current ‘men’s

movement' by suggesting that the cultivation of a 'new man' who is more feminine, cautious, passive, and introspective will not result in better health. Rather, the objectification of men's bodies in terms of medical and psychological diagnosis will encourage men to redefine everyday experiences as illness labels. Fitzpatrick further suggested that the "danger of the men's health project is that, in disparaging masculinity, it risks endorsing a wider diminution of human subjectivity" (p.262). This view puts into question the socio-historical relationship between psychology as a discipline and men's health and well-being. In particular, psychology has emphasised emotional talk and hence a more typically feminine emotional experience as a therapeutic tool. It follows that men's emotional difference has been offered as the first site of intervention for men's perceived health deficits.

Instead, psychology needs to be sensitive and malleable to the particular circumstances of men. Saliently, many cultural theorists within psychology are arguing for a need for cultural groups to negotiate and produce their own versions of psychological theory and practice (Gergen, 1993; Sinha & Kao, 1997; Sonn & Fisher, 2005). Rather than promote a singular vision for psychology, these authors are promoting the development and recognition of multiple 'indigenous' psychologies on a global scale. In particular, it is argued that psychology as it currently stands, represents a mono-cultural Western values set, and is of limited usefulness when dealing with a variety of cultural groups. It is imaginable then that multiple psychologies of men can be developed within this vision of an eclectic psychology. As yet there has been little discussion of this possibility within the psychological literature. Qualitative differences between men and women in the psychological experience of emotion however, are beginning to be discussed.

In addressing the historical and political aspects of emotion, Shields (2005) argued that individual and group identities are shaped by collectively constructed emotional norms. Therefore she proposed that the 'right' or the 'accepted' kind of emotion in any situation is determined by cultural norms (Shields, 2007). According to Shields, emotion was dichotomised along gender lines from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards by an 'enlightened' sentiment, wherein effable emotion (feminine) was conceptualised as measurable through cognitive and physiological expression, while ineffable emotion (masculine) was an unmeasurable motivating force. As such, feminine emotion was associated with the domestic sphere, was conceptualised as an unstable sensitivity towards oneself and others, and was extravagantly expressive.



Conversely, masculine emotion was an intense creative and motivating force, was controllable, and socially and publicly useful. As such, the masculine trait of holding in and harnessing emotion is publicly beneficial while the feminine trait of extravagant expression is domestically beneficial. Shields (2007) argued that the development of psychology as the scientific study of emotion legitimised and naturalised popular gendered conceptions of emotion. Emotion allowed men to excel in the public sphere while feminine emotion was its complementary domestic opposite. In this conception masculine emotion is not inexpressive but controlled, channelled, and directed expression. As such qualitative differences in men and women's emotional lives are socio-historically situated.

It has been argued that while men and women are expected to use both types of emotion according to context, men struggle with extravagant emotional expression within interpersonal relationships (Shields, 2005). Wood and Inman (1993) argued that feminine interpersonal styles have been legitimised and are equated with intimacy. From a socio-cultural perspective there may be good reason for men's supposed inexpressiveness. Boon (2005) suggested that masculine emotion is interrelated with the mythic male hero narrative and is culturally beneficial. The author noted that in times of greater perceived mortality such as war or after terrorist attacks, the superhero leader myth is socially invoked. Collectively people look to a leader or leaders such as politicians or fire fighters who are perceived to be protective in their personification of the masculine emotion ideal of grace under pressure. As noted by Boon and much earlier by Freud (1991c/1921) when the cultural group in question hold more rigid black and white, good and evil views, the desire and need to create heroes is greater. These heroes or leaders have a social function by reducing group anxiety and facilitating group cohesion and co-operation. Freud argued that within powerfully lead social groups, individual egos become more and more humble, and the object or leader more and more larger than life, until most of the groups' individual narcissistic instincts disappear entirely. Under this condition the ego is capable of much self-sacrifice and obedience. As Boon noted "tenacity and faith are the heroic figure's allies; complexity and reason are its adversaries" (p.305). It is argued that the hero helps define masculinity but at the same time sets an unattainable ideal.

Men receive social benefits for presenting themselves in line with this ideal in terms of job success, leadership, and sexual attractiveness. Extravagant emotional

expressiveness would break the illusion and hence men in general prefer to maintain an emotional distance. To some this creates a double bind where men can only escape the unreachable hero demands by abdicating their masculinity. Whitehead (2005) even suggested that violence between men is generally attributable to disputed claims over hero status. He argued that “the continuity of violence by men suggests that men may be bound, as a gender category, across social divisions, by a commonality that is not readily visible, and not changed by apparent shifts in gendered role boundaries” (p.412). This commonality would be adherence to and desire for the hero status. One questions however whether this bind is necessarily problematic as men are able to call on the hero myth according to context, rather than being enslaved by it. Moreover, men’s emotional expression can be at times carefully self-controlled and self-monitored in order to reap the benefits of leadership and of hero status, without it being an intrinsic component of their identity.

#### *Male Friendship*

According to the literature, men’s lack of verbal emotionality and their rivalry over leadership and hero status, is related to and makes difficult the formation and maintenance of satisfying friendships with other men (Town, 2004). Women and women’s friendships are the point of comparison for this problem in men, wherein the reported female form of extensive and continual verbal emotive engagement with each other is seen to be more conducive to psychosocial well-being and mutual support. However, given the difficulties inherent in making gendered comparisons, one cannot be completely convinced that this is necessarily an appropriate or balanced comparative stance (Fischer et al., 2004; Gard & Kring, 2007).

The limited number of published studies on male friendships that I have been able to find have revealed mixed results. Most salient are descriptions of male friendships as being located within the boundary of convenience and based on shared interests and shared societal positions (age, race, location etc) rather than being based on shared emotional understanding and rapport (Seidler, 1992; Spain, 1992; Wellman, 1992). The rationale for reliance on convenience has been justified by multiple extraneous factors such as a lack of time and opportunity to develop emotional bonds due to work, family, and cultural expectations (Cohen, 1992), the decline in male community clubs and the subsequent trend towards one-on-one domestically situated friendships (Wellman, 1992), and the problematic association between male intimacy and homosexuality (Nardi, 1992).

Conversely, Fink and Wild (1995) reported that the simple act of having similar economic or social interests was not a significant indicator of male friendship choice. Although they did not offer an alternative their results suggested that male friendship choice was more complex and multifaceted than formerly thought. Similarly, Markiewicz, Devine and Kausilas (2000) found that male friendships were not reported as less emotionally satisfying than female friendships. Their research suggested that men derived a sense of belonging and support from their same sex friendships. Mankowski and Silvergleid (2000) estimated that in the United States several hundred thousand men have been part of mutual support groups, and that these groups have been effective in addressing men's social and health problems. Further research has also indicated that there has been a resurgence of men's groups within communities (Castellini et al, 2005; Smith & Winchester, 1998) further emphasising the importance of friendship and belonging in men's lives. However, to date, the understanding of the value or need for same sex friendships amongst men remains equivocal and requires further research. In order to address this deficit, the intent of the current study was to investigate male friendships and their relation to health and well-being. In particular, the current study aimed to examine the structure of male friendships, and the importance and format of emotional expression in the development and maintenance of a male social system.

#### *Summarising Men's Health Statistics*

In summarising the current health statistics, it would appear that while some differences exist between the health of men and women, most notably a shorter life expectancy for men, more substance abuse problems, and less help seeking behaviours, there are generally more similarities than differences (ABS, 2003, 2006). It must also be remembered that when viewing health statistics, it is often large discrepancies in the health of minority groups such as indigenous groups or remote groups, which result in across the board differences (Oxfam, 2007). In terms of men's health one size does not fit all and it appears claims of a masculine crisis are exaggerated. As noted by Judd (2002), within the current health data it was the subcategory known as young rural men that disproportionately contributed to overall high rates of health risk behaviours. This report has prompted researchers to investigate the health of this group, and commonly, the construct of masculinity has been the central focus.

### Young Men

Health statistics presented earlier suggest that young men aged 18-34 have high levels of health risk behaviours such as drug and alcohol misuse, poor dietary practices, dangerous work practices, and unsafe automobile practices. Males had higher suicide rates than women in all age groups in Australia in 2005 (refer Figure 1). While in 1997 males in the 18-24 age group had the highest suicide rates, in 2005 the age differences have reduced, and it is men in the 20-49 age grouping as well as the 75 plus group that have the highest rates. Overall however there were minimal age differences, but significant gender differences.

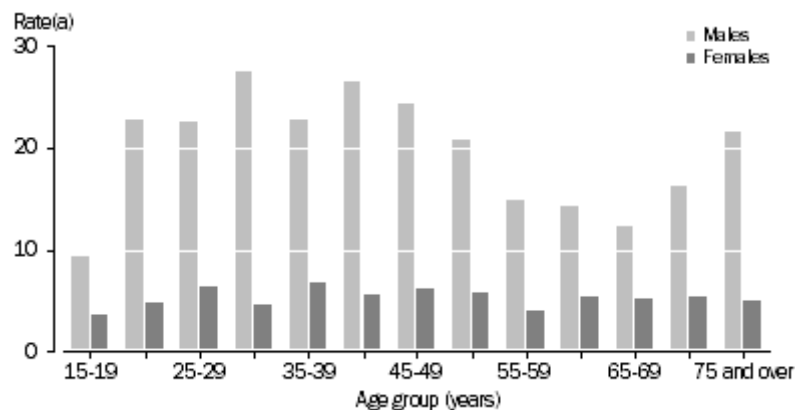


Figure 1 Age specific suicide rates per 100,000 population 2005

In relation to the relative poor health of young men some authors have argued that masculine prescriptions and prohibitions are particularly difficult to incorporate for young male identities (Schwartz et al., 2004; Watts Jr & Borders, 2005). Developmental challenges such as adjustment to full time work or tertiary education, the pressure to establish and maintain intimate relationships, and establishing financial independence necessitate identity development (Szajnberg & Massie, 2003). They also encompass new masculine prescriptions and prohibitions such as those found in an office work environment. Compounding the health risk of stress created by new challenges are masculine risk taking behaviours such as drugs, speeding, and aggressive sports and hobbies.

It must be remembered that at least to some degree risk taking behaviour is part of 'normative' development for young men and boys and to aim to eradicate this would interfere with men's developmental explorations with their bodies. Young men are also less likely than other groups to express their frustration and to seek help from others (Addis & Cohane, 2005). On the other hand controlling and harnessing

emotion is an important developmental task for men in preparing them for public endeavours (Shields, 2007). It is therefore important that research investigates the lived experiences of young men in order to understand the psychosocial complexities involved in this stage of life.

Judd and Humphreys (2001) argued that a sense of hope for the future and a feeling of being valued by one's community promotes resilience in young men. Within some rural communities, however, promoting resilience in young men has been difficult due to the challenges presented by environmental and economic factors. Gaining a sense of pride through contribution to one's community is made difficult by unemployment, poverty, and limited recreational resources. Research has also shown that rural life can have positive health promoting qualities such as clean air, and friendly interpersonal networks (Glendinning, Nuttall, Hendry, Kloep, & Wood, 2003). Hence the range of experiences for men in rural communities is vast and negates the value of generalised assumptions surrounding their health and well-being. While research in this area has identified the heterogeneity of rural communities, it has the tendency to still assume homogeneity in the experiences of men living in rural communities.

#### *The Rural Setting*

Rural communities are not homogenous and there are multiple definitions within the literature. According to the Vic Health Organisation, rural communities vary in many dimensions including demography, economic variables, employment patterns, provision of services, as well as more subjective measures such as community wellbeing and connectedness. However, it is generally agreed that rural communities are geographically distant from a major urban centre, have a smaller and less concentrated population, and hold more traditional values and beliefs than urban communities. The advantages of living in a rural area have been listed as cleaner air and water, being closer to nature, a stronger sense of community, traditional values and beliefs, and less psychological pressure. Conversely, disadvantages of rural life may include feelings of isolation, restricted services, transport limitations, environmental hazards, rapid changes in infrastructure, social stresses, pressure to adhere to behavioural norms, limited social opportunities, the withdrawal of essential services such as banks and schools, and limited employment opportunities (Wainer & Chesters, 2000). The research literature generally presents rural life from a deficit perspective, emphasising these negative attributes as well as rural/urban discrepancies

in health statistics (ABS, 2004). It is possible that this widespread deficit perspective influences the way rural people themselves view their lives and thus perpetuates a cycle of perceived rural deficit.

Australian health statistics (ABS, 2004) have suggested that people living in rural communities have poorer health outcomes than metropolitan citizens. This includes an array of physical diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, neurological and sense disorders, chronic respiratory disease, musculoskeletal diseases, and physical injury. In terms of psychosocial well-being, rural/urban comparisons of mental well-being are made difficult by a lack of mental health services in rural Australia and an alleged attitudinal reluctance of rural communities to seek out mental health care professionals. It has been argued that this apparent stoicism combined with a lack of services contributes to more extreme cases of mental illness such as bipolar disorders, personality disorders, and suicidal ideation. According to the Victorian Suicide Prevention Task Force Report (1995), rural Australia had one of the highest suicide rates in the world. Populations of less than 25,000 have the highest suicide rates overall. Young adult males (20-34) were at most risk followed by young adult females. While suicide attempts were more common in females, male attempts are generally more violent and thus more successful (30-50 attempts per suicide compared to 150-300 attempts per suicide for women). Young male suicides tripled between 1960 and 1995. The most common method of suicide for males and females was hanging, while firearm and explosives were more infrequently used. Rural male suicides however were much more likely to involve the use of firearms and explosives. This may be due to greater access to these more lethal weapons.

The task force found the major issues related to suicide to be parental separation, unemployment, relationship break-ups, mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual abuse, sexuality issues, discrimination, pressure to succeed, sense of belonging, and alienation from society. They also found that 60-90 percent of youth suicides were related to depression. In rural areas depression has been noted to fluctuate according to seasonal and cyclical phenomena, harvests, and droughts (D. Wilkinson & Blue, 2002). The task force also suggested that prevention strategies be aimed at strengthening families, creating positive relationships, improving education and self-esteem, community links and services, promoting help-seeking behaviours, and developing media codes of practice. In relation to rural areas in particular, Wainer

and Chesters (2000) and Letvak (2002) suggested that psychological resilience and mental health depended on a sense of hope, a connection with the community, autonomy, human values, valuing diversity, physical involvement, and a feeling of safety. The authors argued that the major obstacle to mental health and well-being were traditional masculine attitudes of hardness, individualism, stoicism, and homophobia. They described young rural males as having drug and alcohol problems and an unhealthy reliance on female emotional support. Many young rural adults immigrate to cities leaving those behind lacking in companionship and support.

Research and statistics regarding the health and well-being of rural men parallels that which has been reported for men in general. In comparison to women, men's behaviour appears to be less conducive to leading long and healthy lives, and contributes to health differences. As evidenced by examples of work accidents and suicides, particularly in rural areas, men's occupations often facilitate health risks. In addition some degree of risk taking appears to be part of young male identity development and of gaining acceptance within male circles. As such, the masculine discourses surrounding such behaviours are, as Shields (2005, 2007) suggested, very much tied to institutional networks, power, and privilege. If we are to try to change these behaviours we need to go beyond simply blaming hegemonic discourses, and instead investigate these discourses within men's socio-cultural contexts. In terms of rural settings we must assume that men and sub-groups of men are as heterogeneous as the rural settings themselves.

As noted by Fraser et al., (2002) it is also not the socio-cultural factors either, such as social class and locality, that have explanatory power. It is the mechanisms and processes by which men interact with them that are significant. Similarly, Judd and Humphreys (2001) emphasised the need for in-depth research on the nature and extent of health problems in different communities.

### *Summary*

The social group known as young adult males has been described as being in 'crisis'. In comparison to other societal groups these men have been portrayed as being in poor mental and physical health. A review of Australian health statistics suggested that there are areas of young men's health that need addressing; however, claims of a masculine crisis are exaggerated and as yet unfounded. Conventional research methods designed to address men's health issues have been largely quantitative investigations of masculinity. The commonly reported argument from

these studies is that hegemonic masculinity is emotionally restrictive, promotes poor health related behaviours, and even violence. While this is true in some contexts, this argument underestimates the diversity of male experiences, and men's role as constructors and negotiators of masculine discourses. Moreover, in some contexts (i.e. rural areas) hegemonic masculine characteristics and behaviours can often be useful in working through hardships in challenging contexts. Moreover these masculine characteristics are tied to institutional power and privilege.

In terms of psychosocial well-being, research has suggested that men require a sense of belonging within their communities, along with social support networks. As yet however there is little known of how to promote belonging and of the qualitative nature of the support needed. This thesis suggests that the answers will be varied, and will be relative to the men's socio-cultural circumstances. The current focus on verbal emotional expression as being the key to well-being is of limited value to men who do not value such expression. If psychology is to positively contribute to the health of young men, it needs to develop tailored approaches based on an understanding of the breadth of men's experiences.



## Chapter 3

## A Dynamic Psychosocial Theory of Identity and Well-being

As noted previously, one of the obstacles to developing a substantive theoretical understanding of men is the predominate assumption that men's identities are limited to hegemonic definitions of manhood (Clare, 2000; Fischer et al., 2004). This assumption assumes that hegemonic masculinity is static, and underestimates the volition of men to reflect or negotiate their identities within context. In addition there is an assumption that Western cultural definitions of hegemonic masculinity are relevant to all men, and processed similarly by all men. This denies the existence of cultural variations of masculinity and promotes instead the conception of an essentialised masculinity that is endangered and embattled (Laubscher, 2005).

While some theorists have discussed the functionality of masculine discourses in relation to men's health and well-being (Bourgois, 1996), others emphasise the importance of the early development of resilient characteristics that promote well-being (Kohut, 1977; Winnicott, 1989). Within developmental perspectives it is proposed that a good start in life is central to long-term good health and well-being. This theoretical emphasis on early family life often fails to recognise and incorporate broader socio-cultural considerations. Moreover, as noted by Laubscher (2005), it has the tendency to assume that men's problems arise from family structures that differ from the heterosexual nuclear family norm. Others such as Castoriadis (1997b/1975) have argued that we need a theory of identity that addresses both the importance of early development, and incorporates an understanding of socio-cultural factors, within a dynamic intra/interpersonal process. To this end this thesis offers a dynamic psychosocial theory of identity.

The central argument within this theory is that the psychological processes by which a person becomes social are more important to psychosocial well-being than the actual form that is taken by the social. That is, psychosocial well-being is contingent on one becoming social, and the life long process of connecting with others and reflectively negotiating an identity or identities. Moreover, it is important that this learning be consistent with and relevant to the individual's broader socio-cultural context. In terms of early development it is important that one's early teachers are representative of the broader social world and hence give a functional foundation for identity development throughout life. The psychological development of the infant

will be shown to be circular as well as linear, where a primary narcissistic reality is creatively transformed into a cultural reality that also reinstates its primary functioning. In this context, the infant begins life as a self-contained psychological unit, and is then encouraged to develop a connection with his social world, resulting in a sense of identity as both an individual, and as a member of a social group.

A dynamic psychosocial theory borrows from many theoretical paradigms, none more important than psychoanalysis. The emphasis is placed on early developmental processes that result in the construction of a social individual. Whereas Freud (1991a/1920; 1991b/1923) viewed biological drives or libido as the energy of life, a more dynamic theory emphasises the creative and imaginative abilities of the psyche as the fundamental bases of human development. While dynamic theory does trace development back to a central core element, this element is radical and opens up endless possibilities in terms of the types of societies humans can create. In contrast, the nature of Freud's sexual libido was prescriptive in terms of human social arrangements. The theorist most influential in guiding this proposed current dynamic psychosocial theory is Cornelius Castoriadis (1997a/1990; 1997d/1989).

#### *Cornelius Castoriadis*

Castoriadis began his academic and political career as a socialist in the 1950s and 60s (Curtis, 1992). After campaigning and working as a Marxist for more than 20 years, Castoriadis became critical of this social movement, and indeed with all social movements, for attempting to predict future events and for prescribing a social future. Castoriadis came to the conclusion that the radical element of human subjectivity prevented us from knowing what lies ahead (Castoriadis, 1997f/1990). From this perspective limiting the future to that which is foreseeable from the past underestimates the creative capacity of our collective conscious. Rather than painting a pessimistic picture or giving up on political action, Castoriadis was optimistic of the types of social worlds we could create despite not being able to completely conceive of them ahead of time.

For further exploration of this imaginative element of the social psyche Castoriadis (1997a/1990; 1997d/1989) turned to psychoanalysis. In practicing psychoanalysis, learning psychoanalytic theory, and incorporating his knowledge of social organisations, Castoriadis developed a new social project, the basic tenet of which was to encourage individual autonomy. The duty of any social group was to encourage continual learning, creation, and evaluation of the social conditions. The

individual is conceived of as autonomous when he/she actively reflects on and contributes to the society that he/she belongs. In addition, the individual and the social are conceived as one and the same, as individuals are the carriers and creators of social understandings. “And as he criticised the idea of an exhaustive social theory, Castoriadis advanced a new conception of praxis as autonomous activity aimed at the development of the autonomy of the other and socially incarnated in pedagogy, psychoanalysis, and political activity” (Curtis, 1992, p.49).

Castoriadis (1997d/1989) studied within two schools, one that took a broader social perspective (socialism), and one that took an individual perspective (psychoanalysis), and concluded that each lacked an appreciation of the other perspective. He argued that our shared socio-historical knowledge does not exist in a vacuum or within the walls of institutions but exist within individuals. Individuals undergo a process of socialisation such that they are carriers and creators of a collective conscious. The truly autonomous individual is part of a social collective and is armed with the imaginative, creative, and reflective tools to contribute to social evolution. Rather than prescribe a set of social values, Castoriadis prescribed that individuals understand and reflect on the values they create and are an informed part of this process.

The theoretical parameters incorporated within the current study are aligned with the framework presented by Castoriadis (1997a/1990; 1997c/1975; 1997d/1989). Within this framework aspects of social learning theory (Bandura, 1974, 1977), developmental psychology (Erikson, 1980), interpersonal dynamics (Schlesinger & Groves, 1976), and psychoanalysis (Freud, 1991a/1920; 1991b/1923; 1991e/1914) are utilised to construct a dynamic psychosocial theory of identity. The specific aspects of each of these theoretical frameworks offer a component of conceiving the individual as a social entity. A synopsis of each of these is presented below.

### *The Psychoanalytic*

From psychoanalysis we have learnt that what is unique to human subjectivity is not our propensity towards rationality but rather it is our tendency to be irrational. As proposed by Freud (1991b/1923) humans are creative and imaginative beings. Freud argued that the psyche not only receives and creates representations, but that it is also affected by them. Subsequently, he believed that there is an emotional component to all that we think or represent in the psyche. The human psyche can

often represent itself, others, and objects in creative ways that have no direct relation to basic survival needs.

Castoriadis (1997d/1989) extended and altered Freud's theory by limiting the power of biological influences on the psyche. He did, however, acknowledge that the psyche leans on biology in the sense that the psyche's structure is influenced by biological characteristics and needs. For example, the first need of the infant is the oral instinct of sucking and feeding from the breast. The mental representations based on this instinct develop and change but are still observable as oral fixations in adults. While being heavily embedded with biology, the psyche can also override biological needs. According to Castoriadis this is evident in cases of self-starvation, and suicide. Here a negative self-representation can result in irrational and self-harming emotions, behaviours, or intentions. A dynamic theory of human subjectivity argues then that human psychological life is more than just an adaptive function in relation to biological needs and to the environment. Rather, the psyche has an additional creative ability, which has the potential to be both functional and dysfunctional in terms of the preservation of life.

Most importantly, the psyche is imaginative and can represent objects in the world, including itself. These representations are also imbued with emotion and intent. Thus humans can imagine and create their social worlds, and from an individual perspective each of us is born with the capacity to join this world. As the psyche builds in complexity it is necessary to hold and store information not needed in any given situation. Hence, psychoanalysis has taught us to imagine an unconscious component of the psyche in which mental representations as well as their emotional correspondents are stored. The dynamic theory presented in this study argues that the primary infant psyche has a predisposition to becoming socialised, and hence the socialisation process, while fraught with psychic tension, is not as unnatural and as violent as Castoriadis (1997a/1990) and others (Freud, 1991b/1923) have argued.

#### *Relational/Interpersonal Aspects*

A dynamic psychosocial theory of human subjectivity also emphasises relational dynamics (Clarke, 2001; Schlesinger & Groves, 1976; Sutherland, 1994). The human psyche from the beginning is formed and transformed in relation to significant others. For example, James (1890) argued that the self is a reflection of others. The ever present questions of 'who we are' and 'who am I', result from our interactions with significant others. Our identities then are a collection of thoughts,

emotions, intents, and behaviours we have identified in others. While we are able to conceive ourselves and represent ourselves as a singular identity, this identity is always in relation to, in comparison to, and in belonging to, other people. Hence, the way we behave, think, and feel is related to others both present and not present. Moreover the choice of actions and self-presentations varies from context to context and from the presence of relational other/s to the absence of relational other/s. From the beginning, interaction with others facilitates the development of a social reality. At first these others are immediate family, however, eventually the psyche incorporates and is able to represent ones community, and indeed, a world full of people. As such our identities are socially constructed and meaningful both within interpersonal relationships and socio-historical contexts (Berzonsky, 2005; Edley, 2001; Francis, 2002; Frosh et al., 2000; Howard, 2000; Kitayama, Markus, & Lieberman, 1995; Phinney, 2005; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005)

#### *The Developmental*

Implicit from the way in which human subjectivity has been discussed so far is that a developmental trajectory is assumed within a dynamic psychosocial theory (Erikson, 1980). It is contended that the beginnings of development are neither situated upon a blank slate, nor are they emanating purely from a biological predetermination, but instead, somewhere in between these two states. As proposed by Castoriadis (1997a/1990) and Freud (1991a/1920; 1991b/1923), temporal developmental theories argue that while ways of being and perceiving change and evolve from our previous states, these previous states are not completely forgotten or overridden but remain an embedded part of our deepening psyche (although largely unconscious). Hence the psyche builds in complexity with experience without discarding any earlier developments or ways of being. In addition, an earlier almost forgotten way of being may again become salient given a particular context. Hence dynamic psychosocial development is not a simple linear progression of evolving status but a more temporal process. Adult life is full of moments and stages in which previous developmental representations and emotions are reinvoked. They are not felt and interpreted exactly the same; instead they are reworked in terms of the current context.

#### *Social Learning Aspects*

According to Castoriadis (1997a/1990) and others (Berry, 1998) the fundamental processes by which the psyche develops are through socialisation and

enculturation. The varying forms and outcomes of socialisation are infinite, however a process of socialisation will (nearly) always take place. This process of social learning forms the human subject. According to Castoriadis (1997d/1989) the processes of socialisation begin at birth if not before. The psyche has to renounce its omnipotence, its being the centre and totality of the world (although never completely achieved) so as to take in (represent) objects from the social world. Dynamic psychosocial theory then is an explanation as to how the psyche begins to learn from its environment, and of how the learning circle expands from, the primary caregiver, to immediate family, the extended family, and finally to the broader social network. Within this process, social learning becomes increasingly broad. In addition, as social beings we become carriers of our social histories and pass this information on to future generations. This socio-historical lineage includes broad social discourses, as well as more specific behaviours and expectations. It also includes our presuppositions regarding our ways of conceiving our identities, our epistemological and ontological frameworks, and ourselves.

#### *Overall*

The transition from a primary narcissistic state, to a social individual produces the key characteristics of the human psyche. Castoriadis (1997a/1990; 1997d/1989) proposed that the following unique traits were fundamental characteristics of human subjectivity.

- The ability to conceive of ourselves as an individual self and to reflect on that self. This reflective process is more important to our quality of life than any other measures or markers of life success and failure. According to Castoriadis (1997a/1990; 1997d/1989), the functioning of this psychical reality can sometimes lead to dysfunctional thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. For instance, it can be considered functional by the psyche to kill oneself in keeping with a poor self-image.
- The ability to procure pleasure from mental representations and fantasies without reliance on physical cues. The ability to transform a mental representation so it is 'pleasing'. These representations have a social value. Humans continually invest in social objects and can derive pleasure from them.

- The ability to imagine. That is, the ability to imagine or represent something which is not there, to see one thing where there is something else. For instance in language seeing a visual form of a horse from the letters that form the word 'horse'. Human imagination is evident in all artistic practices and processes.
- The ability to create and maintain multiple and sometimes inconsistent desires. Due to the temporal development of the psyche and due to the existence of unconscious materials, humans can desire multiple goals that are contradictory and incoherent. Subsequent stages of development do not nullify the previous ones thus conflicting desires exist. For example, one can desire to maintain a long and loving romantic relationship while also desiring to keep people at an emotional and relational distance.

The psyche then, according to dynamic psychosocial theory has the capacity to represent images, to create, and to distort what is presented to it. This socialisation of the psyche is cumulative as well as transitional. Nothing is lost but is instead repressed (forgotten to the conscious mind) or sublimated (changed or modified in some way) so that the psyche grows in complexity and contains multiple and often conflicting affects (emotional states) and intentions. The socialisation process results in an investment in the social world, and the development of an individual who functions adequately from the point of view of society. This however does not cancel out or remove the plurality and contradictions at both the conscious and unconscious levels of the psyche (Castoriadis, 1997d/1989; Freud, 1991b/1923).

### *Reflectivity*

Paradoxically, the riddles of the irrationality of the human psyche are constantly being investigated with the use of our rational faculties. Our rational faculties look for answers and are not comfortable with partial knowledge and open understandings. From a dynamic perspective, however, partial knowledge and theories that respect the psyche's irrationality and plurality are the best we can do when studying subjectivity. These are the parameters of all investigators, for whom intellectual language and logic reflects a Greco Western philosophical tradition. As argued by Castoriadis (1997d/1989), our current language and rational logic is just one way of knowing. Beyond this, the central faculty of the psyche, the radical imagination, which is responsible for representation, is capable of a vast array of ways

of knowing. According to Castoriadis, the radical imagination is the primary narcissistic state of the psyche in infancy. It is an imaginative capability and also a psychic self-sufficiency. Moreover, this imaginative core of the psyche can create and transform socio-historical ways of knowing. In context with the conceptual status of the present, the process of socialisation results in a reflectiveness, “the possibility that the activity proper to the ‘subject’ becomes an ‘object’, the self being explicitly posited as a non objective object or as an object that is an object simply by its being posited as such and not by nature” (Castoriadis, 1997d/1989, p.158).

This important process of reflectiveness is not only the ability to be self-referential. It is also the ability to question and investigate oneself and one’s social world. Hence we are able to reflect on ourselves as objects and also to reflect on the processes involved in this reflection and our ways of knowing and understanding this. Hence we reflect on ourselves and make evaluations. Our sense of self and our sense of identity are contingent on the particular socio-historical discourses that define them in conjunction with our social experiences and social comparisons. This has important implications for understanding health and well-being. For instance in problematising men’s health we perpetuate a discourse that is now part of men’s reflective practices. Men’s reflective evaluations of themselves will be formed in relation to a discourse of problematised masculine emotion. This is however, just one of many discourses men reflect upon in relation to their psychosocial well-being.

In addition to its link to conceptions of health and well-being, reflectivity also makes possible the capacity for deliberate activity (Castoriadis, 1997b/1975). Humans can turn the results of reflective practices into deliberate action. These are more than just rational calculations and possible outcomes of action. Humans can imagine something that does not exist yet, and will for it to happen. It is important to note that this reflection and intent to act does not necessarily guarantee the action will take place. Conflicting wills exist within the psyche, particularly in the unconscious, making this process problematic. As mentioned previously, one of the characteristics of human subjectivity is the simultaneous existence of conflicting wills. For example, one can reflect on an upcoming life challenge and decide that this challenge is within one’s capabilities. On another level of the psyche however, there may be a strong negative connotation, which seems to have no rational basis, and can jeopardise the completion of the challenge.



According to Castoriadis (1997a/1990) and others (Freud, 1991b/1923) the process responsible for reflectivity is 'sublimation'. Sublimation can be defined as the process by which "one renounces simple organ pleasure and the private pleasure of representation in order to invest objects which only have a social existence and value" (Castoriadis, 1997a, p.192). Sublimation then is the psychological process that allows us to be social. Through sublimation we are able to take in social knowledge for the sake of pleasure. In a sense it takes us out of our primary narcissistic state and into the social world. To speak is to sublimate as it involves speaking to others in the 'real' (social) world. It involves a mental representation of 'self' and of 'other'. The transformation then from a primary infant psychical state to a social being occurs through the process of sublimation. One learns to connect physiological sensations and emotions with mental representations from the social world.

### *Identity*

The concept of identity is hard to define as there are nearly as many definitions as there are theorists. At its most basic, the term identity means that we are self-contained. That is, an understanding of ourselves as an individual is premised on the notion of being separate, unique, and whole. As defined by James (1890), our identity is our physical separateness and uniqueness. However, while our physical being is self-contained, our psyche is interconnected with others. Hence, identity theorists must conceive of both an individual, and a broader society to which the individual belongs. This has proven to be a difficult task and Elias (2000/1939) argued that most identity theories have conceived of the individual and society as separate entities. According to Elias, the problem created by this way of knowing is that when developmental theorists focus on and describe individuals, they construct society as a constant, static, and removed entity. Conversely, social theorists construct the individual as passive, malleable, predictable, and uncreative. Hence, each perspective fails to recognise the complex nature of the other, and both perspectives fail to recognise the dynamic nature of identity as a dialectic of the individual and the social. Moreover, theories that address both perspectives run the risk of simply alternating between positions rather than addressing the dialectic.

Within a western socio-historical context the term identity is used to explain a collection of socially defined markings, behaviours, and characteristics that one has psychically invested in and reflected upon as being the unique and complimentary components of 'self' as distinct from 'other'. Our psyche acts to unify our experiences

into a common theme that reflects our physical and spatial separateness from, and connectedness with, others. Identities function then to create and perpetuate social groups and communities by acknowledging the uniqueness of each individual. However, this occurs only in so far as the individual embodies recognisable social characteristics, and insofar as identities are negotiated between group members. Herein, individuals identify with other group members and hence are acculturated into the group.

As such the concept of identity is a social artefact that incorporates the range of markings available to individual members. According to Castoriadis (1997a/1990), identity involves individual attributions and imputations based on shared socio-cultural knowledge. Within this conception identity is a social artefact that represents individual unity and covers over or denies the complexity and contradictions of the psyche. The formation of an individual identity in terms of social markings gives the illusion of a complete and unified person with consistent characteristics, traits, and behaviours. Castoriadis noted that by attributing social characteristics to others and imputing and maintaining them in ourselves we are involved in a process of classification and simplification. Identities then, are restricted to the sphere of what is already known and accepted. They relieve social anxieties regarding difference, complexity, irrationality, and confusion. As such identity becomes a social construction through which social collectives deal with the complexities of subjectivity and remain cohesive.

Castoriadis (1997a/1990) argued that it is functional for the psyche to invest in the notion of identity and also to smooth over some of the psychical complexities and inconsistencies that exist. As noted by Freud (1991b/1923) this smoothing over is achieved through the psychological process of repression. Hence, experiences, thoughts, and feelings that are incongruent with our social identities or that are socially taboo, are often relegated to our unconscious mind, thus allowing conscious maintenance of our sense of unity and social belonging. Identity then is fundamentally a social consciousness, and according to Castoriadis this consciousness is aware of what it does in terms of repression but is unaware of why it does it. That is, one is generally aware that one chooses to forget things that one would rather not remember, but one is unaware that one is doing so to cover over complexity.

In recent times psychology has emphasised the importance of the concept of identities due to its potential to be inclusive and multidimensional. Debate abounds

within social psychology in regards to what identity is, how it works, and how it relates to well-being (Bennett & Sani, 2004; Frosh et al., 2000; Frosh et al., 2003; Howard, 2000; Phinney, 2005; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). Within this debate it has been increasingly acknowledged that while our physical being is self-contained, our psyche is interconnected with others from the beginning. Utilising a dynamic framework Castoriadis (1997d/1989) suggested that the human subject has a contingent separateness. Traditionally, the way in which we have resolved this connection with and similarity to others has been to conceive of an 'other', defined as culture (Elias, 2000/1939). Culture, however is both carried and constructed by social individuals and hence mediates each physically self-contained unit through the processes of socialisation and enculturation (Berry, 1998; Castoriadis, 1997c/1975). Therefore, while it can be conceived that each of us has a unique identity, it must also be acknowledged that this identity is contingent on culture and more broadly speaking contingent on our socio-historical context.

Moreover, it is assumed that the social nature of identity does not limit the scope of available identity characteristics to those that already exist within any socio-cultural environment (Berzonsky, 2005; Elias, 2000/1939; Francis, 2002; Howard, 2000; Kitayama et al., 1995; Mauss, 2000; Phinney, 2005; N. Rose, 2000). Instead, as Castoriadis (1997a/1990) proposed, the imaginative capacities of the psyche can also draw from other aspects of both conscious and unconscious psychical life and produce changes in cultural identity markings. This creative aspect allows social groups to redefine and invent new identity characteristics and new ways of being. Identity then becomes a fluid and creative process of social construction. This has been exemplified by the constantly evolving definitions of masculinity, particularly over the last 100 years. The current masculine characteristic that values physical appearance and fashion is the result of the processes of identity negotiations within socio-historical settings. Iida (2005) argued that in Japan a subculture of young, feminine looking men, are strategically distancing themselves from traditional masculinity, and subverting hegemonic masculinity by situating themselves within the feminine. This activity has contributed to a cultural shift in hegemonic definitions of masculinity in Japan. These shared attitudes, beliefs, actions, and ideologies regarding men and ways of being a man can be summarised by the term masculine social discourses (Edley, 2001; Frosh et al., 2000; Howard, 2000; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005; Willig, 2003a). These discourses are constantly evolving shared understandings. They can also be

understood as a social knowledge bank from which identity characteristics can be drawn from and applied.

### *Identity and Psychosocial Well-being*

Linking identity to psychosocial well-being is a problematic task as there are as many definitions of well-being as there are of identity. As researchers of psychology we are concerned with the well-being of the groups we study and look for ways to make positive contributions. As previously noted, research aiming to promote the well-being of men has predominantly taken either of two positions (Elias, 2000/1939). One position argues that psychosocial well-being and adjustment is reliant on early development where a resilient core identity needs to be formed. This position involves mapping the metaphysics of identity as a unique core or centre that interacts with the environment in a consistent way. As such, while the individual and society are seen to be interactive, simultaneously, they are also considered to be separate entities. Within this conception, identity is conceptualised as being linear and developmental, growing in complexity and passing through increasingly difficult stages or challenges until maturity (Bandura, 1974; Crits-Christoph, Demorest, Muenz, & Baranackie, 1994; Dare & Holder, 1981; Mecca, Smelser, & Vasconcellos, 1989; Sutherland, 1994). Although the influence of others is seen as significant, the individual is believed to be a free agent in determining and controlling his/her own identity. The common argument being that the individual has a rational, cognitive function at his/her disposal. As such this perspective conceptualises well-being as individually developed. In particular, early childhood is seen as the foundation for psychosocial well-being.

This perception of free agency and rational thought is still a major component of the western public discourse where identity is perceived to be correlated with self-esteem and well-being (Hoalt & Hoalt, 2002; Mecca et al., 1989). The development of a strong core identity is believed to act as a buffer to the external environment. As noted by Kohut (1977, 1987), if the unique or core aspects of a person's identity are socially functional and resilient, the individual will be more adaptive. Hence, individuals experiencing distress are seen to be lacking in core identity integrity and are pathologised as lacking (Freud, 1991b/1923; Sutherland, 1994).

Of concern, rather than consider the influence of environmental factors, this individualised perspective focuses on promoting concepts such as individual resilience, making environmental and socio-cultural considerations superfluous. This

view also promotes the conception of a division between the individual and society. Moreover, it neglects the dynamic nature of the inter-relationship between the two elements, and also neglects the fact that not all identities are chosen (Phinney, 2005; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). For example, socio-historical discourses position people from different racial, ethnic, and gendered groups in particular ways. While people may or may not identify themselves in these ways, the perceptions of others in relation to one's identity must still be negotiated. This is far more salient for minority groups whose difference and juxtaposition to hegemonic culture is felt and negotiated as a part of everyday life. In addition, in some cases marginalisation limits the possibility of autonomy that is espoused by individualised conceptions of identity. Moreover, the individualised position ignores the necessities for well-being such as food, shelter, and other fundamental social resources. Indeed, research has consistently shown that poverty is the primary factor contributing to poor psychosocial health and well-being (Garot, 2007).

The alternate theoretical position identified by Elias (2000/1939) positions environmental factors and socio-historical discourses as being the major determinates of well-being (Levine, 2005; Rezende & Lima, 2004). Herein, individual identity is understood as more reactive and less stable. Maintaining a consistency in defining the concept of well-being is highly problematic as it is defined by socio-historical trends. The focus within this framework is to construct social discourses and social resources for the promotion of well-being, as defined by the social group. Unfortunately, formulating a collective definition of well-being, and strategies to promote well-being are made difficult by individual and sub-group differences. Moreover, the creative and radical nature of identity means that the results of socio-political action are unpredictable and require constant monitoring and renegotiation (Castoriadis, 1997a/1990; 1997d/1989).

Hence psychology is faced with the difficult task of promoting well-being at individual, sub-group, and broad social levels concurrently. It must also conceptualise the relationship between the individual and society. Even with the best intentions the results of these endeavours sometimes miss the mark and can even end up harming those we are attempting to help. According to dynamic psychosocial theory, we can never be sure of the outcomes of actions due to the creative nature of the psyche and of social discourses, despite our careful planning (Castoriadis, 1997a/1990). From this perspective, all we can do is continually learn, reflect, report, evaluate, and implement

change in a perpetual cycle. Rather than simply assuming that those past understandings of men are still salient, we need to continually develop and adjust our understandings. Moreover, in conceptualising men's lives there is no one size fits all answer, and a breadth of strategies and understandings is required. For this reason the present thesis argues that the concept of a dynamic psychosocial identity is required in order to conceptualise the processes involved with identity development within a social world. From this perspective psychosocial well-being becomes a favourable outcome for individuals and groups as a result of integrating complex core identity processes within socio-cultural contexts.

Well-being is socio-historically, collectively and individually defined. While physical and psychological good health are general parameters of the definition of well-being, there is no homogenous parameter of such. Rather, the literature indicates that there is considerable cultural and socio-historical variability (Diener & Diener, 1995; Haugen & Tyler, 1991). Whether someone feels well, presents as well, or is perceived to be well is determined by comparison with social norms. For most people in capitalist first world societies the meeting of basic food and shelter needs is not a daily concern and hence people can invest in the self and in identity markers as constituents of well-being. Within Western societies, self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965, 1979), or positive self-evaluation, has become synonymous with or interchangeable for individually defined well-being. Indeed, this self-esteem movement has focused on positive self-evaluations as the key component of individual identity and well-being.

Socio-historically, the self-esteem movement placed social importance on the fostering of positive self evaluations. As early development was considered crucial in promoting self-esteem, extensive social capital has been invested in education and parenting skills training (Diener & Diener, 1995; Mecca et al., 1989; Stout, 2000). The political campaigns being driven by this conception began in the US in the 1970's and have proliferated in western societies since. They were primarily focused on the fostering of self-esteem in children (Stout, 2000). As self-esteem was defined as a positive self-evaluation, enhancement strategies included increased praise and recognition of individual achievement, and the avoidance of individual failure.

The emphasis on self-esteem promotion as a means of fostering well-being is an illustration of how definitions of identity and of well-being are socio-historically situated. This socio-cultural discourse that positive self-evaluations equate to well-

being is still highly visible in western societies, particularly within public opinion and institutions such as academia. Connell (1995, 2000) argued that knowledge within academic institutions has social prestige and power, and hence academic understandings are often embraced as public knowledge over time. Hence, psychology as an academic and professional discipline is instrumental in formulating public understandings and definitions of well-being. Current research suggests that the self-esteem movement did not create the kind of positive social change that it espoused (Stout, 2000). It has translated in many cases to lowered education standards and much empty praise. Moreover, some research has indicated that this cultural emphasis on the individual has actually weakened resilience and has been detrimental to well-being rather than improving it (Harder, 1984; Hoalt & Hoalt, 2002; Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991a, 1991b).

As noted by Castoriadis (1997d/1989), this example illustrates the difficulty in predicting the impact and outcomes of socio-political movements, due to the radical nature of our collective conscious. In recognising the failings of this self-esteem movement we are obliged to adjust our discourses relating to the promotion of well-being. As such it has been argued that the concept of self-esteem be redefined within psychology as a more intrinsic sense of well-being rather than being premised on positive self-evaluations (Gill & Kostanski, 2004). In addition, this revised concept of self-esteem would only be conceived as a sub-component of well-being within a framework of dynamic psychosocial identity. Hence it is argued in the current study that the concept of dynamic psychosocial identity be the conceptual point of reference for discussions of well-being as it recognises the importance of an intrinsic social connectedness rather than a more superficial and reactive positive self-evaluation.

*Cross-Cultural Comparisons in definitions of self and wellbeing*

Critics have also suggested that the current emphasis on individualised definitions of well-being, and its conception of an autonomous subject, is conceptually naive and reinforces a western mono-cultural perspective (Gergen, 1993; Sampson, 1988; Sinha & Kao, 1997; Sonn & Fisher, 2005). In addition, a large proportion of cross-cultural research on self-esteem also highlights the lack of homogeneity across social and cultural groups. For example, Kitayama, Markus and Lieberman (1995) conducted a series of studies on cross-cultural self-esteem in Japan and the United States. The authors found that Japanese people are likely to attribute their success to either effort or luck, while ascribing the cause of their failure to a lack

of ability. Americans in contrast attributed their success to personal qualities and their failures to external causes. When asked to report the frequency in which common emotions occurred, the most frequent American responses were socially disengaged feelings like pride and superiority, while Japanese subjects reported friendly feelings and feelings of connection. Kitayama et al. posited that those from Western cultures are socialized towards enhancement of the separate self and that this occurs as part of everyday practices. "Those with independent selves...may be motivated to discover and identify positively valued internal attributes of the self, express them in public, and confirm them in private" (p.531). Not surprisingly Americans have been found to score more highly on trait self-esteem measures than Asian groups (Sampson, 1988; Tafarodi & Walters, 1999). According to Kitayama et al. (1995), for one to have self-esteem in Japan, one has to find negative features of the self and be actively involved in correcting them. Human weaknesses in this cultural model are antecedents to the building of self-esteem and self-respect. De-contextualised measures of self-esteem such as letter and number recognition tests have shown a cross-culturally consistent preference for self-referent letters and numbers. This indicates that at least at an unconscious level of self, there may be a universal tendency for self-valuation. However, there is no evidence of a universal definition of self-esteem.

Tafarodi and Walters (1999) argued that while a valuative component of self (self-esteem) may be shared across cultures, qualitative differences in self-esteem occur as a function of degrees of individualism/collectivism. Tafarodi and Swann (1996) found global self-esteem measures to have two factors (self-liking and self-competence). Self-liking is more likely to be promoted in individualistic cultures at the expense of self-competence while the reverse is true in collectivist cultures. While there is significant variability within cultures, it does appear that the conception of a separate self and the motive to both internally and externally enhance that self is a western cultural phenomenon. Similarly, Chamberlain and Haaga (2001) proposed self-rating systems to be irrational and dysfunctional as there is no objective basis for an individual to determine their worth as a human being. Rather, self-esteem is strongly based on one's subjective evaluation of self in relation to culturally defined values and attributes. Reliance on self-esteem as the socio-historical definition of well-being has major repercussions for current health practices.

For example, many psychologists as key participants working within this socio-historical climate of health and well-being offer theories and practices that



increasingly favour individual intervention over social prevention, and symptom relief over long-term psychological change (Cushman, 1990). Alper (2002) qualitatively described the experiences of New Yorkers after the September 11 tragedy and reported that people returned quickly and impressively to their pre-disaster lifestyles without any real attempt to place the tragedy in the realm of the self. People did not want to deal with their psychic stress, and as a psychologist the author was expected to provide prompt symptom relief. He argued that the self-satisfying myth of American invincibility had been broken and that eventually “the person...will be called upon to initiate, orchestrate, or elaborate some vital aspect of the self that cannot be supplied from without, that at best may be facilitated by one or two significant, intimate others” (p.258). According to Alper, when the scope of the loss eventually penetrates the shallow narcissistic veneer, a truly integrated self along with social support networks will be essential for the healing process. Given the cultural preference for incorporating predominately positive information into the self, along with the increasing avoidance of intimacy, the author was not optimistic for the long-term psychological health of the most effected New Yorkers.

In a society geared toward individualism and competitiveness those who embrace these socially preferred models will have high self-esteem (Norem-Hebeisen & Johnson, 1981). It has been argued that the current western cultural promotion of an autonomous centred subject has facilitated an increased dependence on external validation of self as positive, and over emphasis on narcissistic investment as the hegemonic ‘way of being’ (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Self-esteem has been described as a creation of a Western culture that values consumerism and individualism over social connectedness (Bond & Smith, 1996). Linville (1982) argued that Western cultural trends towards narcissism from the 1970’s onward have overridden social responsibility, and have produced an unrealistic over-evaluation of the self that cannot be sustained in the outer world. The current Western cultural pre-occupation with self-enhancement is consistent with the notion of an empty self that must be filled with consumer pleasures, empty praise, and superficial mirroring relationships (Watson & Morris, 1994). Cultural narcissism de-emphasizes a holistic and complex view of self and of self-esteem, instead preferring to consider the individual only in terms of his/her unitary potential.

*Social Constructionist Critique of definitions of self and wellbeing*

Recent academic critique of the notion of the autonomous centred subject has resulted in a growing awareness of the fragile, shifting, and contextual aspects of identity (Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). This critique focuses on the ways in which our socio-historical context shapes not only the way we think about ourselves but also our collective understanding of human subjectivity (Bourdieu, 2000; Craib, 2000; Elias, 2000/1939; Mauss, 2000; N. Rose, 2000). Rather than focus on self-esteem or individual identity and its unique way of interacting with the environment, these authors propose that we focus on the cultural discourses of identity and the meanings that groups of individuals negotiate (Willig, 2003a). It is believed that the human subject is connected to cultural discourses to such a degree that this connection or reliance is unnoticed. There is no autonomous centred subject as identity is always mediated by culture and context (Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). Within social constructionist theory, the term 'identities' is often used rather than 'identity' to signify the multiple layers of human subjectivity. Identities are drawn upon and used according to context. They are performative in nature and function to foster belonging and sameness as well as difference (Butler, 1997).

Recent theories have also emphasised the relational aspects of identity. That is, identities are conceived as being meaningful only in relation to what they are not. For example, masculinity is always relative to femininity. From this relational perspective identity is construed as relative and hence de-centred (Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). Moreover social identity characteristics are historically, politically, and economically situated and ever changing. As such these authors argue that throughout a lifetime the individual will negotiate many different norms and expectations (Levine, 2005; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). From a political perspective this conception prescribes the analyses of the ways in which social discourses position groups of people within a society (Frosh et al., 2000; Frosh et al., 2003). For example some feminist researchers have described and analysed the discourses surrounding being male and female (Benjamin, 2002). They described the available discourses for men and women and the ways in which these discourses were inscribed with power (Foucault, 2000). Recently, many minority ethnic groups have used this perspective to describe how identities are negotiated in relation to the dominant, powerful cultural group, and suggested that identities are negotiated in relation to the public discourses relevant to a particular group (Sinha & Kao, 1997; Sonn & Fisher, 2005).

The current emphasis on the unstable nature of identity has resulted in a burgeoning interest in explaining and critiquing assumed knowledge. It has been suggested that fluid, contextual, and performative conceptions of identity provide scope for multiple understandings and interpretations (Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). They also present identities as ever changing. Hence, the subject, while having less control of his/her identity is also more susceptible and open to change. It is little wonder we are witnessing such intense debate over the concept of identity. Rattansi and Phoenix (2005) argued that the increased scientific interest in identities is related to “the disembedding of hitherto settled identities, at a personal and social level, by the rapid changes of post modernity” (p.99). The question is whether post modernity or globalisation is making us aware of what has always been, or whether this current period of unprecedented technological change has impacted on the nature of how we perceive our identities and ourselves? Certainly new collective identities and conceptions of well-being are being forged in light of this change.

It is widely accepted now that identities are plural. Ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and age are commonly researched identity categories (Edley, 2001; Frosh et al., 2000; Howard, 2000; Phinney, 2005). However, these categories are not discrete but interconnected and do not function separately from each other (Rezende & Lima, 2004). The tendency for researchers interested in any one particular aspect of identity is to isolate, that is to simplify. Hence, what is portrayed is a single aspect of identity in isolation from its other facets. To avoid this problem somewhat, recent research including the current project has investigated a small purposive sample in context, and in detail (Frosh et al., 2003; Loftland, Snow, Anderson, & Loftland, 2006; Parker, 2005). In this way the complexities of, for example masculine identity, can be explored in a particular socio-historically situated group of men (Edley, 2001). This avoids making unfounded generalised claims in regards to men of other ages, ethnicities, and socio-economic statuses. Moreover, rather than having the goal of generalisation, this type of research aims to generate theory out of in-depth ethnographic investigation.

### *Summary*

Two general schools of thought exist in regards to identity. First, there is what one might call an essentialist position in which the human subject has a ‘core identity’ (Freud, 1991b/1923; Kohut, 1977; Sutherland, 1994; Winnicott, 1989). Second, there is a relativist position in which identity is fluid, highly contextual, and historically

situated (Bourdieu, 2000; Mauss, 2000; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005; N. Rose, 2000). Of interest is the conception of the unconscious in both cases. In the first instance, the unconscious is the affects and memories that constitute a consistent human subject. These unconscious processes are responsible for consistent patterns in relating, feeling, and behaving. Here the unconscious can be conceived as analogous to a 'core identity' (Levine, 2005). In the second conception the unconscious stores the endless cultural discourses, including their affects, learnt by the historically situated subject. Cultural discourses are learnt to the point that they are normalised and can be applied without conscious consideration (Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005).

It is argued in this thesis that the unconscious incorporates both of these; acknowledging the fluid and contextual nature of identities, while also requiring a level of internal stability. Berzonski (2005) argued that although knowing and understanding are always relevant to a socio-historical reference, a core identity or ego identity "can provide a personal frame of reference for acting and making decisions within a post-modern world of continuous change and flux" (p.126). From this perspective, the notion of an individual identity implies that an individual will be stable yet malleable across multiple varied contexts. Hence, it may be more accurate to delineate identity as having multiple levels or aspects rather than calling them multiple identities.

As proposed by Levine (2005), if there is no core self, then subjective accounts are of no value as they just mirror or echo social discourses. The proposed stability in identity presented by relational theorists need not contradict the social constructionist conception of multiple identities or multiple aspects of identity. Rather I argue that the two notions can be combined to form a broader and more accurate identity schema. From this dynamic psychosocial perspective, a functional identity is one with multiple aspects that allows the individual to adjust to a number of roles and situations. It also requires stability, a sense of ones own consistency across time. As Berzonsky (2005) noted, "to adapt effectively, people still need to act, solve problems, and make decisions in a relativistic world" (p.134). People require a personal reference point from which to evaluate their social world. This is what Castoriadis (1997a/1990) called a reflective capacity.

## Chapter 4

## Psychosocial Identity Development in Early Childhood

The dynamic psychosocial identity theory presented in this study has illuminated the importance of two primary factors. One is based on developmental psychodynamic theory and posits three major psychical processes as central to the human subject becoming a social being and negotiating a social identity. The first, sublimation, is the process by which the psyche learns to create and emotionally and physiologically invest in cultural mental representations. Second, identification, or more broadly enculturation/socialisation is the process by which we learn from our socio-cultural environment. Third, repression is the process by which we maintain a consistent and unified identity in the face of inconsistencies. The development of these psychical processing abilities is paramount to becoming a reflective and autonomous person.

The second primary factor, based on social constructionist theory, highlights how our social worlds, and the individuals within it, are imbued with endless discourses (social knowledge) from which people construct identities and also create new discourses and new identities (Edley, 2001; Frosh et al., 2000; Howard, 2000; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005; Willig, 2003a).

As mentioned previously, from a dynamic psychosocial perspective the socialisation process is directed to some degree by biological needs, but the biological by itself can only partially explain the infant's development as a social individual. According to Castoriadis (1997a/1990) the infant passes through a number of stages that transform the psyche from a singular closed system to one that is intrinsically linked to the external world. Hence the fundamental developmental task is to become social. Individuals are carriers and creators of social discourses and hence there can be no conceptual division or separation between the individual and society. As such the two primary factors mentioned early operate concurrently and should not be conceived of as discreet processes.

Much research on gender and on masculinity focuses on either individual characteristics of men, or broader masculine discourses as determinates of well-being. Dynamic psychosocial identity theory argues that both perspectives are drawn together when we conceive identity as the development and negotiation of a reflective

Table 1. *Early childhood developmental transformation from primary imagination to social imagination*

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Key Authors</b>
<b>Birth</b> Singular, Pleasure seeking psyche Primary/narcissistic imagination Psychic capacity to be socialised Introduction of unpleasure by absent breast begins process	Castoriadis (1997a)
<b>Object Phase</b> Psyche creates a representation of outside Expels the bad breast to outside First psychical representation of an 'object' Breast conceived of as a possession of the infant	Castoriadis (1997a) Winnicott (1989) Freud (1991b)
<b>Other Phase</b> Psyche creates an 'other' First social representative Owner of both good and bad breast Infant projects primary narcissistic power onto 'other' Primary caregiver perceived as all-powerful	Castoriadis (1997a) Freud (1991b) Winnicott (1989)
<b>Triadic Phase</b> Psyche can represent self, object, and other Dynamic relationship with primary caregiver Loved when carrying good breast, hated when carrying bad breast Partial social reality Pseudo social world of self, object, and other who is all-powerful First guilt over ambivalent feelings towards other Fear of reprisal forms basic psychic structure of conscience Also forms basic structure for reflective capacity Psyche is pleasure seeking (unconsciously in fantasy) Psyche also avoids punishment (consciously within a partial reality)	Freud (1991b) Castoriadis (1997a) Winnicott (1989)
<b>Oedipal Phase</b> Introduction of third person as representative of broader social world The representation of a third person limits power of self and other. Psychic recognition of the autonomy of the other, and others Resultant identification with third person Resultant fear of retribution for the infant's ambivalence Desire is socially mediated Period of psychic tension and resultant repression	Castoriadis (1997a) Freud (1991b) Benjamin (2000) Butler (1997) Rose (2000) Elliot (2002) Irigaray (1993)
<b>Sublimation Phase</b> Full psychic investment in social world Narcissistic pleasure is sublimated for social pleasure Primary representation of pleasure is now socially mediated Psychic (unconscious) time- desire already fulfilled Social (conscious) time- pleasure put on hold Pleasure dependent on dynamic social engagement The ability to derive pleasure from activities within a social world (reflective capacity)	Castoriadis (1997a) Freud (1991b) Cornell (2003) Fell (1993) Rose (2000)

capacity. Reflectivity allows individuals to create and manage identities, and through social membership, dynamically create and evolve social conditions. As such the current study offers an explanation of the development of a reflective capacity, which it is argued should be the focus of theories of masculine identity.

### *Birth*

According to many developmental theorists (Castoriadis, 1997a/1990; Freud, 1991b/1923; Kohut, 1977; Sutherland, 1994; Winnicott, 1989), beginning at the time of birth, when the infant experiences the sensations of hunger, the initial response is to hallucinate or fantasise achieving satisfaction (refer to Table 1). Hunger can only be appeased when the breast or bottle is offered, and these objects are conceived of as an extension of the self. Thus the psyche is singular, knows no outside, and is capable of finding pleasure by representing and fantasising the breast. Before the introduction of the breast as the first object the psyche is self-sufficient. In fact it could be argued that the psyche is self, and capable of satisfaction through a primary representation. Castoriadis (1997a/1990) recognised this initial psychic self-sufficiency and called it the primary monadic state. This was an adaptation of what Freud described as the primary narcissistic state. According to these theorists this primary state is only interrupted by the absence of consistent and immediate satisfaction of instinctive needs, that is, unpleasure. The introduction of the other, the first social representative, is argued to be the first of a series of interruptions to the monadic or primary narcissistic state. Interpersonal relationships with these others are a source of satisfaction and pleasure as well as a source of disturbance and unpleasure.

The first source of unpleasure according to psychodynamic theorists (Castoriadis, 1997c/1975; Freud, 1991b; Klein, 1948; Winnicott, 1989) is the absent breast. It is argued that the infant psyche in its primary narcissistic state is exclusively a pleasure psyche, of soothing fantasies and hallucinations. The breast or bottle becomes a representative part of this psyche and hence an internal pleasure source. According to Castoriadis (1997a/1990) the breast gradually becomes a source of unpleasure as well, as it is often absent when the infant desires it. As a result the infant psyche is forced to open up a mental representation of an outside or external or non-self to which this absent and unpleasurable breast belongs (refer to Table 1). In this conception an outside is created so that the psyche can separate and expel what it

doesn't want, the absent and bad breast. At the same time the good breast is still perceived as part of the self. Hence, the psyche can no longer be called a pure pleasure psyche as it now contains a representation of unpleasure and an unsophisticated representation of outside.

From a developmental perspective it is from this point on, and over a period of time within early infancy that a qualitative change takes place in the psyche. There is a growing awareness of the otherness of the breast, which is impossible to ignore, and the breast can no longer be purely a part of the self (Castoriadis, 1997a/1990; Freud, 1991b/1923; Sutherland, 1994; Winnicott, 1989). Therefore it becomes a possession of the self rather than being the self. According to Freud and Castoriadis for this process to take place the psyche must have the imaginary capacity to project the bad breast to an outside and introject the good breast to an inside. This is the initial condition for an identity that includes otherness, that is, a social identity, rather than a purely narcissistic one. There is now an outside, albeit, in a limited sense.

According to Castoriadis (1997c/1975), for the psyche to fully constitute an 'object' the good and bad breasts must begin to coincide and to represent a third entity, that of the person to whom the object belongs. Hence, for the infant psyche to conceive the breast as a 'real' (social) object, separate from the self, the breast must be placed within the power of someone else (refer to Table 1). Hence the outcome of this developmental phase is the psychological conceptualisation of the good and the bad breast being one and the same in that the primary caregiver controls them. This controlling agent (the primary caregiver) is perceived by the infant to be an all-powerful figure. As noted by Castoriadis, this occurs because the infant psyche projects its own primary narcissistic power onto the primary caregiver. The infant can no longer exist within this primary narcissistic state as the introduction of displeasure through the absent breast has resulted in the beginnings of a mental representation of other.

Freud (1991b/1923) argued that this powerful other is loved when carrying the good breast and hated when carrying the bad breast. At this point the infant's narcissistic omnipotence is reformed and now belongs in part to the owner of the breast. The narcissistic self is projected onto the other that owns the breast. As Castoriadis (1997a/1990) stated "Imaginary omnipotence with respect to the breast, which the infant imputed first to himself, and would have liked to continue to impute to himself afterwards, he is finally forced to place somewhere else, in another; this



means, first and foremost that he can constitute another only by projecting onto the latter his own imaginary schema of omnipotence” (p.305). In this conception the infant psyche now contains representations of a subject (self), object (the breast), and an other (the breast owner). This arose from the psychic need to firstly remove the object to outside (due to its badness), and finally to transfer the omnipotent power over the object to the other (both good and bad).

### *Triadic Phase*

Castoriadis (1997a/1990) called the formation of these three elements of the psyche (self, object, other) the triadic phase (refer to Table 1). As such he argued that the process of becoming social is underway, as an external object and other has a psychological existence. It is only a relative socialisation however, as the creation of an other involves the simplistic projection of the self’s omnipotence onto this other. Moreover, according to Castoriadis the psyche maintains a degree of control over the other in fantasy. As such, at this stage of development there exists only a partial social reality, for to have a full social reality is to recognise not only the existence, but also the will of external others. Eventually, within this conception of early development, it is the fact that the other (breast owner) is a member of a broader social order that facilitates the full development or acceptance that the other, and subsequently others, are separate beings and to a large extent out of the child’s control. This awareness of the existence of others, like us, who are autonomous beings and out of one’s control, is known as the reality principle within Freudian and neo-Freudian theory. This reality is also necessarily a social reality.

According to Castoriadis (1997a/1990) the parent speaks, touches, and interacts with the child in ways that are representative of their socio-cultural group. The other designates him/herself, signifies him/himself, designates and signifies the child, and designates and signifies ‘objects’ and the relations between ‘objects’. In other words the other introduces the child to social discourses. The other is also a source of frustration and guilt as they do not always comply with the wishes of the child, may love or be indifferent, promise, give, take, discipline, and this is interpreted as relating directly to the child’s own attitudes. According to Castoriadis (1997c/1975) the child’s narcissistic psychological underpinnings still relate everything back to their own wishes. Hence, frustrations lead to wishes of aggression against the other. The infant is aware that these wishes cannot be expressed, and the child will fear retribution from the powerful other for having these wishes. This fear of reprisal

and guilt associated with destructive wishes forms the basic structure of the conscience or what Freud (1991b/1923) called the ego ideal.

The ego ideal acts as a guiding principle for the actions of the individual. As noted by Cornell (2003) it is necessarily a social formation as it exists and is instituted by an other who is a social individual. According to Castoriadis (1997a/1990) the development of a conscience or ego ideal marks the beginnings of the psyche's capacity to be reflective. In learning that the wish to harm the other can lead the other to harm himself in retribution, the infant is recognising for the first time the existence of a cause that is separate from himself. The infant comes to the understanding that 'If I do this, then the other may do the same back'. Hence, it is argued that desire becomes socially mediated and from this point will always be socially mediated. Developmentally, thoughts, feelings and wishes are more and more commonly and with more and more complexity, projected onto others and internally repressed and introjected. The result according to Castoriadis is the continued development of a social conscience and the ability to derive pleasure and displeasure from social understandings as mental representations.

The result is a new form of identification, a two-way identification. Castoriadis (1997c/1975) suggested that along with the narcissistic identification of representing the subject as the other by projecting one's omnipotence, the child can now represent the subject as an object that can be posited for the desire of the other. That is, Castoriadis is suggesting that the child can now not only posit the other as other, but can also posit the other as desiring. Therefore the once pleasure seeking psyche of the infant now has two components, the original part that is largely unconscious and involves pleasure through imaginary representations, and the part responsible for the avoidance of displeasure, the ego ideal, which is increasingly tied to others. Thus a primitive ego ideal or conscience is constructed as well as the need and ability to repress thoughts and wishes that are socially taboo and potentially punishable. Castoriadis (1997a/1990) proposed that it is "the repression not of that which cannot be expressed because it cannot be represented but the repression of that which must not be expressed because it has been represented and continues to be so" (p.308).

### *Oedipal Phase*

At this stage however, the development of a full social reality is still not complete. While the infant can represent and conceive of a subject (the primary

caregiver), he cannot conceive of a broader social of which this subject is only a part. As long as the other continues to be conceived as all-powerful, the infant's social reality is only partial. That is, the child's reality is a social world containing one other person. The powerful other controls a private world that is not yet a public world. It contains private language that is only comprehensible within the parent/child relationship. The parent has imaginary omnipotence because he/she has ultimate control over meaning, and according to Castoriadis (1997a/1990), this control cannot be stripped by language or by the parent's own power.

Instead Castoriadis (1997a/1990) and Freud (1991b/1923) argued that the parent must have his/her power removed by someone else. It is argued that this pseudo world that exists between parent and child can only be broken from outside. That is, a third party, another representative of society is needed to induce the infant psyche out into the broader social world. Castoriadis noted that this third party must not be an even greater power than the primary caregiver, that is, a new all-powerful other. If this were to happen, the primary caregiver's omnipotence would merely be shifted onto this third party. According to Castoriadis this other needs to signify to the child that "no one among all those he might encounter is the source and absolute master of signification" (1997c/1975, p.309). This third person is the representative of the broader society, a father among other fathers, a mother among other mothers, the spokesperson for the reality of the societal context. The introduction of the notion of broader society, of a collective of individuals, serves to limit and contain the omnipotent underpinnings of the infant's psyche.

Freud (1991b/1923) termed this phase of development the Oedipal complex, in which the boy is forced to repress desire for the mother in fear of retribution from the father (refer to Table 1). It is in this stage where the boy identifies with the father and begins learning gender roles based on this nuclear family configuration. From Freud's perspective identification with the father is the beginning of all broader social learning. This is understood to begin when the boy realises he cannot defeat his father and have his mother to himself, and so desires to become like his father instead. Castoriadis (1997a/1990) on the other hand emphasised the role of a third person as the social representative rather than specifically a father within a nuclear family set up. Some object relations theorists (Elliot, 2002; Irigaray, 1993) have been critical of Freud's (1991b/1923), as well as Lacan's (1978) and Castoriadis' (1997a/1990) emphasis on the Oedipal complex and the role of the symbolic father in connecting

the 'subject to be' to the broader social network. They argue that in doing this they over-emphasise the Oedipal complex and fail to recognise the mother's continuing role in helping the child develop representations of the broader social network (Elliot, 2002). Hence, the continuing maternal role in the socialisation process of the child is seen to be under developed in Castoriadis' and Freud's theories.

Iragaray (1993) also suggested that men and women develop different subjectivities and that male theorists have emphasised the individuation process over the continuing emotional development and the mother/child relationship. Irigaray analysed the dialogue of dementia and schizophrenia patients and reduced their meaning to a single phrase. For men this phrase was 'I wonder if I'm loved, or, I tell myself that perhaps I am loved'. For women the phrase was 'Do you love me?' Men posited themselves as the subject whereas women posited themselves as an object that needed affirmation by another. Female subjectivity was hence a relative subjectivity while male subjectivity was clearly referenced by the use of 'I'. Irigaray also put into question the tendency for psychoanalytic theories to begin at the oral phase when in fact touch and caress is in existence before orality. According to Irigaray, touch makes it possible to want, to gather strength, and gives back to the person his/her body in the gesture of love.

The Oedipal complex has also been criticised by theorists for being culturally biased, and relevant only to the Western, patriarchal, nuclear family dynamic (Benjamin, 2000). However, recent theoretical work has to some degree rescued this developmental phase by emphasising its importance in the development of social membership (Benjamin, 2000; Cornell, 2003). Within this thesis it is suggested that the concept of the Oedipal phase is adaptable across different gendered family structures. Hence it is relevant for a variety of modern familial configurations. The most important development within this phase is the psychical incorporation of a third party and the beginnings of the recognition of the infants place in a broader social world. The sex, gender, sexuality, and familial structure are of secondary importance to the development of a sense of place within a broader social network. As Freud's use of the Oedipal complex refers directly to the boy's envy of the father, this phase may require re-naming.

The introduction of the third person in the family structure strips the primary caregiver of his/her omnipotence, signifying to the child that the primary other desires another object outside of them, and that the primary caregiver him/herself is the object

of another's desire (Castoriadis, 1997c/1975). Despite the child's attempts to protest, this situation is not changeable and the third person will not go away. The child must come to realise and reconcile their imagined self within a broader social status. That is, the infant becomes aware of himself as one of many. Hence in Castoriadis' interpretation of this phase the boy decides that 'if I can't deny or ignore their (society) existence, then I'll join them', whereas for Freud the boy decides that 'if I can't beat him (father), then I'll be like him'. The Oedipal situation according to Castoriadis teaches the child "the unavoidable fact of the institution (society) as the ground of signification and vice-versa, and forces him to recognise the other and human others as subjects of autonomous desires, which can interrelate with one another independently of him to the point of excluding him from this circuit. This absolutely unmasterable situation is, as a result, always equivalent to a 'castration' " (1997c/1975, p.310). This situation creates psychic tension in the child, much of which is repressed to the unconscious. This repressed material is often evoked at other points in the child's temporal development. The child will also come to the realisation (unconsciously at least) that life meaning is predominantly socially mediated and constructed. The activity of identity creation and negotiation from that moment on is the continual putting into relation of social values, representations, intentions, and affect.

It has been argued that the outcome of the Oedipal situation strongly influences sexual and gendered identities, and has been discussed in detail in recent times (Benjamin, 2000; Butler, 1997; J. Rose, 2000). These studies have examined the more culturally specific aspects and, in particular, possible changes to the hegemonic patriarchal Oedipal configuration. The question being asked is whether the current hegemonic patriarchal and heterosexual configuration results in functional individuals, equipped for modern Western society? The problem according to Benjamin (2000) is that the liberating function of the father is also accompanied by a necessary repudiation of the mother. In particular, the boy dissidentifies with the mother and repudiates feminine attributes. The mother's goodness is a seductive threat to social belonging and autonomy. After engaging with the Oedipal phase, for the boy infant, both routes back to the mother (object love and identification) are lost. The patriarchal father makes clear to the boy that he must be like me and identify with me (and therefore not with the mother), but must not be like me in terms of having the mother as an object of sexual desire. Benjamin argued that the Oedipal complex in its

current configuration does not adequately perform the task of differentiation and social membership as it denies the boy infant continuing identification with the mother and with the feminine. Therefore, the inner good mother is no longer developed and can only be returned to by the psyche in an infantile way. Benjamin suggested that the Oedipal model needed changing so as to promote a stronger identification of the son with the mother. The problem with Benjamin's argument is that it follows a static prescriptive assumption that men are always the 'third' other, need to connect more potently with their feminine side, and hence need to be more emotional. She also underestimates the complexity of the processes involved in the construction of gendered discourses, and that the strongly positioned hegemonic status of the patriarchal nuclear family configuration is already undergoing major transformation.

Butler (1997) also problematised the boy's strong identification with the father. She argued that at the onset of the Oedipal phase in current Western society, heterosexuality is already established as a guiding principle. Butler suggested that the boy must renounce the father as a sexual object, and thus the object is set up inside the ego. According to this Freudian drive theory perspective, the sublimation of a homosexual investment of libido is the condition by which identification can take place. This loss of a homosexual desire is incorporated but not grieved, so the loss becomes an external rather than an internal one. Butler argued that masculinity and femininity are established within the prohibition and sublimation of homosexuality, and within the identifications with the same sex parent they necessitate. An unliveable and un-mournable homosexuality is set up in the unconscious, and results in the performance of gender as compensation. A fear and anxiety regarding homosexuality results and becomes analogous to the fear of losing masculinity and manhood. Similarly, a common argument within empirical literature is that male violence towards gay men or men with feminine characteristics is caused by a need to reject femininity (Glick, Gangl, Gibb, Klumpner, & Weinberg, 2007). As Butler stated "If one is a man to the extent that one does not want a man, then wanting a man will bring being a man into question" (p.246). Thus a repudiated femininity is part of the identification with the father. In broader social terms, as long as Oedipal development is based on a cultural prohibition of homosexuality, a cultural melancholy will prevail and the symptom will be the defensive performances of masculinity and femininity. Butler suggested that gender expresses the inexpressible in sexuality. As for

identifying as homosexual, she argued that homosexuality is always performed in relation to the cultural taboo, must disavow heterosexuality, and so is in no way more functional. The solution then according to Butler is a cultural acknowledgement and grieving of the lost homosexuality. Butler's argument is based on Freud's assumption that development is directly linked to the investment of primary sexual energy or libido. Hence the sublimation of homosexuality is the psychic scaffolding for gendered discourses. A dynamic psychosocial perspective, however, de-emphasises sexual investment, and instead views primary imagination as the key characteristic of the psyche. This perspective also acknowledges the learning of multiple discourses, including prohibitions.

A collection of cultural prohibitions will inevitably be introduced to the child across the developmental phase. As such, as a society we need to address our cultural presuppositions and their possible effects on the developing child. However, the congruence between the cultural knowledge and prohibitions evident within the familial context, and the cultural knowledge and prohibitions one is likely to face and occupy in life, is of utmost importance to functional development. For example in a society that places a taboo on homosexuality, it is important that the child learns this taboo. Similarly, in a society that values male aggression, rationality, and grace under pressure, it is unlikely that boys will identify with verbal emotional expression. Socio-historical shifts in gendered and sexual values will occur as a result of the dynamic interactions between individuals as carriers of social knowledge.

It is hard to imagine a developmental model that alters the infant psyche out of its monadic state, and allows for imagined unity, without social prohibitions. These prohibitions, as a way of being, shape the human experience. It may be most beneficial as Butler (1997) suggested to collectively recognise and mourn the loss of that which is prohibited rather than keeping prohibitions as a collective melancholic identification. If gender is predominately performative, then the prescriptions on male identities and emotionality are also performative and subject to repression.

Castoriadis' (1997c/1975) central theoretical claim is that the primordial psyche or the primary narcissistic psyche is not a particular fantasy, or a number of fantasies, or a sexual libido, it is a representation of a self that is 'all'. In other words, it is the master fantasy in which there is only self. While Castoriadis pointed to an alternative understanding of our basic life energy or drive (alternative to other psychoanalytic based theories), he opened up a new problem. If the original self-

representation is completely self-sufficient, how does the real or the social gain entry to this primordial psyche? If it were truly self-satisfying it would never allow for a socialisation process. He articulated that the helplessness of the infant and the frustration of the absent breast create a break or opening in the psyche to place the bad breast, but it is still not sufficient to explain the initial entry of the social into the psyche. Fel also recognised this deficiency in Castoriadis's theory. Fel (1993) argued that what must be concluded is that the primordial psyche and the social are not totally incompatible, and in fact, that the psyche and social reality share common organising principles that allow for the socialisation process. While the dismantling of the infant's omnipotent psyche may appear to be against its will and results in much psychic tension, it must also be pre-disposed for this break-up on another level. According to Fel the narcissistic psyche may be an "autistic boundary which may encompass some aspects of social processes" (p.169).

#### *Sublimation Phase*

As mentioned earlier, sublimation is the psychological process that makes socialisation possible (Castoriadis, 1997a/1990). According to Castoriadis sublimation transforms narcissistic fantasy and other primordial forms of desire into socially mediated desires. For example, to sublimate homosexual desire is more than simply giving up the sexual pleasure others could provide, it is conceiving them not just as sexual objects but also as social individuals. During the Oedipal situation the mother or primary caregiver, who begins as the omnipotent object, becomes the tender loving mother as she has a socially instituted meaning as 'mother' whose significations go beyond her into society. Psychically, all these representations of mother coexist, including the mother of omnipotence. Object representations are multi layered, and affect, intentions, and relations accompany each representation of mother.

According to Castoriadis (1997c/1975) once the core structure of the sublimated socialisation is in place, another form of pleasure appears. The social individual can now find pleasure in a growing range of social activities, or the perception of these activities and their outcomes (refer to Table 1). The social individual can find pleasure in talking to others, making something, painting, in general an infinite array of social activities. In all these activities it is mental representations that procure pleasure. The fundamental structure of dynamic psychosocial identity is formed in early childhood when "the subject, at the end of its



socialisation process finds itself close to its original situation in which representation was, itself as such, pleasure” (p.315). In terms of desire, the primary imagination as the organising principle ensures that any social desire is not just fulfilable but already fulfilled. Social representational pleasure is temporarily put on hold and separated from the representation of the social activity in question. This deferment does not take place at the level of representation where it functions as a source of ego-ideals. So where in psychic time desire is always already fulfilled, in objective or clock time fulfilment can be deferred, hence society always offers a representation that is fulfilable in principle (Fel, 1993). Objective time, which goes hand in hand with being social, offers the individual an opportunity to exist in a world and to organise. According to Castoriadis (1997e/1990) objective time is not the change itself but the measure or determination of the change. In objective or clock time pleasure can be deferred as the individual and the society organise it that way. Originally the psyche had a pleasurable representation at its disposal (in subjective time), whereas after the socialisation process it is mediated by social representations and an ‘objective’ ordering of time. Hence we can reflect upon ourselves, and desire and will for outcomes in our social world. The sublimation development stage gives us the use of a social plane of representation and of time that is shared with others. Along with this the psyche still maintains a narcissistic representational plane and time but this is unconscious and unrecognisable to our conscious reflections.

The meaning of Freud’s (1991a/1920) reality principle is that there is no reality outside of that which is socially determined. The psyche is forced to replace its own private objects of psychic investment with objects that have worth in and through society. The unconscious represents, intends, and affects but has no sense of objective time. That is, the socialisation process results in the individual being able to find pleasure in the social world. The gap between unconscious subjective time and social clock time equates to human social desire including hopes, dreams, and plans. Without this desire life would be exceedingly difficult. The primary energy created by the primordial psyche, that initial psychic capacity, is now sublimated and invested in the social world. Functional social life involves the continual deferral of pleasure creating an expectancy of fulfilment in the future. The complexity of this process means that even when a desire is temporarily fulfilled there are other desires unfulfilled and indeed the continuing deferral of pleasure, that is, social desire is the energy of life.

*Summary*

Dynamic psychosocial identity is activated in early childhood by means of a series of interruptions or alterations to the psyche. Within this theory it is conceived that the psyche must also be predisposed to allowing these changes. The form and structure of a society is socio-historically situated, however, an alteration of the infant psyche in some form will always take place. The socialised child is able to imagine his/herself within the context of society. According to Castoriadis (1997a/1990) a degree of primary narcissism or of primary imagination is always a component of the subject. If it were not, the individual would be merely a slave to society and significant others. Instead the subject has the ability to project his/her will and autonomy towards others and towards society (Cornell, 2003). This notion of autonomy and a reflective capacity is paramount for considerations of individual and social well-being. As a result of dynamic interpersonal relationships in early childhood, the capacity for the lifelong development and negotiation of social identity is formed, and this identity is always mediated by individual and social history. Castoriadis argued that it includes a reflective image of the individual for him/herself mediated by the image that he/she imagines is being given to others. Part of this self-image is the fact that the individual conforms to his/her self-image. It is the very being of the individual, and this image becomes more important than wholeness or life itself. This is evident in all self-destructive behaviours and intentions.

The important contribution dynamic psychosocial theory makes is in the understanding of the relationship between the individual and society. They are not conceived of as independent entities or even interdependent entities, but as complimentary. Individuals are always social and constitutive of society. If there is an opposition it is between society and the primary narcissistic element of the psyche. This is the element of human subjectivity that maintains an individual essence and sense of time, and remains largely unconscious. Our collective discourses do not exist in some imagined external space, but rather, within individuals.

Identity then from a dynamic psychosocial perspective is an illusion of wholeness and completeness that covers up the complexities of the psyche. This illusion is perpetuated because there is both a cultural and individual desire for this unity based on a primordial narcissistic representation. Similarly, identity has been split by gender under the illusion that masculinity and femininity are complimentary opposites. Rose (2000) argued that this illusion be exposed as the fraud that it is.

Discourse analytic research has demonstrated the lengths to which boys and young men will go to demonstrate to themselves and others their version of hegemonic masculinity (Gough, 2004). It has also been suggested that emotions are bound to these social narratives of masculinity.

The question that is raised is to what effect the socio-historical desire for the illusion of a unified identity has in terms of a fragmented subjectivity? It could be perhaps that the desire for unity and the desire for the removal of difference and distance is a necessary condition for humans to be social. This psychic need is derived from the narcissistic core representation, which although transformed with the gradual introduction of others, can be once again observed in social life. It is the psychic interrelationship between understanding that 'I am just one of many', and feeling that 'I am an omnipotent force'. The projection of omnipotence can be observed in any group formation or in the day-to-day practices of identity making within socio-historical contexts.

Development then can be seen as temporal as well as linear, proceeding from a primary belonging in a private reality to a secondary belonging in a social reality. Language, cultural knowledge, and group memberships allow us to develop a familiarity with the world that protects us from difference and novelty. Fel (1993) argued that the "totalising ambition of science or any other organised system of beliefs (public or private) that seeks universal covering laws or rules of conduct is supported by the same dynamic principle of difference which presides over the constitution of the autistic monad" (p.173).

According to a dynamic psychosocial theory of subjectivity and identity an individual unity is made coherent by consistent cultural markings. These markings have meaning only within the social arena and thus the individual can only have an identity where identity is socially prescribed and understood. The socialisation process in early childhood results in a multi-dimensional psyche containing countless representations of shared cultural discourses, repressed representations born of psychic frustration, ambivalence towards others, and the fear of reprisal; and a monadic, narcissistic core, which drives for unity and the abolition of difference. The psyche also has the capacity for imagined creativity and the ability to redirect and be redirected by the social discourses.

Identity development is linear in the sense that the quality and quantity of representations increases exponentially across early childhood, and temporal in the

sense that sublimated socio-cultural representations of pleasure, and reflectiveness, once again become guided and controlled by the primary narcissistic psyche. It is the process of reflection that is central to conceiving the social individual from a dynamic psychosocial perspective. It is argued within this thesis that while it is important to monitor our social definitions and prohibitions regarding manhood and masculinity, more important is the promotion of reflective capacities which result in autonomous men. These men are active participants rather than passive recipients of information within our social worlds.

Much of what has been discussed is meta-psychological and philosophical, and absent are illustrations and socio-cultural specifics. It is this lack of social detail and cultural comment that is currently missing from dynamic psychosocial identity theory. Moreover there have been few studies that have explored in detail the processes of identity as a socio-cultural construct within targeted groups of men. It is this aspect, the consideration of how men utilise concepts of masculinity in constructing and negotiating their social identities that is sorely needed.

## Chapter 5

## Reflecting on Practice: Negotiating the Competing Needs of Participants, Researcher, and Institution

In undertaking an ethnographic process of active engagement with participants, I learnt first hand of the challenges of fieldwork, and the importance of reflecting on and reporting the fieldwork process as a means of producing 'rich' data and insightful interpretations. In addition, I also found that the opportunity to have access to other fieldworkers when reflecting on the fieldwork process to be extremely useful. As such, I present my critical analysis of the literature in relation to my own experiences of ethnographic fieldwork. In this instance, in order to develop new knowledge regarding men's identity processes it is necessary to reflect upon and move beyond the assumed known. This requires one's return to a critique of the social-historical context of their current knowledge base and an openness to developing their epistemological framework from 'the ground' up. For instance, much of the current research on masculinity begins from a deficit perspective that places men as being in trouble and experiencing a major crisis in their identity (Clare, 2000). Within this thesis it is suggested that this approach narrows the research lens and leaves many aspects of men's lived experiences unknown and unexplored, as they become subsumed within one homogeneous gendered group. What is missing are detailed investigations of the complexities of men's lived experiences that go beyond their gendered attributions. Achieving this required going beyond a reliance on dyadic understandings of men in order to build knowledge of the connection between the psychological and the social. Of particular relevance to achieving this understanding was the incorporation of informed ethnographic investigation of male sub-cultural groups, and a critical analysis of this research within a social-historical context and prevailing norms.

I have argued within this thesis that in order to develop an understanding of men's lives and men's identities we need to engage with different groups of men in their everyday contexts. This involves exploring both the performance of and creation of identities within everyday interactions. To achieve this I engaged in prolonged fieldwork as part of my study of two subgroups of men. As noted by Harrington (2003), the richness of data and the depth of insight possible through the ethnographic process of fieldwork is reliant on the development of relationships with participants.

As such it is important for the researcher to continually evaluate and report the ethnographic fieldwork engagement process. Gaining acceptance by group members allows the researcher to truly participate, and more accurately represent the group. More than two years of fieldwork engagement as an ethnographer of young men from two locations (a gymnasium in metropolitan Melbourne, and a remote Australian fishing town) revealed not only insights regarding the everyday lives of the men, but have also highlighted fieldwork challenges that determine the level of engagement with men. In addition, my journey highlighted the paucity of available published research that critically evaluates the actual practice of fieldwork, as distinct from theoretical discussions of method. The present evaluations of the fieldwork process within this thesis explores the relationship, differences, and tensions between the 'real' and the 'prescribed' evolution of an ethnographic fieldwork study, and offers valuable insight into the vexed question of why some groups of men, such as those in remote communities, are underrepresented in research.

Before discussing this process it is important to address the epistemological assumptions that presuppose this thesis. In particular, it is necessary to reflect on the aim of this research to illustrate and develop the connection between social and psychological processes in men's everyday lives.

#### *Connecting the Social and the Psychological through Fieldwork*

Finding a balance and relationship between the social and the psychological has been identified as a key concern of current psychological practices (Frosh et al., 2000; Howard, 2000; Phinney, 2005; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). For example, Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2003) have identified an explanatory shortfall in discursive social psychology to which, they believe, psychoanalysis could be utilised as a tool to address the psychological dimension. These authors and others (Phinney, 2005; Taylor, 2006) have argued that what is often missing in current reported practices is a consideration of the interplay between the individual, their environment, and the historical context of their identity. As such, theoretical explanation is typically offered from either an individual perspective or a broad social perspective. Instead, it is argued that while there is no such thing as an individual standing outside of culture, there are consistencies in patterns of feelings and behaviours within and between individuals that can and must also be observed and discussed. Further, they argue that describing the interdependence between the social and the psychological is a fundamental and necessary concept within psychology. Similarly, Flick (1998) argued

that what is missing from current social psychological practices are investigations of questions that integrate social, psychological, and everyday aspects of life such as; what part do social and collective discourses play in everyday life? Which psychological concepts can explain how ideologies function? How do representations of selfhood play out? What role does the image of the 'new man' play in everyday life? And finally, what is the relationship between social psychological knowledge and everyday knowledge?

Conversely, it has been suggested that integrating social and psychological perspectives is beyond current capabilities (Edley, 2006). Instead, Edley favoured the use of discursive practices that take a broader social perspective. While acknowledging that "discourse theory is seen to lack (1) an appropriate ontology of the self and (2) an adequate account of the "fixations" of identity" (p.602), he argued that subjective approaches such as those based on psychoanalysis, and discursive approaches, were fundamentally incompatible. He argued that discursive approaches are concerned with how language is formed and used according to context, whereas psychoanalytic perspectives are interested in the speaker's state of mind. As such he suggested that combining discourse theory and psychoanalysis is "not so much a synthesis, as the running of the two theories side by side" (p.605). Within this present thesis it is argued that dynamic psychosocial identity theory overcomes this alleged incompatibility by not theorising a distinction between the individual and the social. As such individuals speak and perform social discourses for two purposes simultaneously. The first purpose is related to contextual and interpersonal goals and demands, and the second is related to maintaining stability and consistency of self through repetition. The reflective functioning that maintains a sense of coherency in identity is evident within each unique context of interpersonal interactions. Edley is also assuming that interview transcripts are the only means by which research can address the discursive and subjective aspects of identity. As such the analytical opportunities afforded by alternative data forms such as participant observation, journals, and photographic documentation are undervalued.

It is suggested within this thesis that by working in conjunction to incorporate both the social and psychological, discursive analysis can be used to locate broad socio-historical discourses, while phenomenological ethnographic fieldwork insights can be used to help identify and recognise cultural, environmental and psychological consistencies. As noted by Denzin (1997) and others (Griffin, 2000; Lofland, 2002;

Wolcott, 1999), ethnography is an eclectic discipline and can utilise both discursive and phenomenological techniques. In particular, the phenomenological aspects of ethnographic research can be utilised to focus on the consistencies in the ways people position themselves in relation to normative discourses, while discourse analysis of interview text can identify the normative discourses themselves.

In describing and explaining the world from a phenomenological perspective it is assumed that individuals have a core self that interacts with external stimuli and socio-historical discourses in consistent ways (Durrheim, 1997; Jones, 2001). Extending upon this, ethnographic approaches aim to describe and explain in detail the lived experiences of a particular group of people. Discursive approaches to collection and analysis (i.e. discourse analysis and conversation analysis) centre on the interview text as a means for inducing relational patterns, discourses, and identity positions. This form of methodology has been successful in illuminating the ways in which socio-historical discourses can be drawn out of everyday conversation. From this perspective language becomes central to social meaning and is used as a cultural tool to achieve contextual objectives. Language then becomes the window to understanding broad social discourses. As such, discourse and conversational analysis focus on the socio-political power of discourse in people's lives as well as the possibility of interactive change. According to Durrheim (1997), and substantiated by others (Edley, 2001; Frosh et al., 2000), discursive approaches help illuminate how particular understandings of the world come to pass as truth and are taken-for-granted.

Phenomenological approaches to understanding usually begin with a research question, whereas discursive approaches are usually inductive (Lazaraton, 2003). Hence with discursive approaches greater emphasis is placed on the data analysis process rather than data collection itself. Within this process, the environmental and social context of data gathering is of secondary importance. That people do talk and position themselves around these socio-historical understandings or discourses has become an accepted way of conceiving our world. As such, the emphasis on and advancement in qualitative analysis bought on by discursive approaches has enabled researchers to describe cultural phenomena, without necessarily having to engage in prolonged fieldwork. Within this context, the discursive approach places importance on the reduction of ethnographic process to the collection of interview transcripts as the primary product of research labour. What is often neglected is any reflective



discussion of the continuing need for and requirements of phenomenological research within this process if we are to achieve a holistic framework.

To date there is a deficiency in our understanding of how to tailor and operationalise ethnographic research to this end. Ethnographic approaches that combine phenomenological and discursive strategies require more extensive and labour intensive fieldwork and rely more on the subjective interpretations of the researcher. However, while the need for prolonged fieldwork is often acknowledged in the literature there is little discussion of what exactly that entails. As suggested by Stein and Mankowski “if qualitative research is to inform and shape our discipline (community psychology), we must both publish the findings of our research and describe the journey” (p.22). Fieldwork tasks are often time consuming, expensive, and require substantial personal investment. Unfortunately, the process of conceptualising and operationalising the collection of data from the field seems to remain separated out from the current process of reporting on discourse. Moreover, the contextual nature of the field environment in relation to the subject seems to receive only a cursory acknowledgement by the researcher in their reporting.

The engagement processes involved in this present study are reported as a means of contributing to this deficit, in addition they contribute to our understandings of the male participants in this study. The challenges and obstacles faced by this study, are offered as a means of informing practice and understanding, and sharing information. This critique of the actual process of developing and engaging in an ethnographic study will be followed by an example of how, this process alone, offered a substantial level of knowledge to the overall aims of the study. In particular, the process of engagement elucidated the complete data set for study one.

### *Critique of the ‘known’ Process*

#### *The Realities of Fieldwork*

Undertaking qualitative research can be one of the most difficult and stressful experiences of a person’s life (Loftland et al., 2006). In too many cases researchers enter the field unprepared and unaware of some of the challenges they will face. Even with the best of intentions and a sound epistemological framework, researchers can often encounter difficulties in the field resulting in compromised data and results. What is easily forgotten is that a person must *become* a fieldworker. This does not necessarily come naturally and easily, and it is a distinct process from one’s academic development (Burgess, 1991; Shaffir, 1991). Difficulties can arise concerning issues

such as choosing a sample, gaining entry, interviewer/interviewee dynamics, familiarity, rapport, disclosure, setting, and consent. Furthermore, as noted by Parker (2005), less talked about are the challenges that arise due to inconsistencies between institutional discourses and fieldwork requirements and the necessary adjustments made by fieldworkers.

*Gaining Group Acceptance/Becoming a Member*

Harrington (2003) described ethnography as “the process by which researchers gather data via interpersonal relationships with participants” (p.593). Hence the ethnographer’s most important function is to form and maintain meaningful interpersonal relationships in the field. The entire research project is dependent on relationally derived data and interpretation, therefore sustaining relational distance equates to gathering shallow or superficial data. However, even when the ethnographer begins their fieldwork with already established solid relationships in the field, sometimes referred to as an insider position (Loftland et al., 2006), extensive relational negotiation is still required.

While the terms insider/outsider are commonly used in fieldwork to demarcate familiarity and non-familiarity with participants at the beginning of fieldwork (Loftland et al., 2006; Wolcott, 1999), others such as Parker (2005) have argued that the researcher’s institutional affiliation and position of power automatically makes one an outsider regardless of their initial assumed relationship with participants. Similarly, Sonn (2004) argued that the researcher’s position of power equates to a cultural difference between researcher and participants and requires cultural sensitivity and a process of mutual negotiation. Arising from my experience in conducting this research is the realisation that the transition towards an insider position occurs over an extended period of time and is often never completely achieved.

Of concern, although this transition from an outsider position to a more collaborative position within the fieldwork context is often not achieved, it is rarely mentioned in the literature. Rather, one reads reports citing the proposed intent of engagement in participant observation, and alluding to the notion that “hanging around a group of people for several hours over a week or month and conducting a few interviews” adequately encapsulates this action (Shaffir, 1991, p.80). As such I argue that these studies need to be more accurately reported as partial rather than full ethnographies. In particular, for the purposes of sharing knowledge, in cases when full

ethnographic engagement was desired but not achieved, the process of engagement, including the barriers to full engagement needs must be reported. It is these processes that help illuminate the special characteristics of the group being sampled, and serve to inform and provide practical illustrations for others.

One of the reasons that only a small proportion of ethnographic studies aim for and succeed in full engagement may be due to what Harrington (2003) argued was a lack of a generalised theory of ethnographic fieldwork practice. This lack in development of a theory could also be attributed to the relational nature of fieldwork and the variances in contextual details from study to study. Moreover, the emergence of a culturally diverse mix of 'new' ethnographers may have significantly increased the variances in field experiences and requirements.

Necessarily, each study is a unique experience between the researcher, the researched, and the setting. However, it is argued here that unless these researchers are open to sharing their insights and experiences in operationalising the notion of insider/outsider perspectives, there will remain a large vacuum of knowledge that is pertinent to conducting ethnographic studies. As noted by Marcus (1997), ethnographic subjectivist accounts of fieldwork or 'tales from the field' have helped break down the notion that fieldwork could be achieved in a manner or method on par with conducting surveys. This thesis acknowledges that the process of sharing experiences is not likely to lead to a generalised theory of fieldwork practice, however such research notation can and has illuminated some of the generalised experiences and requirements of the researcher working in the field. For example, Shaffir (1991) proposed that despite the uniqueness of each ethnographic project, there were three consistent themes emanating from his experiences. Firstly, that despite the researcher's anxiety, participants are generally more co-operative than expected. This co-operation generally reflects the researcher's personal likeability far more than it does the merits or importance of the research. Secondly, the researcher is always required to be in some part deceptive, largely because of the need to present oneself in ways that will be perceived as congruent with the group or as non-threatening to the group. Finally, the researcher never lets their guard down, even when the participants do.

Such information can be heartening to the novice in the field, who has to date had little formal training. As noted by Harrington (2003), it is anecdotally well known that ethnographers rely on advice and guidance from more experienced colleagues,

reading 'tales from the field', or receiving input regarding behavioural planning strategies or other agreed methods for initiating and sustaining fieldwork interaction. However, to date there remains a paucity of literature enunciating the learnings this engagement offers. According to Seale (2004), the quality and credibility of qualitative research is reliant on its evolution and development as a craft or skill. He argued that at present there is insufficient discussion and reporting of the practice of qualitative research. Instead research has focused on qualitative research as a philosophical or political movement. He suggested that sound and productive research was reliant on a skilled practitioner whose quality can be judged by fellow researchers within a particular field. In order for this judgement to take place, it is argued that practitioners need to be more diligent in reporting their practice of fieldwork. As such, the reporting of fieldwork practice allows for innovation and development.

*Duality of relationships*

One of the major misconceptions in conducting ethnographic research is the assumption that the power differential is a one-way, top-down approach, from the researcher to the participants. While it is well documented that participants act differently when they know they are being watched, Van Maanen (1991) argued that less frequently discussed is the fact that participants also watch and monitor the researcher. Therefore if the participants do not like or trust what they see the research will be unsuccessful, regardless of any actions taken by the researcher. To this end, forming alliances in the field initially is often beneficial.

Sometimes the proposed plan or solution to engagement is for the ethnographer to exchange something with their participants in return for their assistance and information. Usually, however, to counteract the confounding aspects of power differentials associated with monetary or material rewards, the only thing a researcher can truly offer is relational and symbolic (e.g. friendship) and this must always be negotiated slowly. Hence, gaining acceptance by a group remains a two-way interactive process beyond the specific control or manipulation of the researcher. Indeed, as Burgess (1991) noted, gaining acceptance as a researcher in the field is more than just strategies and a one-off activity, it is a process of negotiation and renegotiation of relationships. The allies, guides, and gatekeepers involved in a project can often be invaluable in promoting the virtues of the researcher to other participants and deflecting initial engagement problems. However, total reliance on this entrée into the field is naive, as the participants themselves will have the final

power in determining the value or depth of their relationship to the researcher or with the project.

For example, a further step in the process of acceptance and engagement is, what Harrington (2003) argued, the give and take of identity labels and categories. In general, people like to associate with those with similar characteristics, therefore the researcher needs to find some common ground upon which to relate with his field members. While the researcher can present aspects of his identity that are congruent with the group, the group must also apply identity markers or characteristics to the researcher. Hence the researcher's identity within the group is negotiated. If he tries too hard to fit in, he runs the risk of being outed as a try hard, or as non-genuine. Similarly, if he does not present some congruent characteristics he will also remain outside. Instead the researcher needs to leave a sufficient gap in his self-representation for the group to fill in. The initial process of engaging becomes one of compromise and negotiation between the identified participant group, possible gatekeepers, and the researcher, well before the actual real work begins, yet much of the published research intimates that it was a simple, pragmatic process. As Harrington pointed out, the "ethnographer's identity claims must be validated by participants in order for researchers to gain access to information" (p. 611). Hence, gaining acceptance by a group of people takes skill, time, and considerable effort. Even then, the potentiality of predicting and controlling relationships with participants remains impossible. I argue that for this aspect of the research to sustain any form of reliability or trustworthiness, as researchers and educators, we need to discuss these processes far more explicitly and reflectively with other practitioners, and offer clarity in how we achieve our engagements.

#### *Institutional Research Discourse*

One of the primary gatekeepers, and major obstacles to accessing the participant field, lies within the research institution or organisation itself. In the early stages of the research process the ethnographic researcher's drive for 'real life' data rather than guarded testimony will be challenged by the practical and ethical requirements of their employer or funding agency. As noted by Parker (2005), the undertaking of qualitative research within an institution such as a university or research centre, necessarily positions the researcher within a particular discourse. This discourse involves the positioning of the researcher as an expert, and as an investigator who must draw data from a sample of participants. The researcher has

consented to gather participant testimony using accepted methods such as interviews, focus groups, and observations, in an agreed ethical manner, and in an agreed time frame. Hence the researcher must assume an outsider position in relation to participants regardless of their level of familiarity and understanding of the group. Taking on the researcher position with its explicitly implied duties automatically places the research process within the context of objective data collection, which can only be described as outsider or removed data.

In this act of objectifying the data collection process, the researcher creates a power dynamic separating themselves from their informants. Implied in this process are the roles and expectations determined by both party's understanding of the institutional discourse (Van Maanen, 1991). The institution is primarily concerned with extracting the required 'best' data possible, and thus meeting the research requirements. From this perspective, familiarity is acknowledged as a process that may assist in establishing rapport, but the research motive, data collection, remains primary. As such any empathic understanding or engagement with the participants can become a secondary consideration.

The nature of the planning process, and specific economic limitations (time, resources) and methods (interviews, focus groups) are often already laid out by the research affiliate, which as noted, means that the researcher inevitably begins with limited flexibility when faced with important issues such as engagement, access, and rapport. Such limitations and/or boundaries mean that the researcher cannot always be flexible in relation to the needs of the social setting. The researcher is constantly made aware of these inherent constraints (legitimate data, research protocols and ethical behaviours). As a first step, I propose that in order to enable a more authentic process the researcher must consciously work through and beyond these boundaries. It is during this process that I argue, when full engagement is desired, the researcher is required to immerse themselves in an extended process of reflexivity and considered evaluation of both the conceived research project and multiplicity of demands associated with process. As noted by Loftland et al. (2006) it is this aspect of institutional oversight, with its legal, socio-political and economic protocols that require substantiated pre-fieldwork demarcation of all processes of engagement, data collection and assessment associated with working with human beings that can become a major stumbling block in many qualitative projects. This is especially so for ethnographic research, wherein achieving engagement is a process so fluid, dynamic,

and contextual that it defies exact pre-planning. Again, the paucity of literature exploring this aspect of the research process leads to a major vacuum in understanding and diminishes institutional or other motivations to change long established protocols and infrastructural demands.

*Data Types, Ethnographic Observation Versus Talk and Text*

The attainment of some form of genuine rapport between the researcher and the researched allows for engagement and verbal expression that more closely resembles everyday talk. This important relational factor facilitates depth in the data collected and also the analysis. For example, Van Maanen (1991) in his ethnographic experiences with police officers noted that it was not until he had demonstrated his discretion and trustworthiness a number of times did the policemen trust him enough to let their guard down. Indeed, often when the ethnographer has gained appropriate 'membership', the participants are likely to offer up information rather than having it extracted, and want to ensure that important intricacies of understanding or formation are not left out of the final report (Loftland et al., 2006).

Ideally, ethnographic interviews are less structured and more conversational in style than other forms of interviewing (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). In terms of analysis, the researcher must often pick up on less well-known idiosyncrasies and meanings within and between the text. It is through having achieved a familiarity with participants that the ethnographer is able to pick up on coded or abbreviated language such as slang and invented words and sayings. Engaged membership also gives the researcher an understanding of the context in which things are said.

For the ethnographer, fully immersed in his sub-culture, finding the time, place, and mood to conduct a recorded interview is a very sensitive task. Any formalization of the conversation can result in a shift in relationship and consequent reversion of the discourse to a more guarded outsider interview (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). In the early stages of the data collection process any focus group or interview data necessarily remains limited to dissociated accounts of everyday interaction, and while containing multiple socio-cultural discourses, will be primarily governed by the institutional discourse (Parker, 2005).

In the objective or outsider interview, the researcher uses the interview dynamic to gather as much information as possible, and often uses probing questions to get to the heart of matter. Conversely, in ethnographic research the interview is a

more seamless part of a triangulation of data collection methods (observation, engagement, and conversation) in which all the parts need to fit for true understanding. To conduct this form of interview requires a high level of expertise and time. However, as noted earlier the pressures of the institution in monitoring the successful progress of research by the amount of solid (i.e., interview or focus group) data being collected can lead to this aspect of the study being overlooked. The lack of training and time constraints often places pressure on a researcher to collect these forms of data, without the necessary preliminary processes being fully developed, even though the value of data would be unsuitable or even counter productive to the concept under investigation.

Again, in these conflicted periods of full ethnographic fieldwork, the integrity of the project is threatened and can often be compromised. The researcher often needs support and encouragement at this stage to follow his intuition and resist short cuts. I argue that having a support team to discuss this personal struggle can be advantageous. As noted by (Loftland et al., 2006), it is important that researchers, particularly new researchers, be encouraged to follow their instincts and that their efforts in the field be acknowledged and encouraged. In order for this to occur, I argue that this form of discourse needs to be far more pronounced in the reporting of our work. As such, rather than being rigidly planned and executed (which we have noted is a very common practice amongst, especially the novice researcher), within an ethnographic format, interviews and other data are collected within a more fluid here and now context. It is for these reasons that a collaborative position in research in which the institutional discourse is to some degree diluted must be developed. Without such a process the data too greatly reflects the power differential between the researcher and the participants.

#### *Observation and accurate records*

A further area of importance for the researcher is to constantly remind themselves of the distinction between aims and types of data collected. When the everyday interactions of the participants within their environment are the focus of inquiry it is necessary for the researcher to search beyond superficial pragmatic access to knowledge and understanding. The combination of interview transcripts and journal notes allow for a more detailed interpretation, fact checking, and contextual relevance (Wolcott, 1999). However, the legitimacy of observational data in the form of journal notes is often viewed as lacking or insufficient on its own. I argue that the value of



persistence in maintaining one's journal is pivotal to the researcher being able to maintain some form of containment over the process. It is within the confines of the journal that one can find some of the most interesting and important details regarding the process, issues with gatekeeping, and insights into aspects of the study, which are not recorded via interview.

Furthermore, what is often not recorded publicly is the fact that often researchers go for long periods of time with feelings of failure because they have yet to obtain sufficient data, or because they have become aware of the gap between them and the group. This gap can leave them vulnerable to engaging in dichotomous relationships of power between the object and subject of knowledge development. Frustration, despair, anger are often felt as the disparity between fieldwork requirements of participant observation and institutional expectations become more evident and more salient. As noted earlier, it is often in this period that many researchers re-evaluate and change their research in line with static research expectations (outcomes), funding and time limitations, and for their own well-being (Shaffir, 1991). In this situation, levels of institutional understanding are tested and can strongly dictate the quality of research outcomes. Unfortunately in many instances this means a pulling back from the investment of time and resources needed to persist with engagement as a participant observer. The researcher has to rely on his intuition to best position himself within a group. Hopefully, the end result is an understanding of some of the complex systems of a subculture of people, of which the researcher is now a part. The researcher realises he is now an accepted member of the group when his relationships with group members are more genuine rather than purposive, and he is far less tied by institutional timelines and discourses. This process is gradual, and in the end, hardly noticeable. It is through the process of constant self-monitoring and reflection of journal writing that the researcher can retain an awareness of this process.

Another feature of concern in conducting research is the overall expectations of presentation of narrative of the research project (Parker, 2005). It is consistent with western academic expectations to look for a clear and coherent narrative flow. That is, to have a beginning, middle, and end. This has the effect of smoothing and covering over any seeming inconsistencies to form a rational story. This motive and narrative structure is second nature to the researcher and seldom questioned, certainly, if it is to be accepted into the arena of knowledge to be shared with others. The predominant

professional discourse promotes research that 'fits' the empirical trajectory. It is then on this level as well that the researcher can become seduced into a power dynamic which places them once again as the outsider, someone who judges through multiple lenses the information he gathers. The temptation to alter the 'story', to clean it up and make it 'sexy' or 'relevant' to status quo can be quite compelling. I propose that by having ensured adequate, solid and consistent levels of note keeping and reflection of the process that the researcher is less likely to overlook important aspects and nuances of the work that may be central to the final analysis and outcomes. It is often in the 'messy' periods of research that most learning is achieved, particularly when one reflects on and reports these periods. However this component of the research is again often not alluded to in the current research literature, or receives only a cursory comment.

#### *Researcher's reflexivity*

A fundamental aspect of qualitative research is the requirement that the researcher address their own subjectivity within the project itself. As discussed earlier, often the temptation to briefly acknowledge or offer some innocuous statement of personal or affiliated interest in the subject matter seems to be the normative offering in this area of reporting, if it occurs at all. Given the competing forces of institutional discourses and one's own discourses it is understandable that this process may be contentious. It can be quite cathartic to reflect and write about ones experiences and interactions with others in a personal way. The researcher's confessional story, often full of emotion and passion, is a common way in which the frustration of ethnographic research is expressed. Some have argued that while personal growth is part of the research process it is largely self-indulgent and pointless to report (Parker, 2005). From this perspective, personal accounts are to be included only where they help illuminate the data and add to the understanding of the cultural group being studied. In this way the research focus is maintained on the cultural group in question rather than reflecting on a separate self as a potential confound to the findings.

Unfortunately, this has meant that much of the important data related to the process has been delimited from the actual reporting process, and participant observations have been subsumed within the 'not important' category once again. In line with Wolcott (1999) and Stein and Mankowski (2004), my experience would lead me to strongly encourage this 'messy' aspect of reporting as a means of recognizing the subjective component of qualitative research and valuing the 'essence' of our

work. Similarly, Marcus (1998) argued that ethnography “which is centrally interested in the creativity of social action through imagination, narrativity, and performance, has usually been produced through an analytic imagination that is comparatively impoverished and far too restrictive” (p. 187). He argued that critical work should resist easy assimilation to the specific phenomena of interest laid down in the planning process, producing a ‘messy many-site-ness’ in terms of the objects of study and the data collected.

Overtly or covertly, subjective investment will always come through in the data and in the report. Moreover this personal subjectivity is always relational to the research and its constituents hence a separate personal report, reflecting on the experience, must become an essential aspect of all reporting of fieldwork, if we are to be enabled to accurately reflect and consider the full context of the issue presented.

As mentioned earlier, there is a paucity of research literature addressing the role of personal subjectivity in ethnographic research, however the following accounts of my work offer some indications of the value this form of reporting has on the whole research project. The reflective analysis of my experiences in engaging with two groups of young men is presented as a way of illustrating and contextualising some of the inherent issues and obstacles faced within an ethnographic research project that relied on participant observation and engagement. In addition the fieldwork experience is presented as a means of better understanding the participants’ everyday lives. As Marcus (1998) stated “ethnographic projects that are heavily motivated by and cast in cultural theory terms must be allowed to “breathe”, especially in terms of their descriptive accounts of things, before the theory kicks in” (p.18).

## Chapter 6

### Methodology

It is the contention within this thesis that identity can only be understood through the integration of both developmental and social processes. As such, a theory of dynamic psychosocial identity is proposed as a means of conceptualising the ‘oneness’ of individual and social dimensions. As noted, this theory requires further development through exploration of the processes of identity construction and negotiation within a ‘real life’ context. Within the empirical literature, aside from specificity along lines of race, ethnicity, or religion, there have been few studies that have explored in detail the identity processes of sub-cultures of men. In order to obtain detailed accounts of the lived experience of men, and to avoid culturally and contextually naïve generalisations, a qualitative methodology was adopted for this thesis (Berg, 2004; Collins, 2003; Huberman & Miles, 2002; Willig, 2003a). Data was collected through participant observation, focus groups, and individual interviews. The author chose to engage in the data collection via the process of ethnography.

According to Parker (2005) ethnography “documents the invention and decomposition of communities” (p.36). Ethnography describes the ideologies, behaviours, relationships, and contextual factors that define these communities (Lofland, 2002; Wolcott, 1999). Hence the researcher’s intention in using this framework was to describe in detail a particular sub-culture or community of men. Ultimately the aim of this thesis is to develop an in-depth understanding of men, being male, within a specific social context. Further, this thesis aimed to illustrate and further develop dynamic psychosocial identity theory.

#### *Ethnographic Description*

The main benefit of an ethnographic study and of engagement in fieldwork is the rich detailed data that is obtained (Denzin, 1997; Holt & Sparkes, 2001; Wolcott, 1999). The current research project presents detailed description of the everyday lives of male participants, and is presented as a set of stories. The purpose is to draw the reader into the social world of the men and for the reader to gain insight and perspective through stories of their everyday activities. Ethnography describes the social worlds of small groups of people, including activities, interests, and rules and styles of engagement (Frosh et al., 2003; Griffin, 2000; Holt & Sparkes, 2001; Huberman & Miles, 2002; Lofland, 2002; Parker, 2005; Willig, 2003a; Wolcott,

1999). This is achieved through the active participation of the researcher in this world, and subsequently, the reporting of this engagement. As such the researcher describes the social world as he/she sees it, having become a member himself.

Ethnographic description also sets the scene for the more macro analyses that follow. With this more detailed understanding as a basis, it is proposed that further analysis and discussion will then be grounded in the experiences of the men, and the subjective interpretation of the researcher as a pseudo group member. While ethnographic social worlds contain particularities that make each world unique, these groups are also socio-historically situated and constructed. This makes possible the recognition and discussion of broader social discourses. Hence this ethnographic study of men describes the detailed daily lives of the men and also places their lives within a broader social context. The analyses of data while not seeking generalisation through sample representativeness, will have relevance to a broader population of men who also live within a similar socio-historical context and share similar social discourses, particularly those surrounding masculinity. It is a presupposition of this study that different groups of men will have different ways of negotiating these discourses.

### *Summary*

Two studies were conducted as part of this thesis (see Table 2). The first study investigated a group of young adult men from a small fishing community in Southern Australia. This study involved a brief intense period of participant observation. Due to the extreme challenges (time, economic, personal) this location presented the researcher it was decided to suspend study in this location. The second study had two phases and investigated a group of young adult men from a gymnasium in a metropolitan Australian city. Data was collected via participant observation and focus groups in phase one, and participant observation and one to one interviews in phase two.

### *Context and Participants*

The participants were from two communities of young adult men. The men were predominantly between the ages of 21 and 37 (except for 2 community leaders who were in their early 50s, and two gymnasium members who were in their late 50s). The first community was a small fishing community in Southern Australia, and the second was a subgroup of young male members of a gymnasium in a metropolitan Australian city. The researcher selected these groups on the basis of a common

Table 2. *Methodological Summary*

	<b>Study 1</b>	<b>Study 2</b>
Location	Remote Australian Fishing Village	Gymnasium in Metropolitan city
Participants	Small sub-group of young adult men (and one older gatekeeper)	Small sub-group of young adult men (and one older gatekeeper)
	<b>Phase 1</b>	<b>Phase 1</b>
Data Collection	Participant Observation	Participant Observation Focus Groups
Analysis	Ethnographic Description (Denzin, 1997) Discourse Analysis (Edley, 2001)	Ethnographic Description (Denzin, 1997) Discourse Analysis (Edley, 2001)
	<b>Phase 2</b>	<b>Phase 2</b>
Data Collection	Suspended (refer Ch.5)	Participant Observation One to one interviews
Analysis		Ethnographic Description (Denzin, 1997) Discourse Analysis (Edley, 2001) Dynamic psychosocial analytic ethnography (Castoriadis, 1997b)

locality, a common interest or profession, as well as age and gender characteristics. It was premised that these factors combined to produce shared understandings, meanings, and normative masculine identities specific to that grouping of men.

Further, participant groups were selected on the assumption that they were representative of 'blokie' males, due to their overt hegemonic masculine cultural practices (hard manual labour; body building). It is these hegemonic masculine practices that have been problematised within the literature (Whitehead, 2005), and hence in need of detailed exploration. Men from the first community were largely professional fisherman or butchers by trade and shared a small and isolated locality.

Men from the second community were from a working or middle class socio-economic background, lived in a metropolitan city, and had varying occupations.

The researcher had no prior connection with the men from the fishing community apart from one man who agreed to act as a gatekeeper. Hence the researcher was an outsider. Depending on the degree of familiarity with participants prior to beginning fieldwork, the researcher can be classified along the continuum from outsider to insider. The major challenge in beginning fieldwork from a position on the 'outside' is to develop relationships with unfamiliar participants by finding shared interests and values. This process often requires much time and patience. While a more 'inside' position allows research relationships to develop more quickly, there is a tendency to overlook and fail to report and analyse phenomena that seems ordinary and familiar to the researcher. As a young male from the same city, and also a member of the gymnasium, the researcher began fieldwork from a more 'inside' position in terms of the gymnasium men (Loftland et al., 2006).

#### *Data Collection*

##### *Participant Observation and Focus Groups*

Ethnographic research data involved the researcher spending as much time as possible within these communities in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the men's everyday lives. Participant observations of the men's behaviours and interactions were recorded at the end of each day in a journal. Where applicable focus groups were conducted in field settings and were either recorded and transcribed, and/or summarised in the journal. As an active participant in the research process the researcher constantly evaluated his role, his relationship with participants, and applied this to develop an understanding and interpretation of the men's social worlds (Unger, 2005). This resulted in an evolving research process both in terms of the direction and type of data derived and also in terms of a personal transformation for the researcher. The relevance of this transformation is in the resultant data and analysis of data contained in this thesis (Parker, 2005). The evolution of the research as a relational transformation between a researcher with openness for new experience and a community of participants cannot be over emphasised. The results of which could not have been foreseen at the inception of this project (refer to Chapter 5).

##### *Study 1*

As noted earlier, the first location for study was a small rural location in Southern Australia. Initially the researcher spent five days in the town to gather

demographic information and to meet as many of the locals as possible. Also, it was hoped that an initial understanding of the community culture could be gained through participant observation. A community insider, who was already known by the researcher volunteered as a guide. The researcher flew to the rural location to meet up with the gatekeeper with whom he lodged. The researcher liaised with community leaders and interacted with local men at hotels and pubs. Participant observation data was obtained and recorded in a journal, while access to participants for focus groups was limited. Participants were geographically scattered throughout the community and were often separated by many kilometres and unmade roads. However, the researcher was still able to talk to small groups of men at the pub and at the gatekeeper's house.

The research at this stage was covert. The gatekeeper was very well regarded in the community and was not willing to risk disclosing that the outsider, whom he had introduced to the community, was a researcher, let alone a psychologist. The researcher was introduced to participants as a friend from the big smoke. It was also evident that the participants were guarded towards outsiders, educational facilities, and in particular, psychology and psychologists. A substantial personal, financial, and time commitment was required to overcome these obstacles and actively engage with this community. This challenge was also compounded by geographical isolation. Hence data collection for this community of men was limited to this brief but intense period of covert participant observation (refer to Chapter 5).

#### *Study 2 (Phase 1)*

The second community of men was vicariously known to the researcher prior to commencement of the study proper. Data collection involved regular daily visits to the gymnasium that were recorded in a journal. The difficulty for the researcher in this setting was that because of familiarity with the environment, the dialogue and behaviour of the men was often perceived as normal, and therefore the prevailing danger was that important information might be overlooked and not recorded (Berg, 2004; Lofland et al., 2006; Wolcott, 1999). The researcher was careful to keep this in mind and to be diligent in recording journal notes. In addition, this data was discussed on a weekly basis with a research liaison who acted as a devil's advocate in questioning research assumptions. Along with participant observation the researcher conducted four focus groups containing 3-5 members. These focus groups were conducted at the gymnasium or at other venues where members would normally meet.



Each focus group was between two and four hours in length. These groups were conversational and the participants were left to direct the topics of conversation as much as possible (S. Wilkinson, 2003). Verbal consent was obtained prior to their commencement.

The researcher began by asking participants of their motives for being a member of the gym and the conversations evolved from there. This was the only focus group question that was pre-planned. The researcher's task was to facilitate an easygoing atmosphere where participants felt free to discuss any topic and in any way they chose. Hence the groups produced a performance of male social identity for my benefit as well as for other group members. The topics of conversation and styles of address included were consistent with the group's everyday relations and interactions. The researcher spent over two years with this group of men in active engagement and became a notional member of the group.

#### *Participant Observation and Individual Interviews*

##### *Study 2 (Phase 2)*

In the second phase of data collection (Study 2) the researcher conducted seven conversational one to one interviews. The participants were seven of the men from the gymnasium, and the interviews were between one hour and three hours in duration. These interviews took place towards the end of the researcher's two years of participant observation. At that time strong trust and rapport had been established with participants and the men gladly agreed to give interviews. The researcher had sufficient trust that the participants felt comfortable discussing their lives in detail. While most of the men who made up the study's gymnasium sample agreed to be interviewed, there were three men who were unable or unwilling to be interviewed.

It was important that the trust already established was not jeopardised by formalising the interviews or appearing to interrogate or analyse the participants. Hence, the interviews were conducted in the location and time of convenience for the participants. In addition they were conversational in style (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). Two of the men were interviewed at their homes while the other five men were interviewed in the office at the gymnasium. The interview plan had four general topics, namely gym and fitness, friendships, relationships, and male issues. These were introduced in a conversational style with no reordered questions. The interviewer made sure all four topic areas were covered within each interview. Burgess-Limerick and Burgess-Limerick (1998) argued that semi-structured

interviews can be limiting and researcher directed. Conversational interviews involve setting the agenda interactively, and can be a powerful way of gaining access to a participant's interpretation of their experiences.

Rather than lead participants towards responses that are either consciously or unconsciously desired by the interviewer, conversational interviews allow participants some power in leading conversations towards topics and information of their choosing. These interviews were in keeping with researcher/participant relationships that contained mutual respect and rapport. The data derived from these conversational interviews was detailed and offered insight into the identities of the men.

### *Analysis*

#### *Participant Observation and Focus Groups*

##### *Study 1, Study 2 (Phase 1)*

In total there were four A4 notepads containing journal notes. Journal notes were only analysed where they related only to those men who were interviewed or were approached for an interview. Journal notes were read multiple times before being condensed and summarised. Similarly, focus group data was transcribed (by the researcher), condensed, and summarised as part of the analytical process. The researcher extracted from the data key narratives (Ricoeur, 1983, 1984, 1985) and phenomena, which would most accurately represent the everyday lives of the two groups of men. This data was then presented as ethnographic description. Narratives are stories that unfold within the fieldwork process and it will be my role to elicit key stories that help capture and represent the everyday lives of the men. These ethnographic narratives will illuminate the men's individual characters, their shared values and understandings, and their friendship dynamics. According to Ricoeur, narrating is a person's means to create meaning and it reveals identity characteristics of the author and the characters involved, while shaping identity at the same time. Narratives can also be seen as a reconstructed perception of life experiences (Gadd, 2003; Lock, 1995). Within the context of the current ethnography, the stories presented will reflect my subjective experience as a participant observer of the men, both in terms of the stories selected, and also the style of presentation. Narrative description is also an important means of imagining and creating the social worlds to which we are a part. I contend that narrative description is the methodological extension of dynamic psychosocial theory in that both promote processes of reflectivity, sublimated emotional investment (passion), and creativity.

The analysis of the participant observations and focus group data in Stages one and two was also informed by dynamic psychosocial theory as well as social constructionist approaches (Castoriadis, 1997b; Durrheim, 1997; Frosh et al., 2003; Griffin, 2000; Lazaraton, 2003; Phillips, 2001). Within these perspectives, communities of people are conceived as being joined by shared social understandings. These social representations or discourses are learnt through language, behaviour, and iconography, and determine what we know, whom we know, what we like, and whom we don't like. At a macro or collective level discourses may reflect national or even global shared meanings. At a social level people are joined on many intersecting levels. These include age, gender, socio-economic status, and ethnicity. Many of these discourses operate at an unconscious or level or are taken-for-granted, and we are often unaware of their underlying presence and effect (Castoriadis, 1997a/1990). The social construction of discourses then, is a process of learning until representations are enacted as truths or ways of being (Barker & Galasinski, 2001).

This analysis of ethnographic data illuminated the social discourses shared by each community of men. In particular, discourses relating to being a young adult male were described. As mentioned earlier these discourses are ways of knowing and being and inform our relations with other people (Collins, 2003). The men construct and negotiate identities in relation to these social discourses and are carriers and creators of these discourses (Castoriadis, 1997b/1975).

As such the analytical tool used here was discourse analysis (Edley, 2001). Discourse analysis describes the relationship between the individual and society (Berg, 2004; Collins, 2003; Denzin, 1997; Parker, 2005). People relate to one another according to social discourses that take the form of mental representations. These discourses are represented in both language and behaviour. Language consists of more than labelled objects, as these objects are also imbued with social meaning. Discourse analysis describes the social meanings that govern the interaction between research participants. According to Collins discourses are "systems of meaning that operate at individual, social, cultural, and historical levels and inform how we interpret and understand our lived experiences" (p.23). They are the patterns in conversation, and the motives of behaviour. Discourses can inform us of the ideologies that young males negotiate and position themselves around in everyday life (Castoriadis, 1997b/1975). Edley (2006) suggested that discursive analysis of men's conversations is important as

“masculinity is not something that stands outside of discourse as an essential aspect or quality of men; instead, it is seen as something that is routinely constructed “in” and “through” discourse” (p.601). Similarly, Durrheim (1997) argued that Psychology’s attempts to treat the human subject as a natural scientific object have failed as human meaning is derived from shared constructions. These social constructions should be then the proper object of psychological research.

Another way to interpret this negotiation of meaning or relationship between the individual and the social is as a dynamic psychosocial identity. Discourses tell us who we are in relation to others and hence our identity is formed through discourses. Discourses have meaning at a reflective level as they are perceived as who we are and what we believe or know (Castoriadis, 1997b/1975; Howard, 2000; Willig, 2003a). A collection of discourses surrounding being a male in a particular community is lived as a masculine psychosocial identity. Discourses are also historical and are created by people. Howard (2000) suggested that even the degree of fluidity/rigidity of peoples’ identities is a reflection of the community’s social discourses. This research then will highlight the social discourses through which young male psychosocial identities are formed.

Of particular interest will be the ways in which discourses encompass implicit and explicit ways of being and connecting. These discourses determine the rules of the group and also determine who is included and who is not included. Many social identity theorists have argued for a greater political focus in psychological research (Howard, 2000). This entails an investigation of how social discourse positions some men on the fringes of a group or negates their inclusion. This study will also highlight the types of identity characteristics that were more functional in terms of belonging and relationship maintenance for the men in these two groups, as well as those characteristics that were less functional. The resultant consequences for identity construction and well-being were also discussed.

At times it is apparent in discourse analysis that two or more discourses appear to contradict or oppose one another. The juxtaposition of discourses will also be discussed including both complimentary and incompatible discourses. Contradictions offer us insight into the complexities and tensions involved in dynamic psychosocial identity formation (Castoriadis, 1997a/1990; Parker, 2005). Also, and as Berger (1996) pointed out, contradictions remind us of the limitations of discourse analysis in terms of understanding and predicting outcomes from social constructions. The

reference point (discourses) from which we analyse determines our interpretation, and fluid interconnections of social constructions make prediction problematic. That is, due to the fluidity and contextual nature of identities it is problematic to conceive of discourses as stable and widely generalisable. Also their use for political purposes is confounded by their unconscious, dynamic, and hence unpredictable nature (Castoriadis, 1997a/1990).

In phase two of research study two, an exploration of social discourses and social identity will proceed in the form of individual interviews and continued participant observation. The formulation of social identities through discourse will be the focus of one-on-one discussion. In particular, the social discourses derived from this first phase of research will be presented to participants as identities to negotiate within an interview context. Continued participant observation will also be a feature of this phase and will guide research understandings. A discussion of dynamic psychosocial identity negotiation will ensue (Castoriadis, 1997a/1990; 1997b/1975; 1997f/1990).

#### *Participant Observation and Individual Interviews*

##### *Study 2 (Phase 2)*

The researcher transcribed four of the interviews himself, while the transcription for the other three were outsourced to a company due to time restrictions. After transcription, analysis began by reading through the transcripts. Each transcript was read at least five times until the researcher felt he had a general understanding of their content. The researcher then re-read the findings of the focus groups and the participant observation notes. This included the focus group transcripts and the reflexive journal that was ongoing over the course of both phases. The journal helped monitor the subjective experiences of the researcher and their effects on the data. The three methods of data collection, focus groups, interviews, and reflexive journal were drawn together and analysed as a means of checking and synthesising emerging themes, perspectives, and interpretations (Huberman & Miles, 2002). This also provided an opportunity to link the core elements of identity and well being with the socio-cultural and contextual variables relevant to the men. A process of inter rating of this data was also conducted with the assistance of the previously mentioned 'liaison'. This involved me presenting and discussing my findings with my research liaison. This provided an 'outsider' perspective and functioned to pick up on any emerging discourses and insights overlooked from the researcher's inside perspective.

This process occurred over a three-month period, and until the researcher was in a position to formulate an overall discussion of dynamic psychosocial identity theory based on the complete set of findings in this study. By this stage in the study I (as the primary researcher and fieldworker) had intimate and detailed knowledge of this group of men. The triangulation of data collection methods had been successful in illuminating many aspects of the men's lived experiences. The key components of their identities appeared clear, while the complexity lay within each of these components. Key aspects of the transcribed text were highlighted; hence the text was reduced to a more manageable length. The researcher then discussed and worked through the implications of these findings to develop theory that was applicable to the men in the group, and also to men from similar socio-historical circumstances. Although generalisation was not sought, the theory that evolved from such a detailed understanding of this small group of men has broader phenomenological importance.

As I was deeply immersed in the lives of the men there were aspects of the findings that I took for granted. In these cases my researcher liaison's more outside perspective, along with her analytical experience was beneficial to the study's outcomes. The masculine discourses that were revealed in the focus groups and participant observations were extended upon in the one-to-one interviews. Hence by utilising a combined analysis, the end findings were applicable to men in both one to one and group contexts. The one to one interviews allowed the men to communicate personal beliefs and feelings regarding the salient issues in their lives. While the topics covered were similar for the focus groups and the interviews, the relevance of these topics to the men's identities were more subjectively evident in a one to one situation. The rapport that I had established with the men and the conversational style of the interviews were also beneficial to this end.

#### *Participant Validation*

After analysing the data and writing the first draft of the findings and discussion, the researcher chose selected members from the participants in both studies to discuss the findings of the study. During this process the participants helped validate the findings by fact checking, discussing and contributing to analysis, and pointing out inaccuracies and omissions. Participants were selected for participant validation on the basis of convenience, eagerness to contribute, and perceived reflective capacity. During this process it was brought to my attention that in a few instances I had not sufficiently protected participant confidentiality and the

subsequent changes were made. On two occasions alternate interpretations were brought to my attention, and the subsequent alterations were made. Generally the reactions and feedback were very positive.

### *Researcher's Positioning*

I'm a 30 something male from the western suburbs of Melbourne. My employment background has consisted of retail sales, retail management, and hospitality positions both on the floor and in the kitchen, spanning the last 15 years. This experience has taught me many helpful rapport building skills and I have developed a strong understanding of the male psyche. This understanding has also been facilitated by numerous sporting club affiliations (tennis, football, and ten pin bowls). I have also had considerable interviewing experience from various managerial roles.

I utilised all my life experiences along with an ever-broadening knowledge of the psychodynamic and social constructionist literature to direct this research. I continually consulted with experts in the fields of research methods, data collection, and analysis. As this was only my second qualitative project I drew heavily from the experience and guidance of other qualitative researchers, where possible.

The personal relevance of the rural setting relates to my living in Warrnambool as a child for 2 years, and more particularly to living in Leckford (a village in Hampshire, England) for 10 months in 1999. The village consisted of a milk bar that was open for 3 hours a day, a church, a social hall, a small number of farms, and a country house, in which I lived and worked. The initial adjustment for a city boy was extremely difficult, especially as a bicycle was my only means of transport. Despite this, I feel very fortunate that I made it through the first 6 months and was able to enjoy life there as a well-liked member of the community. That experience has made me aware of how difficult it is for an outsider to gain acceptance in a small community. I also experienced feelings of isolation, the pros and cons of knowing everyone and everybody knowing me, and cultural tolerance and intolerance.

Shortly before the study commenced I had joined the gymnasium at the advice of a friend in order to regain my fitness. I attended the gym about three mornings a week before work, and was fascinated by the laid back feel of the place and by the many characters who 'worked out' (exercised) there.

## Chapter 7

## Contextualising the Subcultures of Men

As previously stated this study involved over two years of fieldwork with two groups of young men, one from a remote fishing village, and another group who frequented a gymnasium in metropolitan Australia. I am in my mid-thirties and considers himself to be a white middle class male. My interest in men's issues began five years ago when I studied the narcissistic elements of identity from a psychoanalytical perspective (Gill & Kostanski, 2004). The current ethnographic study arose out of a desire to study in detail the identity of men, and in particular the identities of sub-groups of men, as a means of developing theory relating to the social/psychological dialectic.

*Study 1: Men in the Rural Village**Entering the field*

The phase of official data collection began in February of 2005. It was planned to study a subculture of young men who lived in a remote rural location. I had spent the first year of my PhD candidature reading about ethnographic studies and their advantages and disadvantages. I believed strongly and passionately that ethnographic work was the key to understanding the complexities of men's lives and it was the only method that was congruent with my ontological and epistemological beliefs. As noted in my journal, although loaded with methodological theory, when the stage for data collection began I was very anxious (and excited), as it was one thing to plan fieldwork and another thing to actually do it. I booked a plane ticket, packed my journal and voice recorder, and set off into the unknown.

This anxiety became even more pronounced once I had arrived at my location, and although I had diligently assured myself of being 'okay' by setting up a strong alliance with a major player in the community, this in itself did not prepare me for the major cultural and social impact the field was to bestow. Reflection in my journal indicates that it was evident early in the data collection period that the time, cost, and personal sacrifice required was far too great to continue in this location. Most salient however was the personal investment needed to become a participant in such a foreign cultural environment. A summary of some of the field notes taken from visiting this ethnographic location highlights how, with the best intention, a particular location and community were not viable for continuing study.



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*Summary of Field Notes February 2005*

*I arrived by light plane and on approach noticed the absence of anything that looked like a central township. This place was as rugged and remote as it gets. Merv (my insider) was there to pick me up and was in his customary attire of shorts, singlet, and work boots despite the cold winter like weather. While waiting for the luggage to be unloaded, Merv pointed out that the baggage handler was also the town mayor and proclaimed 'Hurry up Phil you slow bastard'. [Merv made clear in this statement that there were no tall poppies in this community]. 'Jump in the ute' he said, 'just push the dog over (a large, friendly, and pungently odoured dingo- cross named Sam)'. I had never seen a dirtier interior of a car, a consequence no doubt of the butchering trade. Merv and I (with Sam on my lap) drove around for two hours in which I was able to see and learn much about the town. Firstly, it was almost a pre-requisite to drive a four-wheel drive for much of the best scenic spots and coastline was accessible by unmade roads. Merv painted a picture of almost perfect rural life with friendly people, great produce, plenty of employment, and affordable housing. Most men worked as fisherman, in the dairy or kelp industries, or on the abattoirs. Recreational activities included surfing, scuba diving, fishing, bush walking, horse riding, horse racing, shooting, tennis, football, dancing, pool, gambling, and drinking. The population was spread out over about 50 squared kilometres with a small central township that included one pub and one recreational club both with gambling facilities. The small population was very familiar with each other, Merv waved or spoke to everyone he passed by, be it by car, while walking, or at the pub. The community outsiders according to Merv were mostly young male seasonal workers sent by a metropolitan employment agency. Merv went on to say that there were few social problems and the few instances of violence or misbehaviour were a result of these men or a few other bad eggs (usually young men) living in the community. These people were ostracised very quickly and often left the community as a result. Trust and approval were the most important factors for an enjoyable community life. These factors were achieved through work competency and creating employment and prosperity, as well as friendliness and social and community participation. Merv had both these factors working for him and it was soon apparent to me that he was a well-liked and respected community leader. It was a mixed population of young and old,*

*men and women. Women were in the numerical minority and worked mainly in the clerical, tourism, hospitality, and service industries.*

*I stayed at Merv's house, which was modest at best and located about ten kilometres from town. He had no neighbours for at least a kilometre in all directions and the sense of isolation and/or tranquillity was apparent. He led a bachelor's existence and cared little for cleanliness and hygiene. Since his job involved getting dirty and bloody he didn't see the point in cleaning and washing all the time, as it would only get soiled again. His house looked like it hadn't been cleaned since he moved in some three years ago. Appearances were just not important to Merv, who appeared to stake his self worth on his professional success as a butcher and his esteem within the community. This was apparent when he showed me my bed for the five days and said, in the tone of a question as much as it was a statement 'It's not much but it'll do ya...somewhere to put ya head down, that's all ya need'. I nodded my head in agreement and said 'That's right mate' as I looked in horror at the dense covering of dog hair on the doona cover.*

*Merv was very suspicious of and anxious about being a participant in psychological research. He would often make jokes about me psychoanalysing him. To help offset this anxiety Merv had coined me the nickname of 'psycho'. While not flattering I was glad to accept it as it represented the beginnings of a group identity and negotiation of my position as a social psychological researcher. Merv also appeared not to want me to psychoanalyse or upset others in the community and hence put his community standing in jeopardy. It appeared above all that this community standing had taken Merv a long time to establish and he was not willing to put this in jeopardy for any reason. As he said 'I've got a good thing going here...what do ya reckon?'*

*The researcher was introduced to and chatted with many of the local men. Topics ranged from breeding pigs and cattle, to farming, to produce quality, to the housing market, and to business acumen. A barter system that involved trade of goods and services was evident, and according to Merv, offset the higher cost of imported products. I was more often than not excluded from these conversations as I had little knowledge of the topics and instead I relegated to the role of an active and empathic listener. The importance of work competency in this location cannot be overemphasised as it related to the self-worth and identities of all the men in the community. These men were stoic and proud that they were employed in and excelled*

*at typically masculine endeavours. There was a sense of pride in the fact that they were performing tasks that had a direct influence on not just the immediate community but broader society. They were catching, breeding, killing, and producing the food that sustains lives.*

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On returning home I sorted and analysed my field notes and reflected on a strategy that might allow me to gain the best insights of life in this community. It was apparent at this stage that, of greatest concern for the community was, retaining the integrity of one's personal standing and reputation. Hence, confidentiality between community members was the most salient issue. As such, it was clear that the focus group data that had been operationalised in planning the study would not be viable. Moreover, focus groups would be extremely hard to do, and I believed would be of little benefit, as responses would be of a guarded and suspicious nature.

Upon reflection and discussion with my supervisor, I decided that for now the best option was to continue with covert participant observations of the group. This process was strongly in line with what Shaffir (1991) proposed was the second theme emanating from his experiences, where the researcher is always in some way required to be deceptive. The result of this decision was never before experienced feelings of guilt and of self-loathing as the covert nature of the research clashed with my individual morality and ethics. I felt like a user, a 'scab'. Also, I felt like this form of 'soft' data would be viewed as insufficient by the institution and this compounded my guilt.

Through the extensive planning and approval process for the study, the institutional feedback I had received was that focus groups and interviews were the primary and legitimate form of data and that participant observation would add depth and texture but were not valid on their own. My journal notes and supervision sessions indicate that at this stage I felt like the entire study was doomed and that I would come out of it a failure. This sense of inevitable loss was only relieved after a couple of months, when I finally resolved that the length of time, financial and personal commitments involved in working with this community were beyond the scope of the project. The clash between my reality of fieldwork and my affiliation with a particular institutional discourse (Parker, 2005) had become pre-eminent at this stage, and required much reflective process and journal writing in order to reconcile.

Through this however, it also became quite clear to me in real terms that young men are not a homogenous group and that getting to know a group of men will vary and require different aspects and levels of commitment from the researcher. When engaging with the men from the village I often felt enormous anxiety. I felt like I had little to add to the conversations, and indeed little to offer the community. I felt completely out of place and could only vaguely foresee a time well in the future when I might reach insider status. Issues such as time, finances, transport, remoteness and access to participants in this case were just as salient as the cultural and personal characteristics of the men in shaping the research experience. It is difficult to get to know a cultural group when the members are thinly dispersed over rugged terrain. In those cases a researcher must rely on catching them at a meeting place such as a bar or sporting club. Also I realised that while interview/focus group transcripts were desired to facilitate in-depth analysis of discourses and psychological consistencies and inconsistencies, these methods were and often can be problematic and even invalid in some contexts. Indeed, it may often mean that the data that is reported and published has some major limitations if we are to negate discussion of those groups that are not included, or do not conform to our data collection practices.

*Study 2: Beyond the Grunt, the Men of the Gym*

*Entering the Field*

The second location and group of men selected for the project were from a gymnasium in which I was an existing member. It was anticipated that entry into this group would be far easier than the first location. I also believed that conversational style focus groups and interviews would also be feasible in accordance with my research aims and institutional expectations.

My journal notes indicate that I perceived the environment in the gymnasium as low fuss and unpretentious (14<sup>th</sup> July, 2005). The equipment was old and outdated, and the place could generally be described as run down and dirty. On the plus side it was spacious and generally quiet and hence suited the more advanced weight trainer.

The majority of clientele were men between the ages of 18 and 45. However, again in this location, despite my feelings of having landed a more congenial location and having some familiarity with intended participants, from the moment the data collection process began I noted that I perceived those relationships differently and had become task oriented. My position was altered as I was now also representing the research institute and its inherent expectations. In order to overcome this regression to

outsider, and achieve the transition towards collaboration and the participant observer role I had to step back and reflect on my process. I began by significantly extending the period of time I spent at the gym, and began increasing the level of engagement with gym members. I initially discussed the project with the gym owner and two other members whom I knew quite well.

As time went by I slowly informed more and more group members of my research role. Initially when participants became aware of my motivations they became slightly hesitant and curious and attuned to the type of testimony expected, as well as the ways in which the testimony may be perceived and presented to others. This regression and guardedness occurred despite a degree of familiarity with myself. As a consequence, I realised that any collection of interview testimonies at this stage in the research would remain to some degree guarded and reflect a power differential between participants and myself.

An interesting process that occurred at this stage was what Burgess (1991) identified as the ongoing negotiation and renegotiation of relationship, and involved the to-ing and fro-ing between engagement of myself as an insider/outsider as the participants worked out who I really was, and how much they wanted me to know or be included. My intuition was telling me to continue participant observation and that rapport and trust were not sufficient to conduct interviews that would accurately reflect the group. Although participants would normally agree to be interviewed they would then find excuses to not be available as the interview times grew nearer. I noted that, at this time, I was aware of how, when the topic of recorded interviews was raised, I felt the dynamic change between myself and the group member, and the power differential would be evoked more strongly. For example, as noted in my journal on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2006, I felt that Spiros' and my normally jovial conversations were strained and awkward and reflected that this may be due to the anxiety the upcoming interview was provoking in him. This distancing threatened the integrity of our relationship. At this stage my instincts in managing relationships and maintaining the integrity of the project were heavily weighed against the overall goals and time restraints of the project. I did not want recorded conversations that were different to the groups' everyday interactions. In the case of Spiros, I noted wondering how long it would take for, or if at all, a conversational style interview (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998) could be conducted. I also began to despair of

reaching institutional targets or being enabled to progress if I didn't get some 'hard' data.

In another instance, I had approached Petro and he agreed to do an interview. I noted in my journal that he then began avoiding me and possibly the interview by coming into the gym at different times. I felt that the best thing to do was to not raise the topic again unless Petro did. I was right. The lack of pressure and demand from me was needed. After a few weeks of playing it down and resuming normal conversations Petro said 'hey, so when are we doing that interview, I thought you were keen to do one', and the interview was done shortly after.

The first evidence of a change in the nature of my relationships with group members came when I received an unexpected phone call on a Sunday afternoon. Alex told me he needed to speak to me straight away and I met him at a cafe near his home. He explained that he had broken up with his girlfriend and needed to send her some flowers but they did not deliver on Sunday. He asked me to drive to his girlfriend's house and deliver his flowers disguised as a delivery driver. I was happy to do this so as to make a positive contribution to Alex's life. To be able to give back to the group members both resourcefully and symbolically made me feel less of a 'user' and more of a collaborator (Burgess, 1991). I was pleased also that he trusted me with this personal information and that he would seek my help and advice. This gesture strengthened our friendship and Alex's trust in me. It was a significant step in becoming a group member as my research role was largely dormant and conceptualised as separate from my role as a friend.

After 18 months with the group of men, and countless inner turmoils and crises relating to the progress of the project I was now relating stories of the group to my research liaison as if I were talking about friends (indeed they were now). It was noted by my liaison that the distinction between friend and participant was now being blurred. The ethnographic process was so subtle and gradual that someone outside the group was needed to recognise the end of the data collection phase.

In the final stages of involvement with the group, the recording of interviews often seemed superfluous, and when conducted, closely resembled everyday interaction. Moreover, gaining the interviewees consent had minimal impact on relational dynamics. By this stage men began to enthusiastically offer me information for my thesis. 'Don't forget to mention that' they would say. Men were keen to divulge as they felt I knew them well enough to speak on their behalf. Many of the

men felt some narcissistic pleasure in being written about and being part of an academic study.

Over this extended period of research my attitudes and feelings towards the research group moved from a distant observer with an eye for some data, to a full member and confidant of one group. In the end, I believe that the men are proud of me because one of their own is also an academic and a writer. In terms of my group social identity we have negotiated many aspects so that Pete the football fan, Pete the weight trainer, Pete the joker, Pete the researcher, and so on, can co-exist. It was interesting to note that the first time I felt like the group were filling in an identity for me was in receiving a nickname. Having a personal term of reference created by the group relieved the anxiety of group members by placing me on a more equal level. This is further evidence of the necessity for the participants to co-construct the ethnographer's group identity (Harrington, 2003). My familiarity with participants was also an important analytical tool as it allowed me to pick up on coded or abbreviated language. For example during a focus group one of the guys looked away briefly and said 'paddle pop'. This was a reference to an attractive girl who walked past. Importantly, this reference was well known to all the guys but would appear incoherent alone on an interview transcript, further enforcing the importance of the researcher being truly engaged with their field. Group membership and the joy of engagement is based on a collection of these shared and often quite exclusive cultural and linguistic knowledges. Hence they are integral to understanding the group and in general how a sense of belonging is acquired and negotiated (Frosh et al., 2003).

Within the current project, there were many times, particularly in the first 12 months when I was very close to packing it in, or just grabbing a few interviews and getting out. Unfortunately at the time I was not in access to any form of comfort from other's experiences, which, as noted by Harrington (2003) can be quite cathartic, and I believe invaluable for providing solace in times of doubt. It can often be hard to actually hear what someone close to you is saying, and in times of doubt reassurances through vicarious learning from others in the form of bibliotherapy can be of much comfort and reassurance (Pennebaker, 1999). It was simply a pig headed determination and a desire to fight the system and to be true to my participants that kept me going. As such a component of the writing completed for this study on men were narratives of institutional and personal incompetence. The voice used is personal and the writing angry and impassioned. I found this quite cathartic and at the time I

intended to publish and ‘out’ those whom I felt had failed to support me. A year or two later and I have decided to omit this writing, and talk only of my personal hardships in relation to the data and as a ‘tale from the field’. Despite this I don’t underestimate the importance of that writing exercise to the overall project. In particular, it helped me to progress from that angry position to a more contemplative and evaluative position. The subjective process of development as a fieldworker then has influenced my relationships with participants, my interpretations, and my analysis. As noted above, this is where education and support from experienced fieldworkers can be of most benefit. Unfortunately, there was not a lot of support for me outside of my research liaison, and I learned about the realities of fieldwork predominantly from personal experience. This was a heavy burden at times, and I can see now that it could have been lessened through support, and understanding of the need for flexibility in methods and time.

*Study 2: Ethnographic Participant Observations and Description*

As the author of these ethnographic findings I should first introduce my position in the group. I am known as Gilly, or Magilla. Having spent over two years participating in the everyday goings on at the gymnasium I now have the task of representing this small cast of characters. This is made difficult by the guys’ eclectic mix of ages, ethnicities, and personalities. Moreover, as a friend and member of the group I am very familiar with their patterns and characteristics and it is very easy to leave out aspects that are taken for granted. I have utilised field notes, transcripts, memories, contemplation, and where possible I have sought authentication from the ‘guys’ (participants) themselves. The guys have described me as being passionate about sport, football, and the western bulldogs in particular. I’m also known for passionate narcissistic outbursts while working out, kicking a football around the gym, and running on the walk only treadmills. In addition I’m known (to them) to tell a good story and to enjoy being a link in the gym’s storytelling chain. Finally, I’m known as a psychologist and a researcher, although this aspect is used primarily by the guys light heartedly to make fun of each other’s psychological adjustment. To this end I’m often asked if I have a cure for some third party’s problems.

The majority of the men frequented the gym in the mornings. On any given morning the researcher would bump into at least three or four of the men. The men chatted in between weight lifting sets and often congregated along the front counter where the gym owner Stan would lead discussions of sporting results and nostalgia.



Some of the guys had been members for up to eight years. Stan the owner was the group's figurehead; he was always there and available for a chat. While the group was formed out of the convenience of a shared activity, the friendships between the guys were mutually enjoyed and an integral part of everyday life. While most of the members of the gym remained mere acquaintances, this group developed a more complex micro-network by spending additional time in the gym environment.

The men chatted before, during, and after workouts. Each member was predictable and consistent in terms of the time of his or her arrival and departure (usually early/mid morning); hence, they were able to overlap their visits with each other. There was little effort made in terms of external appearances, clothes, and grooming, for many of the men the gym was their first port of call for the day.

I decided that the best way to represent the relational dynamics and everyday activities of the guys was through narrative (Ricoeur, 1983, 1984, 1985). As mentioned previously, I chose both the set of narratives to include, and the style of presentation so as to most accurately, creatively, and passionately represent the everyday lives of the men. The names of the men and some of the details have been changed to ensure anonymity.

## Chapter 8

## The Characters

*Stan the Wedding Leper*

Stan approached me one morning (visibly upset) and said “Hey Magilla, can you believe that Billy hasn’t invited me to his wedding”. Billy was one of Stan’s first members ten years ago. Before retiring, Billy was an elite footballer and Stan had been one of his biggest supporters, attending every one of his 30 or so finals appearances. Billy rarely trained at the gym these days and I doubt that he even had a membership, but he still called in for a weekly cup of tea and a chat. Billy was in remission from a serious illness and had sought Stan’s support during this time.

Stan was hurt and dumbfounded, he couldn’t believe that after all they’d been through someone whom he considered a friend could omit him from the guest list. This was compounded by the fact that Billy had not even told Stan he was getting married. Stan found out from his son, who was also friends with Billy (through Stan’s introduction) and who had been invited to the wedding. When Stan approached Billy about this, Billy said that he thought he had already told him. Stan wasn’t buying this story.

We discussed the possible reasons for the omission. Was it a small and selective guest list, an oversight, or had Stan offended Billy’s fiancé in the past. We both agreed it was out of character for Billy to snub someone. Billy was an open and friendly guy and was generally sensitive to the needs of others. It was obvious to me that for whatever reason Billy did not consider Stan a close enough friend to invite him to the wedding. I suggested to Stan that he might have been overlooked because he was a gym owner/friend rather than having a traditional and more obvious role as a family friend, school friend, or work friend. Stan explained that they had caught up regularly outside of the gym environment and that he was more to Billy than just an acquaintance or friend by convenience. I asked Stan would he treat Billy differently now to which he replied that the cups of tea and long chats would cease immediately (they didn’t, however).

Stan lamented that only months earlier another gym regular Aaron had not invited him to his wedding. “Do people just think I’m just some goose who runs a gym, that everyone can fuck over...I tell ya (becoming agitated), with that and a few other things that are going on in this place I could easily lose it, people wouldn’t want

to push me”. Earlier that morning he discovered that someone had stolen liquid soap out of the change room by breaking open the dispensers. This was not the first time it had happened and he’d already warned his prime suspect not to do it again. The combination of these events had Stan feeling like everyone was against him. He wondered whether people enjoyed pushing his buttons and getting a rise out of him. The truth was that a lot of guys did enjoy provoking responses from Stan, although I would not include Billy and Aaron in that group. While Stan was very open and friendly, he could also be petty and was prone to pushing a few buttons himself. The result was quite a volatile relationship with some of the guys. It seemed like these guys knew just how far they could go without crossing the line. Stan (in his late 40s) was a powerfully built man, was an ex security guard, was prone to occasional violent outbursts, and not someone you wanted to push too far. I witnessed one such outburst at the gym one morning.

There was myself and one other person in the gym when an unfamiliar young man walked in and stood at the counter and began talking to Stan. Shortly afterward Stan began verbally abusing and threatening the man, he then proceeded to walk around the counter, grab him by the scruff of the neck and throw him out the door. As he did he kicked him up the backside. Stan continued the abuse in the car park as the shocked man threatened to call the police. Seeing Stan at full rage was very scary, I got the feeling that if the man had have fought back Stan would have seriously hurt him. When Stan cooled down a bit I asked him what happened. The man was a potential new member who rang earlier in the morning and made an 11am appointment to be shown around the gym. In the mean time Stan’s back was playing up and he was in some discomfort, he organised a replacement worker but had to pick her up from her home, as she didn’t drive. The man came in at 11; Stan asked him if he could wait 20 minutes while he picked up his replacement. The man said he didn’t have time to wait and reaffirmed that he had an 11am appointment. Stan snapped and told him to “get the fuck out of the gym” and the rest is history.

All the guys got a great laugh out of this story when I told them. Spiros summed it up when he said, “Yep, that sounds right, that guy’s a ticking time bomb”. The story was also in keeping with the minimal level of customer courtesy and service the guys expected. What the gym had going for it was a lot of space, few members, and plenty of weight lifting equipment (albeit old equipment). It also had Stan’s generally welcoming demeanour, which facilitated a relaxed and unpretentious

environment. There were plenty of down sides though and some people have described it as one of the world's worst equipped and serviced gyms. It opened at 9am, much later than any other gym and hence excluded a before work clientele. It closed on every public holiday, precisely when most members were free to use the gym. It had virtually no female members and hence was getting more 'masculine' by the day. It was dirty and dusty and the equipment had not been updated since the 1980s. It was hot in summer and cold in winter and Stan was reluctant to turn on lights and fans because of electricity costs. The only two treadmills in the gym had big hand written signs on them, Do Not Run! Walk Only! (Ironically the treadmills were called Repco Runners). The signs were needed as they constantly broke down at higher speeds; Stan blamed the weight of the men running on them and aggressively policed the no running policy. The guys joked that he had a speedometer behind the counter.

The signage on the outside windows had not changed in over 10 years. They read "UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT". I suppose that was true 10 years ago. "BRAND NEW SAUNA AND SPA". Stan removed the sauna and spa five years earlier. "TAI-BO CLASSES". These classes finished up 4 years earlier. "BRAND NEW SOLARIUM". The solarium was now closer to an antique than to new. It was also missing two fluorescent globes and could only offer a 'striped tan'. I asked Stan why he hadn't updated the signs and he said that the paint was too difficult to remove without hiring a professional.

Despite all of the gym's faults the small but loyal band of male members were generally satisfied. They felt relaxed and at ease in the place, they had plenty of friendly people to talk to, and had plenty to laugh about. Most argued that if the gym were not so 'quirky' it would be crowded with pretentious people. They would also not be able to laugh at, be annoyed by, and be amazed at Stan's management practices. In addition, the place seemed to attract more than its share of eccentric characters. Once members had developed some rapport with Stan they were able to go behind the counter, put their valuables away, help themselves to drinks and equipment, some guys were even allowed to use the cash register. If Stan liked you, you would be offered a tea or coffee after your workout, and if you were a friend he would often invite you into his private office for a chat. Those who knew him well knew not to take these liberties too far and to wait for an invitation rather than impose yourself. If you did not the offers would dry up. Stan was witty, intelligent, had a

good sense of humour, and was a good conversationalist. He regularly counselled members through life strains and struggles, including relationship ups and downs, and of course, wedding stress. He was a music lover and had hundreds of cds and tapes to play at the gym. Occasionally he would go too far and offend members by playing Eminem (a rap artist) at full volume or, in contrast, by playing an Elvis marathon.

*Profanity Aaron*

Aaron, a mid thirties Maltese Australian, came into the gym four or five times a week. He was Stan's postman before he was a member and the two have a ten-year history. Aaron and Stan chatted in the office nearly every visit. Stan shared every one of Aaron's relationship, financial, and wedding ups and downs leading up to the big day. I heard most of the stories as well. Stan was the first friend Aaron contacted after the wedding and also after the honeymoon. Aaron unashamedly included Stan in every aspect of the wedding while omitting him from the day itself. I was disappointed not to get an invitation myself so when I heard Stan did not go I was amazed. Then on reflection it made sense. Aaron was very likeable but tended to be very self-absorbed and some of the guys have described him as a spoilt mummy's boy. By all accounts he's always been well looked after by his family both financially and emotionally. I don't believe Aaron even contemplated inviting Stan, to him his friendship to Stan and his 'gym world' were completely separate to his 'family world'. Stan agreed and he said his omission from the wedding was not out of character for Aaron, hence it was easier to forgive than Billy whose decision to omit Stan was conscious and considered.

Aaron also had quite a temper when things didn't go his way. I regularly heard him abusing customer service workers on his mobile phone. Most of the stories he told centred on others' incompetence and how he was disadvantaged by it. The stories were always well received as they were impassioned and contained a well above average expletive quota. In fact most guys agreed that Aaron was the most prolific exponent of profanity they had ever heard. He tended to induce them from those he spoke to as well. One morning Stan counted 57 uses of the word 'fuck' in a five-minute conversation between Aaron and myself. He received a complaint about this profanity from a mature age female patron the same morning. Her comment was that she could handle her share of profanity but that this was ridiculous.

One particular morning Aaron came in particularly angry and impassioned. He explained that a friend had asked him to pick up an ounce of marijuana and drop it off

to his house. After picking up the drugs Aaron hid them in a boxing glove in his car boot. Before getting to his friends house he stopped at a tyre yard to have four new tyres put on. While changing his tyres the workman found the marijuana and stole it. When Aaron realised the drugs were missing he flew into a rage and confronted the workman. They stonewalled him, saying they didn't have it and even if they did what could Aaron do about it. After all he couldn't exactly go to the police and report that he had an ounce of marijuana in his possession. By this stage of telling the story Aaron was enraged "Those fuckin' cunts, those fuckin' crooks, I'll get 'em, ill wait for 'em after work, no one steals from me". I asked what he did next. He said he told all the customers in the place not to leave their cars there as the workers were thieves. He caused a commotion in the waiting room before being asked to leave. He then went to the police station and demanded they arrest the guys for theft. The police said that they'd also have to charge Aaron for possession of drugs to which he said "fine, of course, I want you to find my drugs, arrest them, and then charge me". The police then told him to calm down and to stop swearing at them. In the end and despite Aaron's insistence, they refused to go to the tyre yard and told Aaron to go home and cool down. It was the principle, according to Aaron, that was most important; no one should get away with stealing from him. He said he'd be happy to go to jail as long as the thieving workers went to jail as well. He promised to get them when they least expected it. Fortunately for the workers, Aaron's bark was far worse than his bite. His talk of retribution never came to fruition (as far as I know anyway).

### *The Golden Greeks*

Alex and Spiros, two 30 something Greek Australians are the glamour boys of the gym. At least they like to think they are. Both of them derive pleasure out of stirring up Stan. Alex's morning ritual involves getting out of bed, throwing on a tracksuit, packing a change of clothes and toiletries, and going down to the gym. He arrives at about 11am, stops at the counter and starts reading Stan's newspaper. As he reads he chats to Stan and whoever is around. Usually at some point he'll say something light-hearted to Stan to make fun or provoke a response. Alex will then do about a 30-minute weights session. Alex's weight lifting technique is the worst in the gym. His lower back bends and contorts in every exercise, and all the guys are predicting a serious back injury one of these days. A couple of guys have raised the issue with him but Alex is convinced his techniques are sound. The next part of Alex's morning ritual is what he is best known for, a one-hour session in the change

room, which involves a shit, a shave, and a shower. The foul odour that drifts out of the change room is recognised and known to all the regulars. Alex has performed his morning ritual most weekdays for the last 8 years, and Stan has grown increasingly resentful over that time. One morning I heard Stan say, “Will you please stop using my gym as a toilet, Jesus Christ, what do you eat?” Alex just laughed it off. Spiros loves pouring fuel on the situation by complaining to Stan “Hey, tell that bowl bronzer to cut it out, there’s something seriously wrong with that guy”. Both Alex and Spiros have huge egos and love to self-promote, this is tempered to some degree by an active sense of humour.

One morning Stan approached me and said “Can you believe that cunt Alex has never given me a plug on his sports show, he’s been promising me for months”. Alex was a sports promoter and had a community television show. Stan said that Alex had told him to watch the show each week, as he would give the gym some free promotion. This never occurred. I approached Alex about it and he began laughing uncontrollably. He said he’d told Stan he’d done a plug one week (when he hadn’t) thinking Stan wouldn’t watch. Stan did watch and had a go at him and Alex apologised and swore he would do it in the coming week. Stan watched only to find that he had once again been misled. Alex continued this charade as long as he could to get Stan to keep watching. To Alex, the thought of Stan watching with anticipation, only to be disappointed and angered time and time again was hilarious. The other guys, including myself found it hilarious too, particularly as Stan allowed Alex to promote his boxing shows in the gymnasium. Stan would also complain to the guys that Alex never even gave him a free ticket to his boxing shows. Alex’s comeback was that he gave him tickets once and he didn’t show up. As a retort Stan parodied Alex’s minor celebrity status, huge ego, and love of self-promotion by posting photos of Alex all over the gym. Stan superimposed Alex’s photo so he became the fifth Beatle, the sixth rolling stone, and was front row to see Elvis at Madison square garden in 1967. His nickname for Alex was ‘the golden geek’.

His nickname for Spiros was ‘gorgeous’ or ‘the gorgeous one’. Spiros was a former male stripper turned stockbroker and property developer. He took his training and appearance very seriously, he was a born exhibitionist and everyone knew when Spiros was around. His grunts, groans, and ‘come ons’ could be heard all over the gym. He wore the same black tracksuit pants and black and white singlet to every session. When I asked him why, he said he had bought 16 pairs of that same outfit. He

enjoyed pushing out those last couple of repetitions when he was near exhaustion, and asked anyone who was nearby for a spot (assistance). Stan hated spotting Spiros because he said the girly lightweights he lifted did not warrant a spot. He found it demeaning. Spiros constantly hounded Stan for a spot, partly because he knew how much it irked him. Behind Spiros' external shallowness and narcissistic tendencies there was an intelligent and articulate man. He always came up with interesting insights into the complex psyche of Stan, as well as other gym members. Despite his continued taunting of Stan, and amazement at some of his decision-making, he freely offered Stan professional and legal assistance when needed.

I got the feeling there was always a bit of tongue in cheek with Spiros' narcissistic excesses, and that he enjoyed shocking people. His actions alienated him from most of the members who generally interpreted them as obscene and vulgar exhibitionism, and unbecoming of a man. Often we would work out together, spurring each other on with overblown and over acted slogans and clichés. These workouts would seem comical and even absurd to an outsider, like two prima donnas patting each other on the back. In our defence though, they were extremely productive workouts. When I first witnessed Spiros' performances I too was shocked and horrified and dreaded contact with him. Eventually however, and after a couple of years, I can now appreciate his sense of theatre, work ethic, and I can even join in once in a while. One morning I came into the gym to find Spiros 'blasting' his legs and gluteus. "Have a look at this ass" he said "look how plump it is, I bet everyone in the gym wants to fuck me right now" he added as he clenched and posed his butt. Then to everyone's surprise he dropped his pants and posed in his underwear. I just shook my head and laughed.

Spiros also fancied himself as a boxer and often trained alone in the boxing room. He told all the guys he could knock out Paul, a former Victorian heavy weight champion and the gym's boxing instructor. The reactions to this statement ranged from shock, to disgust, to laughter. Many of the guys told Paul and tried to set up a sparring session between the two. Most guys (especially Stan) were hoping that Spiros would get taught a lesson although no one actually thought he would go through with it. To everyone's surprise Spiros agreed to fight and although beaten, he acquitted himself quite well. Spiros won a lot of respect with this display of courage (or stupidity?). He proved he was not all talk after all. No one thought he would front up and that if he did he would leave in an ambulance. Spiros was even talking a rematch.



He confided in me that his plan was to warm up in the main weights area while Paul exhausted himself training, then storm into the boxing room and demand a rematch. This way he thought he might be able to take advantage of a fatigued Paul. Even Alex developed newfound respect for Spiros. He said “he can’t fight but it took a lot of guts to spa Paul”.

### *My Brush with Celebrity*

Alex, Michael, and myself met up at a cafe most Sunday afternoons. We would talk about the happenings at the gym, relationships, work, sport, and anything else that tickled our fancy. One such Sunday we’d finished up our chat and headed our separate ways. As I pulled into my driveway my mobile rang, it was Alex, he said he needed a favour and could I meet him back at the cafe. Alex, a minor celebrity himself, had been dating a major celebrity (Suzie), and he very much enjoyed sharing his stories with Michael and I, as we did hearing them. When I got back to the cafe he explained that on his recent trip to Asia he had met a number of lovely young ladies. When he arrived back Suzie had found the piece of paper with all their numbers on it. He said he was skating on thin ice and needed to send her some flowers and a card. The problem was all the florists were closed for home delivery, and in addition, he was banned from her house. He asked could I drive to her house and pose as a flower delivery guy. It was one of the weirdest requests I’ve ever been asked. Why couldn’t he just wait until the morning? Why didn’t he organise this earlier when delivery was possible? I concluded that he wanted to involve me in this for some reason. As it turns out we had a good chat about the situation, relationships, and moral dilemmas on the 40-minute drive to her mansion hideaway. Maybe he was testing me to see if I’d pass judgement on his infidelity. I didn’t. Maybe he just wanted a bit of a counselling session, or maybe he wanted to share with me the excitement and drama of his love life.

He directed me to Suzie’s house and slouched down in the passenger seat as we went by. We parked five or six houses up and I walked down to her house and up a flight of steps to her front door. I said I was from a local florist and had a delivery for her, she thanked me politely and I went on my way. Two weeks later Alex had made up with her and he invited me to a life coaching recruitment night she held at her house. He said he wanted my expert psychological opinion on this life coaching seminar and the people who attend. When I met his girlfriend (officially), she said I looked familiar, but I assured her we had never met. There were 15 or so upper class

professionals in attendance. The problems they needed the seminars to help them with were all related to time management. I found it particularly difficult to engage with any of them and felt like saying, hey, if there aren't enough hours in the day for you, why are you wasting 3 hours here? Go home! Alex agreed and he decided to give these meetings a miss from that point on.

Alex and Suzie continued to date for three or four more months. Alex was worried about hurting her feelings if he had to end it. Alex was a 'player' but liked to think of himself as an 'honest player'. He said he never promised a girl exclusivity so it was ok to sleep around, although I suspect he expected exclusivity from them. He often lamented to Michael and I that Suzie really loved him, and although he thought she was a fantastic girl, he was not in love. He kept telling her she should keep looking for her perfect man, but he suspected she thought she'd already found him. A couple of weeks later Michael showed me a newspaper clipping of Suzie and another man. Apparently they had been dating for six months and were engaged. It seemed the 'player' had been played. Michael asked Alex if he knew, he said they'd probably just started going out and that the article would have been an exaggeration. The two did get married a few months later and Alex has seldom discussed Suzie since.

### *The Computer Technician*

One morning Alex came up to me pointing at a middle-aged lady standing at the counter, and asked whether I knew her, and started telling me a story. I told him that it was Gillian, a semi-retired aerobics instructor. Gillian did the odd shift at the gym and for a 12 month period ran a nightly aerobics class. Although fit, Gillian was considerably overweight and some of the guys joked that she was the heaviest aerobics instructor in the southern hemisphere. Her nickname was 'triple T', a parody of the professional wrestler 'triple H' and short for Ten Ton Tessie. Alex spoke quietly and appeared a little disturbed by the story. He had told Stan that he was having some problems with his home computer. Stan had told him that a girl who worked at the gym (Gillian) was a computer wiz and he could ask her to drop by and have a look at it. Gillian was happy to help and dropped by Alex's house early one evening. She fiddled around with the computer for about half an hour without any success. She turned to Alex and said she couldn't get it to work, and that she would try a trick commonly used in the industry as a last resort. With that she punched the computer, shook it, and then punched it again. Alex couldn't believe it "She punched it", he exclaimed with horror, "hard! And she broke it, I had to buy a new computer".

I instantly burst into tears of laughter. “How could Stan recommend her?” Alex lamented. I explained that Gillian was a bit of a know it all and probably exaggerated her qualifications. To make things worse Gillian then made a pass at Alex. She noticed the moving boxes lying around and Alex told her of his recent divorce, she said she thought the house could use a feminine touch and asked for a glass of wine. Three glasses later Alex finally got her out of the house but not before she had told him that her decorating and IT services were always just a phone call away.

Despite Stan’s good intentions he had once again managed to become an object of Alex’s derision. Stories of Stan’s well-meaning blunders were a popular source of amusement for the guys, although in this case Alex’s sense of humour was impaired by the cost of the replacement computer. Stan had let the gym run down considerably over the last three years. His membership had fallen from a figure of over 450 to less than 100. Spiros joked that one day soon the handful of remaining members would all have their own keys and that the gym would be completely self-serviced. Stan’s openness meant that most of the details of his business failings were public knowledge. He was losing money every week and had taken out loans to stay afloat. To compound things he consistently told people that he was over the place and had no energy or motivation to improve things. He would often sit in his office when new customers walked in and not come out to talk to them. One of the guys would usually walk over and do the best they could. This job often fell to Stopper, a morning regular who quite enjoyed liaising with customers. Then one day we were told that he had an interested buyer from interstate. The plan was to inflate the membership and the value of the business by giving away free memberships and by reinstating expired memberships. In addition, all the regulars were generously given a free 6 or 12-month extension to membership. The whole deal seemed very suspicious and we couldn’t believe that anyone who inspected the gym would pay Stan’s asking price, or believe that it had 400 members. Spiros helped Stan with the legalities and warned him that if he signed a contract declaring 400 members that the buyer may end up getting the gym for nothing based on this deceit, and that in addition Stan could find himself on criminal charges. As it turned out the interested party was most likely looking to acquire the gym for next to nothing on a technicality and the deal fell through at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. This left Stan with thousands of dollars worth of legal costs and an unprofitable business. To make things worse Stan had set it up so he had no membership renewal revenue for the next 6-12 months. Member by member, Stan

explained his unfortunate circumstances and asked could payment be renewed from this time onwards.

*The Mighty Hawks*

On Monday mornings during football season, one often entered the gym with trepidation, depending on the weekend's results. For Stan and many of the members a win transformed their week and put a positive accent on all areas of their life. A loss would leave them bitter and eager to vent their frustrations. After a couple of years as a regular I knew to keep to myself on Mondays or skip coming in altogether. When I first joined I was gladdened to hear that Stan was a passionate Hawks supporter, as I also loved footy and was a passionate bulldogs supporter. Most of the relationships in the gym were initially formed out of a shared passion for footy and for your team of choice. Footy talk was the guy's favourite topic and was mostly fun and stimulating, and a great way to pass the time and develop friendships. It was also a source of tension and impassioned verbal arguments. This was particularly true with Stan. He wore his heart on his sleeve and left himself open for criticism with his Hawks biased claims. He also was a master of subtle football related taunts that the more passionate guys (including myself) found infuriating. On Monday mornings after a Hawk loss most guys knew to leave Stan alone and to let him approach you. Unfortunately Stan rarely paid you the same courtesy. Sometimes the tension in the air was palpable.

One such Monday morning, I entered the gym tentatively and saw that Stan was in his office. I waved hello and moved on to the boxing room to begin my workout. Usually Stan would enter within 5 or 10 minutes to discuss the game, particularly as the Hawks (his team) had defeated the bulldogs (my team) on the weekend. To my surprise he never entered and I finished my workout, and just waved goodbye on my way out. I was thinking that maybe he'd learnt some tact and had decided to wait a day or so before gloating or delivering one of his stinging jibes. A couple of days later Spiros came up to me and made a wise crack about me being a sore loser and a sook. I didn't know what he was talking about. He said "you know, the way you snubbed Stan at the footy cause you were losing". Then it suddenly dawned on me what had happened.

I had gone to the footy game with a friend that weekend and arrived just after the first bounce of the ball. We had sat down in the stand when I heard my name called. By coincidence we had sat directly behind Stan and his son. We said a quick hello and focused our attention back on the game. Stan, by his own admission, was a

very loud and parochial supporter whereas I was very quiet and analytical. We'd had many discussions about how I would only ever go to the footy alone or with my close friend, and how I sat away from other supporters wherever possible. Stan on the other hand was famous for getting into arguments and sometimes even fist fights with people at the footy. On this day the combination of some brilliant Hawks play and no doubt my close proximity had Stan in full cry. Stan performed a running commentary of the game along with intermittent Mexican wave like celebrations. At the quarter time interval I turned to my friend and said let's move to another area. My mate asked whether I was concerned that Stan would be offended to which I assured him that Stan was aware of my need for quiet and would probably even expect me to move, besides, the way he was carrying on I wouldn't be surprised if many of the other supporters in the area also moved away.

As it turned out I was wrong. Stan and his son took offence at us moving away and Stan had told all the regulars how I was a sore loser and had snubbed him and his son. In addition, Stan did not speak to me for more than a week. He eventually came around but we never discussed the incident. The other guys found this story most amusing. I must admit, on reflection, the thought of Stan and his son turning around at quarter time to see two empty seats is highly amusing, and then by halftime they would have realised that we weren't coming back.

Later in that same footy season I received a phone call at home at 7.45am. Stan rarely rang me at home, and he sounded a bit sheepish. He reminded me that I had told him I would renew my membership in the next few days. He asked could I do it today and could I pay cash as he was having a cash flow problem. When I got to the gym he told me the full story. The Hawks were playing in a preliminary final interstate on the weekend and Stan was raising funds so he and his son could go along. Stan was already in financial difficulty and the trip required he raise a minimum of 1000 dollars. This would pay for tickets, a motel room, and a lengthy bus ride each way. The other draw back was that in order to get this cheap deal they had to travel with the Hawk's cheer squad. Most of us (including Stan) could think of nothing worse than spending hour after hour on a bus with singing and chanting fanatics. Spiros was there at the time and he said to me jokingly "Is there some way you can help that guy, there must be some psychological intervention you can do...Can you believe what he's doing?" There was simply no logic to his decision. Spiros and I analysed the situation rationally.

If he did not go interstate, and watched it instead on television, both possible outcomes would be positive. If they lost he would be glad he didn't go and spend all that money, and if they won they would play in a grand final the week after at home, the preliminary final would become insignificant, and he would again save money. By going he would definitely spend money he couldn't afford, and if they lost he would endure one of the longest and most painful bus rides home in football history. This discussion was simply academic though as we both knew Stan had an overriding need to take the trip, as an escape from his everyday life. According to many of the guys, Stan's sojourn interstate also had a negative karmic consequence that ensured an Adelaide victory.

Indeed, the Hawks were defeated by a record margin in one of the most lopsided finals in football history, and Stan and his son did endure that horrendous bus ride home from interstate. I remember watching the game and noting that all the luck was going against the Hawks, it was as if the Hawks were cursed. This story satisfied the humours of the regulars for some weeks. As football was a major talking point in the gym and had the tendency to create tensions as well as positive interactions the guys all had ways of managing their emotions and their interactions. Stan was happy to let himself ride the emotional roller coaster that football provides, revelling in the emotional highs and suffering the emotional lows. He allowed people not only a full view of this, but attempted also to draw them in and make them a part of it. I tried hard to manage my emotional responses and minimise the magnitudes of both emotional highs and emotional lows. To achieve this I used my rational faculty to gain a perspective that lifts up the lows and brings down the highs. Important to this process was having sensible, rational discussions with others. Where Stan's style of supporting tended to set high expectations and resulted in harder falls, other men took a pessimistic outlook and hence were never too disappointed. Alex, a Blues supporter spoke about football in a generic manner, and rarely personalised his support and belonging by using we, us, and them. More passionate supporters spoke of their team as a collective in-group. It was only after an exciting success would his passion be ignited. After the Blues successful 2007 finals campaign, many of the guys commented that they had never known that Alex was such a passionate supporter.

Petro, a fellow passionate bulldog supporter, maintained a fairly pessimistic outlook. This style of supporting was the legacy of following an unsuccessful team over many years. It was also passed down from generation to generation. Even when

the team's prospects were bright Petro new not to raise expectations too high as he had been disappointed so many times before. Petro and I grew up in the same neighbourhood, as did our parents. We shared a bond based on thousands of shared football memories ranging from playing football with friends in the street, meeting our heroes, game highlights, disappointments, near misses, and favourite players. The stories and conversation topics were endless. Petro's pessimistic view seemed to void Stan's (and others') attempts to taunt him. Stan would make a derogatory comment towards the bulldogs, Petro would agree, and Stan would have nowhere to go from there.

Michael, in a more conscious and deliberate manner, used this technique to avoid argument in all his footy talk, particularly with Stan. One morning I was impassioned and angered by something Stan had said to me when Michael pulled me aside and said "Mate, just agree with him, whatever he says just agree with him, it's the best way to shut him up". Michael had known Stan longer than any of the guys and had been using this technique for years. When Stan fished for an argument Michael would say things like "you're 100% right mate" and Stan would not know what to say next. I began using this technique in many of my footy conversations to great effect.

### *Grumpy Old Men*

The two elder statesman of the gym were Vlad and Sam. Sam came in everyday without fail and lived alone in a flat down the road. He was retired and had very few family members or friends. Sam chatted to all of the guys, especially Stan, and the gym was his home away from home. The only problem was that his English was so poor that no one could understand what he was saying. I would just nod along with him; laugh when he laughed, frown when he frowned, and sigh when he sighed. Often he would get very excited and animated during a conversation; sometimes you would glean the general topic of conversation through his body language and through his pigeon Italian/English. Stan had tremendous patience with Sam and would spend hours talking to him and was even beginning to learn Sam's unique tongue. Often I would go up to Stan and ask, "What did old Sam have to say?" "Not too sure" would be the typical response "something about taxes being high I think".

Vlad, on the other hand, was considerably more articulate but still difficult to understand at times. He was of Romanian descent and had been a full time carer for his elderly father. Vlad did not get along with his siblings and had few friends. He

was a skilled handyman and did odd jobs around the gym; he also enjoyed offering workout advice. Stan employed Vlad on Saturdays after his father died, and when Vlad had little to do and had minimal income. Vlad spent at least 3 hours in the gym everyday and although he drove Stan mad at times was generally well received by all the guys. Vlad had a kind heart and loved doing favours for people. He struggled to engage with the younger guys on a consistent and meaningful basis due to limited social skills and cultural differences. Despite this most guys found a common conversational thread with Vlad, be it workout talk, or a silly joke, and most guys generally enjoyed having him around. He loved rules and regulations and would rigorously enforce Stan's directives (such as his treadmill speed limit) on his Saturday shift. Because of this the guys loved breaking the rules to provoke a response. I had a few running jokes with Vlad that we repeated every time we saw each other.

After his father died Vlad inherited the family home. There was a time when he was worried that his siblings would contest the will and Vlad would be left homeless after years of being the sole carer for his father. He was happy the house was in his name and that his siblings were not contesting, but the asset value of the house reduced his pension to next to nothing. I said to him "Look Vlad, what I'll do is I'll get my solicitor to draw up some papers and you can put the house in my name". Vlad was horrified by this idea, "No, No, No!" he said. I followed up by saying "Why not! I won't charge you much rent to live there, maybe 150 a week, but no parties!" Then Vlad's horrified facial expression turned to a smile and he told me I was a dreamer. Since then, every time I have entered the gym Vlad has asked me if I have come in to collect the rent, to which I reply "Yes, and your late with your payments". He has also told everyone in the gym how I want to take his house and become his landlord.

Vlad's friendly and altruistic nature does not extend to homosexuals however. Vlad's homophobia is so severe that most of the guys believe he must be homosexual himself. He tells stories of lurking in trees in the park at night and jumping onto and attacking guys in the act. There are a set of barbells and weights in the gym that were donated by a gay member, which Vlad will not touch. His nicknames for two of the gay members of the gym are 'sperm face' and 'Philadelphia'. Ironically one of the guys that Vlad respects most in the gym, 'Trent', is gay, but Vlad doesn't suspect it due to Trent's hyper-masculine appearance and behaviour. It goes without saying that the guys go straight for the gay card when they're looking to push Vlad's buttons. On



Vlad's Saturday shift he has received calls from radio quiz show hosts and gay Mardi gras organisers.

*Reflections on the Group 'Fit'*

Having given Stan's wedding omissions considerable thought and discussing it with the men involved; I came to conclude that the men consider their lives within the gym as separate from the other aspects of their lives. Either consciously or unconsciously motivated, they did not let their gym life and their family life come together and become enmeshed. The gym is a form of personal escape, a unique environment offering relief and release from daily pressures. Aaron and Bill gave little serious consideration to inviting Stan to their actual weddings, yet they were willing to discuss the details pre and post in minute detail with him. This apparent clear conscience suggests naivety and insensitivity rather than a lack of respect or caring. I believe they valued Stan's friendship as a mate at the gym and to not invite him to 'family events' in no way inferred a lack of caring. Hence they were not embarrassed to discuss the wedding and would be surprised to hear that Stan was offended.

This suggests a psychological need for the men to have at least one aspect of their lives that is their own. Involving Stan and the gym in a family occasion would result in the two worlds colliding and a sense of loss of privacy and sanctuary. The gym network is a surreal microcosm in which the importance of sporting results far outweighs world politics. Humorous anecdotes have more relevance than familial tensions, and frustrations can be exercised out of the body. When outside affairs penetrate this gym environment the illusion is temporarily lost. While Stan is an object of much ambivalence as the leader of this group of men, I believe in this case, not inviting Stan was more a reflection of the importance of the gym in Billy and Aaron's lives.

Stan is the unofficial leader in the group. Firstly, he opens the doors everyday and provides a paid service. Due to his openness and willingness to share personal information he creates an atmosphere conducive to social interaction. This social environment is far more open than anything the guys have experienced at other gymnasiums. Having created such an environment there are also days when Stan resents what he has created and he appears grumpy and short tempered. Some of the more annoying members of the gym commonly feel his wrath at these times. When Stan is down or worried he has a need to share with others as if to confess, and he

utilises his workplace friends to this end. Similarly when he is happy he does not hold back. It is this personality characteristic that leads to intense and sometimes volatile relationships with some of the men. In particular, Stan had problematic relationships with the men who were more guarded, who did not 'air their dirty laundry', and who tried to present themselves in a positive light. This was the case with Spiros and Alex. In contrast, Aaron was almost perpetually complaining so it made it easier for Stan to get along with him. Other guys such as Michael had withdrawn from Stan to some degree after having been enmeshed in a volatile dynamic in the early stages of the relationship. I would also put myself in that category. As I got to know Stan initially I felt as if there were very few boundaries and I felt as if I had to create them myself.

Stan's leadership role did facilitate relationships to form between the men. I developed a friendship with Michael and Alex that extended out of the gym context. I also had good rapport with Spiros, Aaron, Vlad, Stopper, and Sam. Michael and Alex were also good friends as were Michael and Vlad. Generally speaking, all the guys got along quite well. Interestingly there were very few female members to complicate the dynamics and curb masculine behaviours. The few female members and the one female staff member quickly became co-opted into being treated as one of the boys and were seemingly comfortable in that environment.

I often raised the subject of extending friendships outside the gym. If the gym was to close, how many of the guys would still catch up with each other? The answer was not too many, making most of the friendships based heavily on convenience. I would argue though that describing a friendship as convenient does not diminish its importance. The men shared a strong sense of belonging and group unity and loyalty was carefully maintained and monitored. When talking to the men individually or in small groups, they would describe to me how important the gym network was to some of the other men in the group. In particular, two of the men appeared to have few friends or family members outside the group and appeared to be more sensitive to group dynamics and group tensions. All of the guys had a need for this type of friendship and in the event of the gym's closure the men all agreed that they would join another gym and look to develop a sense of belonging there. Without Stan's presence though I doubt whether the dynamic could be replicated. I'm sure that those guys with a need for a sanctuary away from the rest of their lives, if need be, would move on again in search of this.

*Positioning the Data*

As shown in the narratives above, even when the formality of data collection is over ethnographic researchers must look back over their fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and memories, as they begin to make sense of their work and search for themes, discourses, and theoretical insights. In most cases they will be looking back over a long and often messy process containing many circumstances, actions, and decisions that do not fit neatly into any formalised methodological research protocol. It is the interaction between the researcher, researcher affiliations, the researched, and the environment that produces the uniqueness of the study.

It is in reporting and discussing the entirety of the research experience that we can not only describe the everyday lives of participants but also share fieldwork insights, locate consistencies and inconsistencies, and help better prepare fieldworkers. Moreover this process aids analysis of the group under investigation. To do this, it is necessary for the fieldworker to feel empowered to resist the pressure to smooth over rough edges, and to report and analyse the data and data collection methods that can often seem cringe worthy to the academic or paradigmatic eye.

As evidenced in the current project, the researcher's experiences in the remote rural location could easily have been buried and forgotten, or filed away as a failure. However, by taking ownership of all of the research experience I learnt and could report valuable information about these men and about the difficulties in getting to know and understand them. This was particularly important to note in light of the current research impetus, and epidemiological data that has suggested the psychosocial health of rural men is a point of social concern.

My new awareness of some of the major obstacles to accessing groups of such men has offered up an understanding of the inherent 'lack of fit' any treatment modality or policy aimed at fixing or ameliorating the identified "health crisis" will have. Such knowledge, I propose is central to informing further clinical or political/social actions.

I argue that for purposes of contextual understanding the inclusion and discussion of the subjective tensions involved in my fieldwork is necessary. I also propose that 'negative' cases and partial engagements such as Study one be given space as much as the confirmatory, as it is these seeming black swans that provide the grist for contemplation and substantiation of our knowledge development regarding men's everyday lives. Such activity can only enhance our work and understanding of

the complexity of the socio-cultural components involved in 'knowing' how male identity is forged within specific contexts, and lead to improved instruction, support, and understanding of possible tensions and ways of engaging. It will also enhance the reporting process to reflect more accurately the lives of the two groups of interest rather than a homogenised attribution to the larger whole.

## Chapter 9

### Men Talk

The findings presented here were derived primarily from over two years of engagement with a group of men from a gymnasium, represented by a triangulation of one to one interview data, as well as focus group data, and participant observation. In addition, these findings were influenced by the researcher's subjective understandings of the men, and the researcher's introspection as a group member. Although generalisation is not sought, some of the discourses and aspects of identity negotiated by the men have relevance for many adult men in western cultures.

As mentioned previously, four focus groups were conducted and recorded. The focus groups were conversational in nature and reflected men being men and talking about men. The men were all members of the gymnasium and had at least some familiarity with each other. Two focus groups were conducted at a local café, and the other two at the gymnasium office. The purpose of these focus groups was to explore the conversational dynamics and rules of discourse men utilised in relation to other men.

After the voice recorder was turned on some of the men became a little guarded and nervous and it was predominantly myself and one or two more outgoing men that did the talking. As time went by the men began to forget about the recorder and spoke more freely. In some cases it was only after more than an hour of recording that 'real life' conversations began taking place. The conversations became more and more relaxed and more and more candid as time went by. As such the majority of focus groups ran nearly three hours.

In analysis, the researcher used a social constructionist lens to draw out the social discourses most relevant to the men's lives (Durrheim, 1997; Frosh et al., 2003). These discourses also represent broader social beliefs, attitudes, expectations, and behaviours surrounding being a man. These men share both personal and collective narratives, and these narratives are socio-historically situated (Ricoeur, 1983, 1984, 1985). Hence, the men's narratives represent their personal lives, their lives within the group, and their broader socio-historical belonging. In addition, the researcher analysed the men's narratives and group dynamics for conversational styles as well as for motivations and behaviours.

The seven, one-to-one interviews were conversational in style and offered the men the opportunity to reflect on their identities and their belonging within the group without the restrictions implied by a group context. As such they revealed personally held values, hopes and desires, some of which would not be communicated within a group dynamic.

Overall the findings can be summarised by the *conversational style and language* of the male interactions, the *motivations and behaviours* evident in male interactions, the *shared values* that were evident within male interactions, and the men's *definition of man* (refer to Table 3).

Table 3. *Summary of Findings: Conversational Styles, Motivations and Behaviours, and Discourses*

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### **Conversational Style and Language**

- Humour and storytelling
- Definitive statements
- Defensiveness/protection of the group

### **Motivations and Behaviours**

- Skills and competencies
- Connections with friends and friendship circles

### **Shared Values**

- Family values
- Heterosexual attraction, sex, and intimacy

### **Defining Man (Masculine discourses)**

- Biologically based
  - Man has simple needs
  - A competitive spirit
  - Managing others
  - Independence/Autonomy
  - Defining woman
- 

### *Conversational Style and Language*

#### *Humour and Storytelling*

Within the male group contexts, the style of the conversations was open, jocular, accepting and supportive. It appeared to me in reflection that the predominant purpose of most conversations was to make each other laugh. Humour seemed to bring the men together time and again, and humour determined the length and enjoyment of the interactions. The men exhibited much joy and passion with frequent boisterous outbursts of laughter. Within male group contexts, as time went by the

laughter would get louder and louder as if they wanted those outside the group to look on in envy at their fun.

The men used storytelling as a means of generating humour and also to reinforce their connectedness. This included stories in which the men were directly involved, and stories of people they knew. Depending on the amount of history between the guys, stories could range from an event an hour earlier to an event years before. It seemed that a shared history was reinforced through this storytelling process. For example, I (Magilla) had met Stopper through a mutual friend a number of years ago. Shortly after commencing a focus group in which he participated, he reminded me of a story from that meeting long ago. It served to generate laughter and good rapport between all of us.

Magilla: "I had lunch with my old man the other day and he said to me..."

Stopper: (interrupting) "Never trust a man with a blonde moustache (the group laugh). That was funny that night, I was at Magilla's father's house and he was watching *Alby Mangles* on TV and pointed to him and said 'never trust a man with a blonde moustache' (the group laugh)...sorry mate, what did your old man say?" (this took me by surprise, I had completely forgotten about that past meeting)

The stories told within the focus groups as they did in everyday conversation, seemed to have more effect if they were humorous. It was as if humour was a safety valve for men to connect intimately with each other without positioning themselves as sappy or overly sentimental. Nostalgia presented in a humorous way seemed to have the effect of bringing the men closer together. These stories were also often embedded within revealing embarrassing or flawed aspects of the other. This process appeared to pull each other into the group and prevent bigheadedness and mask the underlying good will and need for connection and belonging. As such this group of men were joined in part by a collection of shared stories that contained humility and humour. The retelling of stories further reinforced the group's intra-connectedness.

#### *Definitive Statements*

One of the most important styles of engagement evident within the male groups was extreme and definitive statements, and strong opinions. These clear statements acted to exaggerate many of the masculine discourses admired by the men such as heterosexual libido and competitiveness. The presentation of extreme attitudes functioned to make more obvious the men's shared understandings about life (e.g. masculinity, sexuality, sport and competition) through the service of generating

humour. Making clear cut statements and opinions appeared to position the men as being more transparent. Overall this way of engaging seemed to have a levelling effect making the speaker more like the rest of the men, less threatening, and more amusing. It also served to clarify the accepted normative rules of belonging to this group. The more extreme and controversial the statement the more humorous the men found it. In the following excerpt from a conversation, the men discussed the benefits of working out and keeping fit.

Stopper: "If people say to you 'gee you look great', it's just an ego thing, you're more confident, 'cause you know, me personally, I don't think I've ever met a person whose obesely overweight that's happy. They're miserable, smelly, nasty people (the group laugh)...generally, and I'm not being nasty"

Michael: "They've got a chip on their shoulder"

Stopper presented this generalisation as fact, and a nasty opinion as an acceptable position. As none of the guys in the group were overweight he was not going to directly offend anyone. However, no one protested this comment; rather they all laughed and shook their head. Another function of the extreme statement is that being derogatory to another out-group heightens the goodness of the in-group. The more someone dislikes those outside the group, the better the in-group must be to facilitate his membership. In this next excerpt Michael and Alex are talking about women and sexuality.

Michael: "I don't like the butch looking ones"

Alex: "They've got attitude though, if you like a girl and she's a lesbian you're not gunna get her anyway, so she's useless, why would you even want to talk to her? That's my philosophy. You'd rather talk to your mates wouldn't you? It's like saying there's the car but it doesn't drive...it's like a t-shirt that doesn't fit (group laughter)"

Alex admonished all lesbians as useless and in doing so reduced women's usefulness to sexual gratification. He also portrayed himself as having a strong heterosexual desire and as someone with a definite leaning towards physical appreciation over more complex engagement. He relied on the use of a hyper-heterosexual masculinity and of humour to present a simplistic and non-threatening façade to the group.

Throughout group conversations the men appeared to continually utilise the binary oppositions of masculine/feminine and of heterosexual/homosexual to generate humorous affect. Women and homosexuals were the objects of light hearted



conversational derision. The men appeared to find it cathartic to vent frustrations upon women and homosexuals, and in doing so reinforce their own sexual base as being primary.

*Defensiveness/Protection of the Group*

Within the group conversations there appeared to be a preference to have clear demarcations between in-groups and out groups. Sayings like “winners are winners and losers are losers” and “friends are friends and enemies are enemies” provide examples of the ongoing discursive preference for men within a male group to present clear and distinct boundaries for social groupings. For example, a conversation between Troy and Alex indicated how simplicity and predictability can be represented as admirable qualities.

Billy: “You know its black or white with you Alex, and a lot of people would like to be like that”

Alex: “No grey areas”

Billy: “No grey areas with you mate”

Alex: “Cause you waste time and that’s where the disputes and the mind games...you burn a lot of energy in those grey areas and I don’t need it...I’d rather miss out than go through that”

Billy: “Where did you pick up that trait Alex? From your business dealings?”

Alex: “I just know that people work in those grey areas, and we’re gunna argue. I’m just not interested in that shit. And once you’ve made up your mind you’ve just got to be strong with it”

It was also important to this end for men to show humility. Trying too hard to sell oneself to others was often perceived as arrogant, or as an attempt to place oneself above others. Men who failed to demonstrate humility were rarely accepted into the friendship circles. Spiros’ lack of humility resulted in him being disliked by most of the gym patrons. Some of the men who had known him for a long time had been able to see past his exhibitionism, but most hadn’t. In this extract Michael and I discussed some of the men from the gym.

Michael: “You know saying all this, you know, aspects of people that, at the gym that I can’t stand. As you know, I’ve got the ability to just block them out”

Magilla: “Do you think if you were great friends with everybody it would be the same? Like, do you need those blokes, for sorta, balance?”

Michael: “Well you do, you do...”

Magilla: “That you can laugh at? Not that you necessarily dislike them. Like Big John, you know, the most boring man on the planet”

Michael: “Yeah, he’s boring but he doesn’t offend me in any way. He always says hello and he’s always polite”

Magilla: “And you’ve got Fabulous Frank”

Michael: “Yeah, but they’re all inoffensive. They’re neither here nor there. You know I’m going down the track of Spiros and Armen”

Magilla: “Hmmm”

Michael: “You know. They’re two horrible personalities as far as I’m concerned, but as you said they make up... the rich tapestry of the gym. And without those guys there would be a sameness”

Both Spiros and Armen were exhibitionists and professed to know more than others about most subjects. While acknowledging them as part of the overall gym dynamic, Michael could not overlook these threatening personality characteristics. Spiros had won enough of the guys over to belong to the group despite him not seeing eye-to-eye with Michael. Armen and Fabulous Frank however, while contributing to the overall gymnasium environment, could not be considered group members.

In contrast to Spiros’ exhibitionism, behaviour that was self-deprecating positioned the men as wanting to be an equal rather than a superior, and as someone who was non-threatening. Being self-deprecating was particularly important when one was at the same time promoting one’s strengths. Balancing both self-deprecation and self-promotion was important to being accepted. Similarly, poking fun at another person or ‘taking the piss’ could also be interpreted as a humorous and a likeable quality, but it could also be perceived as offensive. The rules of taking the piss effectively involved being witty and funny rather than simply cruel, and being able to ‘take it’ when someone was taking the piss out of you. In addition, it was important not to go too far, or be too personal, so that it was personally insulting. One also needed to have existing rapport with the person/people to whom one was addressing. Through the processes of self-deprecation and ‘taking the piss’, members were constantly being brought back down to the level of the group.

The men constructed a clear boundary between those who were in the group and those who were outside the group. Those outside the group were the less popular members of the gym or other men in general. The men frequently described other males, those outside the group as untrustworthy, calculating, and even threatening.

The discussion of an 'other' or out-group appeared to function as a means of reinforcing difference and the relative security and loyalty of the in-group. Telling stories of outside threats, be they other males or females, also communicated a commitment to the group. To reveal flaws and failings to the group further emphasised your likeness to others and provided opportunities for story telling, taking the piss, and generating laughter.

It was evident for these men that male friendship was based on the notion of equality. It was important to present oneself as a straightforward man with similar interests and concerns as others. The men were also sensitive to behaviour that suggested a sense of superiority or one-up-man ship. There was much talk and passionate dislike for those men with chips on their shoulders, and who thought they were better than other men. At the same time the men did feel superior to out-groups and hence the sense of equality formed the in-group but did not extend to other groups of men. Moreover, the men also talked about being independent, strong willed, and not afraid to be different. When talking about competition they encouraged acts of heroism, and exceptional grace under pressure. Hence there were two competing discourses. One discourse espoused equality as essential for belonging, and the other encouraged independence and exceptional achievement. Many of the men were also involved in the media and in public roles, suggesting a strong need for individual recognition.

As such the men needed to be skilled at 'reading the play'. That is, they needed to be constantly aware of context and of where and how they can be admired and respected for individual achievement. They also needed to know where and how to embrace equality, hide their need to stand out, and present as 'one of the boys'. This is a difficult ongoing task and the men had various degrees of competency, which had direct consequences for their group status and belonging. It also must be said that this paradox can be a source of anxiety and confusion for the men.

Often the men contradicted themselves when telling stories, changing from context to context. Generally, they expected far more from others than they could offer themselves. In this excerpt Alex was asked whether he felt that males and females were different.

Alex: "Whether I'm with a female, male, whatever, I treat people the way I'm treated. If they're respectful I'll be respectful, if they're disrespectful I'll be very disrespectful. We're in an environment where we trust each other so were freely

speaking but if I was with people I didn't trust and I know that they're going to twist things and you've gotta think about what your saying...I went to this bar once with a mate and part of the bar was a bisexual area and a guy came up to me, and he was gay. He said your the guy off that sporting show, then it registered with me that this place is a bit this way and I said to him look mate I'm not that way so get lost."

Michael: "I would have just said fuck off, but..."

Alex: "I just didn't want him sayin I was gay just cause I was in that area of the bar. That's another thing I hate when people jump to conclusions without knowing the facts, and it happens a lot"

Here Alex and Michael display homophobic attitudes and behaviour, but more interesting are the inconsistencies in Alex's argument. Firstly, he says he treats people like they treat him, but then says that if people are disrespectful to him, he will be **very** disrespectful back. This is already a very defensive stance setting up two sets of rules, one for himself and one for others. He then contrasts the current safe environment to the many threats outside the group. In his reaction to the man in the bar he quickly jumps to conclusions about the man's sexuality and quickly jumps to the defence of his public image. The very next thing he says is that he hates people jumping to conclusions and making assumptions about him. Again he sets up a double standard. He is likely to treat people badly because he perceives them as threatening and as misbehaving even when they are not. In addition, he perceives negative intentions because he has formed a negative view of the other.

#### *Motivations and Behaviours*

Within the group discussions the guiding motivation for joining with others in conversation appeared to be to reinforce a sense of belonging, friendship, and cohesion. The men were careful to portray themselves in a good light in relation to salient masculine discourses without explicitly asserting their position as being more or less than the other. As such the group tasks of the focus groups was premised on the notion of equality of group members.

Power differentials and hierarchies were evidenced more implicitly in the motivations men had for engaging. For example, Stopper appeared less certain of his group standing and his claims to masculine credibility and hence looked to demonstrate this at every chance. He was to be one of the most vociferous of the men. Others, such as Michael were motivated to 'egg the others on', and incite extreme reactions in the service of humour and release. Indeed, during the planning of the

focus groups, many of the men portrayed great excitement at the opportunity to shock 'outsiders' with candid details of life within their male friendship circles. They would remind each other not to leave out stories that were particularly funny or crude.

Within the groups the 'inciters', such as Michael, did not appear to need to perform hegemonic masculine scripts as much as the 'performers', such as Stopper, and instead appeared to manipulate the scripts as well as other men for enjoyment purposes. As such, it was rarely the loud, more expressive men that controlled the flow and topic of conversations. Rather, it appeared that control lay with the men who were less personally invested in presenting masculine traits and more interested in treating the focus groups as a light hearted 'bull' session. The 'inciters' seemed to be able direct the topics of conversation with little noticeable effort, and this may have also served to stay within topic boundaries they were comfortable with. It was clear that these quieter and seemingly reflective group members were more powerful in terms of directing the group discussions. This may suggest, as Freud (1991c/1921) and Boon (2005) argued, that for male groups to form and function requires leadership that centralises interactions around shared understandings and a sense of equality of group members. In the case of the current study the leaders of group discussions were not conspicuous, but rather were quiet and reflective. On the other hand, Stan's leadership style was more expressive and at times confrontational, often creating ambivalent feelings towards him.

In relation to the one-to-one interviews, some of the men were very motivated in doing an interview and contributing to the study. They wanted to discuss with me salient issues relating to the gym and also relating to their everyday lives. These discussions were mostly based on reasoning and involved reflecting on events, people, relationships, and fitness. Stan wanted to talk about his position within the group in terms of friendship and loyalty. Together we worked through the wedding situation and gave it some perspective. Stan found it cathartic to express his hurt at being excluded from Billy's wedding, and also the hurt he felt from a friend's betrayal. Stan used the interview context to work through issues that were causing him pain. Spiros maintained a greater degree of emotional control and restraint. The discussion was far more rational and he used the opportunity to demonstrate and exercise his reflective faculties. We spoke 'from higher ground' as two wise men who'd privately reflected on many of the goings on at the gym and beyond. We found many common insights and enjoyed sharing them. In the interview with Spiros, he eventually insisted in

reversing roles and began asking me personal questions. This proved to be a very effective way of debriefing and of building rapport. Michael was very restrained, calm, and rational. We discussed friendships, relationships, and the gymnasium, and Michael offered insightful reflections. Petro and I discussed football and working out. It was very much a conversation of football nostalgia between two people sharing similar football histories.

Vlad and Alex also offered gymnasium and relationship insights, while other men such as Aaron and Stopper were not comfortable with recorded interviews. Interestingly, the men who were most vocal and demonstrative in the focus groups were more guarded in individual interviews and in some cases were not comfortable with participating at all. It was the quieter, more reflective characters who enjoyed the opportunity to discuss the group and their lives in an interview context. Overall, the interviews varied in terms of reflective insights, depending on the dynamic between myself and the men, the men's reflective needs and styles, and their openness to share information. The interviews gave the guys opportunities to give personal reflections without the restraints imposed by the presence of other men.

#### *Skills and Competencies*

The men were also motivated to be members of the gymnasium group to gain expertise, which was directly related to the much-valued feeling of pride. Skill acquisition was also related to productivity, and self-discipline. Working towards a competency related goal gave the men a sense of self worth and relieved guilt that would otherwise arise from being idle. For the men in the gymnasium disciplining themselves to workout regularly impacted on all areas of their life. I asked Spiros about his fitness training in a one to one interview.

Spiros: "Cause I know when I don't go to the gym, I feel...I feel awful sometimes. I think you know, you feel shit you know. So, and when I go to the gym, you feel, I'm exhausted but I feel really good"

Magilla: "Yeah, I know"

Spiros: "You know, and then I found, a whole different approach. When I first went to the gym, to me, it was the fountain of youth, to me it makes you look younger, feel younger, there are so many positives from it, it's just incredible. I mean, you're in charge of your own body shape you know."

Magilla: "Yeah"

Spiros: “It’s so inspiring, I think. If you go back in time, going back a few thousand or a thousand years ago, in those days people were industrious, you know, they were lifting things, and you know, ploughing fields, using their muscles, sweating, bending their backs. These days we’ve got a remote control in one hand, a cigarette in the other, and a drink in front of us, everything is just at our feet, we’ve got so many choices now. We’re just becoming lazy”

Achieving an admired level of competency through self-discipline gave the men a sense that they were unique and stood out, as they were doing something that other men have failed to achieve. Hence, this aspect of identity is mediated by culture and social interaction as the type of competency is reliant on social norms, and the evaluation of merit is based on social comparison. The need to excel and to stand out and to be better than the next guy resulted from a need to establish a unique individuality. This can be understood using Castoriadis’ (1997a/1990) argument that identity involves individual attributions and imputations based on shared socio-cultural knowledge. The men built and maintained identities through shared knowledge and activities. Each man’s unique combination of competencies helped consolidate his identity as unique and integrated. In addition, the in-group who actively construct identity markings gave social value and standing to this identity. As such, identities are negotiated and maintained within group conversations and behaviours. In addition each individual also reflects upon their identity in a broader social perspective that goes beyond the group. These identity processes are reliant on social membership, that is, the sharing of social discourses.

As found in this study, the men needed to be valued for contributions they made in paid employment. In the context of the fishing village the men’s participation and proficiency in masculine employment roles was not only their most proud achievement, but it also brought the men together as a community. Sharing expert knowledge that few urbanites (or outsiders) could boast was central to the men’s individual and collective identities. In order to have the respect of others and to respect oneself men needed to demonstrate and apply expertise in paid employment. In the case of the men from the fishing community their work had a physical component and this physical prowess became a part of their identities. The conversations were dominated by discussions of their friends comparative work competency, and they worked hard to avoid being thought of as incompetent or

deficient. While work was important for the gymnasium group, it was less salient as the group's cohesion was not as integrally linked to their working lives.

Due to its physical and psychological demands sport was also a major conversation topic for the men in this study. The men told stories of their personal sporting memorable moments and achievements. Sporting achievements represented skill acquirement, physical mastery, natural ability and coordination, self-discipline, and courage. It was important for men to have some history of sporting participation. At the very least the men wanted to demonstrate some sporting knowledge, and to join in discussions and analysis of sports. Within the gym environment the men continually learnt workout exercises and techniques and shared this information with each other.

Michael (discussing the merits of working out): "Yeah, it educates you on your physiology, which most people have no idea about and suddenly they go to a gym, they learn about this discipline, they learn about their dietary intake, and they become, um, sometimes anal in how they treat their body."

In addition the men knew each other's level of competency across many sports, particularly weight training, football, and boxing. Sporting knowledge also facilitated male friendships. Sporting conversations were the most common way that friendships were formed and maintained within the gymnasium environment.

Another admired competency was social skills. This included the ability to get along with people and be liked, as well as the ability to make people laugh, and also the ability to attract women. The gymnasium was a place where men not only had the opportunity to demonstrate social skills but also to develop them. The male friendships evidenced complex implicit and explicit shared knowledge. As such friendships developed slowly over time and required attention to non-verbal as well as verbal cues. The guys who were easy to get along with understood the rules of engagement better than most. I asked Michael in a one to one interview to describe the social environment in the gym.

Michael: "It's a microcosm of society, it's a cross-section, you know, you get real sporty types, then you get your body builder types, and you get people who just enjoy going there just to talk. So, you know, some social outcasts, misfits, suddenly feel part of a family in the gym, because of that familiarity of knowing everybody there"

Magilla: "Hmmm"



Michael: "So they (the social outcasts) don't experience it in real life situations. It's almost like an unnatural place for them to go"

Magilla: "That's interesting that you call that um, sort of constructed, sort of unnatural"

Michael: "Well it's a contained atmosphere. So therefore they're really forced to develop a personality"

Magilla: "You can't go anywhere once you're in there"

Michael: "You're really forced to make a conversation in a gymnasium and I think it develops people's personal skills to an extent. And as I said, it makes people who, maybe aren't accepted in general society, it's a way for them to connect with the real world"

Magilla: "Yeah coz you get all types don't you? I mean you get the various walks of life, it's a level playing field in there"

Michael: "Regardless of how much you earn, the way you look, what you wear, you're pretty much an equal in a gymnasium. Cause everybody's there pretty much for the same common goal...sometimes you've only got an hour for a workout and you can spend 45 minutes in general chit chat and waste that time, and do 15 minutes, basically nothing. But as I said, the upside is that it can develop you as a person by forcing you in a way to communicate with different people"

Michael described the social importance of the gym to those with few outside friendship circles, particularly in terms of developing social skills and finding a sense of belonging. In particular he was referring to guys like Vlad who initially present as odd and as someone you want to avoid. Vlad focused on the minutiae of life, had very few friends, and told long-winded and often excruciating stories of seemingly unimportant daily events. As time went by the men learnt techniques to help shorten these stories and also learned that Vlad was always on hand to do them a favour. Through the repetition of chatting within the gym environment Vlad's oddness was gradually normalised as the men gained an understanding of his full life story and a full range of identity characteristics. Characteristics that initially made one feel uncomfortable were later perceived more favourably within a context of understanding. In the extract just presented Michael also acknowledged the benefits he had received from his interactions within the gym. These included learning to engage with a broad range of people, and also feeling good about himself by making

social comparisons, that emphasise his more advanced social skills and his more diverse social networks.

For the men in the study skill acquisition also implied a degree of competition and social comparison with others. The only way to gauge one's level of expertise was to compare with other men and this involved subjective interpretation of relative competencies. Gaining acceptance within a group of men is easier when one has skills in areas that are more generally recognised. While there were generic areas of expertise, such as being a sexual predator of women, work, having sporting experience, men were also able to introduce different and novel contexts and activities as long as they could be 'sold to' and accepted by the other men. For example, Petro was an amateur astrologist, and this gave his identity a different dimension that the men found interesting and that they also respected. Within the fishing community I had little knowledge of the men's work practices and was not accustomed to physical labour. Hence, I was reliant on sporting similarities and my listening skills to develop rapport. In order to become a group member I would have needed to learn some of these skills as well as slowly introduce some of my own skills in order to be accepted. One option that might have been successful would have been to join the local football team. In this case I would have been part of a team and established a reputation in terms of my football attributes.

#### *Connection with Friends and Friendship Circles*

In terms of male friendship circles, acceptance often involved contributing to the group in terms of skills and competencies. Men were more likely to include someone as a friend or as a group member if they 'brought something to the table'. That is, they offered something such as sporting knowledge or ability, or a great sense of humour, or an array of funny stories. This made them more pleasurable to be around and improved the comparative standing of the other men in the group. In the gymnasium context for example Aaron told funny stories and swore profusely, Alex was known for his sexual prowess, and Petro was mad about football. Hence they had negotiated a sense of belonging through emphasis on a particular characteristic. Whether an identity marker or competency was admired and valued by a group depended on the shared values of that group. In this way a competency or attribute may not necessarily be a socially desirable one in the broader sense. Proficiency in behaviours that are not condoned by broader society (such as profanity or fighting) may also be accepted and admired according to the relevant male discourses of the

group. Becoming a part of a male friendship group involved complex implicit knowledge. Members needed to contribute to an overall sense of group pride and goodwill without trying to dominate or act superior.

Social friendship networks were indeed an integral component of men's lives. These friendships were based on similarities and shared socio-cultural understandings. Men needed to demonstrate they belong and were alike by reinforcing similarities in their conversations and in their actions. In the formation of friendships, difference was tolerated in so far as it didn't connote inequality, inadequacy, or superiority. When I was establishing rapport in the fishing community I was aware of the need to hide the many differences that were evident between the men and I. Hence, I found myself simply listening to and complying with what was being said. Being more outspoken would have exposed the differences and resulted in mistrust and dislike. As time goes by however, men were generally able to display more individuality, built upon a solid base of existing similarities. Men who were adept at forming and maintaining friendships utilised a wide array of identity markers according to context. These men knew how to behave in order to be accepted whether it is in a group of bikers, or whether they were having a glass of wine with an accountant. The ability to adapt in a chameleon like way to context was beneficial in establishing friendships.

The men were sometimes able to interpret subtle behavioural signs of anger, sadness, and loneliness, and respond to these signs in subtle and often covert ways. For example, when Michael was having problems with his girlfriend he was emotionally supported (covertly) by two of the guys without having informed the two men of his problem. In chatting to Michael after a workout, Alex picked up on Michael's generally negative attitude towards relationships and women (Michael had not directly stated his problem). Alex rang me that night and told me, and I informed Alex that Michael had text messaged me about sporting events all week and that this normally occurred when he was seeing less of his girlfriend. After a short discussion we decided to take Michael out on the weekend and take his mind off his problems. Intuitively, Alex and I 'knew' that Michael would not feel comfortable divulging the nature of his problems (and we would not feel comfortable asking), and that if he did have a need for discussion it would take care of itself over a few beers on Saturday night. As it turned out he didn't divulge much. Alex and I raised the topic of relationships and how difficult they could be. Michael agreed and we talked about this in quite a general way. While we all knew the sub-text, it was left up to Michael to

give it detail, which he didn't. What was most important though was that Alex and I let Michael know we were sympathetic to his girlfriend problems and would be supportive without being invasive. Within this group of men, quite often it is sufficient support to demonstrate awareness without in-depth verbal discussion.

Friendship between the guys was also facilitated through training advice and assistance. More experienced weightlifters would suggest new exercises and training methods to less experienced ones. Asking someone for a spot (physically helping someone with the closing repetitions in an exercise set) was a common practice. Men would also give verbal encouragements related to physical development such as 'geez, you're starting to put on some size mate'. The group members had detailed knowledge of each other's routines, techniques, strengths, and weaknesses. This was a source of both competition and support.

Generally speaking, men with a well-developed sense of humour were the most admired friends. Within male circles generating humour was the number one activity. Narrative description was a common way men induced laughter, especially when the stories directly involved group members.

Making another person laugh was dependent on shared socio-cultural understandings and experiences. Story-telling, as well as twisting, disturbing, and exaggerating social morays were common ways of generating humour. Hence, those men with well developed understandings and commentaries of cultural discourses (especially those relating to masculinity), and well-developed insights regarding group members, were most proficient at generating laughter. Subverting and exaggerating masculine discourses was a particularly important source of humour.

Pressures and anxieties that arose from social expectations were often released, at least for that moment, through humour. Expressing a masculine failure to other men in a comical way could act to reduce the collective fear relating to that particular failure. Men also admired the courage to degrade oneself in this way, unless it was performed too regularly in which it would become confronting and no longer funny. In addition, if the failing in question was a particularly sensitive issue to one of the men in the group, it would also fail to be funny. This process of identity negotiation and maintenance of a sense of group and sense of self can be understood through Castoriadis' (1997a/1990; 1997d/1989) processes of sublimation, identification, and reflection. Through identification the men learn these discourses that are relevant to living as a man within their environment. Through the process of

sublimation the men have psychological investment in these identifications. The manifestations of this psychological investment were observed as laughter, anxiety, joy, tension, anger, and sadness. Reflection is the process by which the men negotiate their sublimated psychological investment in, and manipulation of, identified discourses. As such the process of reflection is central to the men's felt sense of identity. Reflection was observed as a group activity when masculine discourses were discursively exaggerated or subverted. It was also, and at the same time, observed as an individual activity through interpreting men's discursive contributions within a framework of identified patterns and phenomenological understanding.

For example, Stopper made humorous self-deprecating comments about his baldness in nearly every social interaction. On one level it was an admired quality because it positioned him as an equal and allowed the men to make light of, and ease anxiety relating to, a common fear. Unfortunately Stopper over did this self-deprecation so that it became annoying to the other men. By making constant reference to his baldness it showed that it was a concern for him and hence should be a concern for others in a similar position. If he was actually ok with his baldness he would have discussed it less frequently, and hence his commentary would subvert popular discourses and reduce collective anxiety. As it was, his constant focus on his baldness actually reinforced this fear, and made the men wish he'd just get over it.

#### *Shared Values*

Within the male group discussions there were discourses around being a man that served to build and mediate friendship and belonging. These discourses were a set of shared understandings that the men used to reinforce their inter-connectedness. The men shared countless understandings. They understood the primary discourses and expectations surrounding being a 'man' within this group. They came from a similar geographical area and shared sporting interests, television and popular culture, and other more particular interest areas such as 'working out' and horse racing. It was strongly apparent within the focus groups that without these commonalities the conversations and the resulting bonds that formed would not be possible.

#### *Family Values*

Less talked about, but no less salient, was shared family values. The group conversations generally began with the guys reinforcing their commitments to family and friends first and foremost.

Magilla: "What's important to you guys? What makes you happy?"

Petro: “For me it’s a strong family unit, having all your family surrounding you, supporting you and you supporting them to the utmost whether it be emotional or financial”

Sometimes the conversation turned to the importance of backing up your mates in a crises or protecting your family. One of the backbones of these male relationships was the knowledge that they would back each other up and that they shared similar fundamental family values.

Stan: “...But relating to my family, if anyone said anything about my kids it would be war, straight up mate”

All agreed that protecting and nurturing family was at the top of the values hierarchy.

#### *Heterosexual Attraction, Sex, and Intimacy*

Within this group of men the particular aspect of sexuality that facilitated a sense of shared belonging was heterosexual attraction and the admiration of female physical beauty. The focus group discussions were frequently interrupted by collective glances at passing females. The men discussed the physical credentials of females present and not present including their face, body, hair, clothes, age, race, and ethnicity. This acknowledgement and appreciation of the female form was an assumed subtext to the male gatherings. No matter the degree of congruence of beliefs between the men on a range of topics, and no matter the degree of congruence on preferred physical qualities, the general appreciation of and attraction to women was shared.

For this group, men were seen as sexually aggressive while women were perceived as more concerned with status, power, and materiality. Some men presented monogamous long-term relationships as a necessary evil in order to have a good sex life. It was felt that men had to play by women’s rules if they were to get sexual satisfaction.

Stopper: “At the end of the day if you’ve got women on tap why would you even engage in marriage and have children...Cause at the end of the day I personally don’t believe that one man is really meant to be with one woman for the rest of their lives...and that may sound hypocritical cause I’m married (group laughter). I think if guys could have all the sex they wanted the concept of marriage would be non-existent”

A little later Stopper also confessed that it’s nice to have a wife to confide in and discuss things with.

Most of the men believed fidelity and monogamy to be a social construction that was very difficult to practice. Even with the men who were in long-term relationships there was a sense of uncertainty that a relationship could last forever. It was very difficult for the men to believe that there was just one girl for them and that they could be satisfied in this situation forever. The guys often used hypothetical situations to work through the anxiety and guilt provoked by doubts over their fidelity.

Michael: "Which gets back to, do you agree with monogamy, should we be monogamous? I mean there's no other animal that is?"

Magilla: "I thought there were some, what about some of those big cats?"

Alex: "If you have any male at any age, married or single, and an attractive younger woman put the hard word on that guy, and if the male thought he could get away with it without anyone knowing his circumstances, I think 98 % would take the opportunity and run with, and I think that's just being honest"

Underlying these discussions was the presentation of an almost uncontrollable male heterosexual desire. For a man to disagree with Alex's hypothetical illustration would be to present himself as sexually deficient. A strong heterosexual orientation then was an important quality of masculinity.

The men enjoyed giving ratings out of ten and shocking each other with either extremely high or low ratings. The guys rated passers by, celebrities, or women they all knew. Alex was a notoriously hard marker. He prided himself on this, in keeping with his 'player' image.

Alex: "High priced hookers, that's how they all end up"

Magilla: "Who, models?"

Alex: "They end up going to Japan. They say 'oh we're going to Japan to do promotional work'...yeah, Japanese men pay four or five grand a night, especially the blondes"

Michael: "You're a big fan of the Eurasians aren't ya?"

Alex: "Sorta depends though, they can't be too curiously looking for opportunity, cause that's what I've noticed about Asian people...you take them on a date and they'll tell you they love you within the first five minutes...they probably don't even know your surname"

Michael: "See Lane Hancock (the group laughs)"

Alex: “I tell you what, in the Philippines I’ve seen four or five girls who would run 1.55 (based on a standard harness horse racing mile rate of 2.00 minutes, 1.55 is very fast hence very attractive)

Michael: “That’s big coming from you Alex”

Alex: “That’s big for me”

The men derived much pleasure out of understanding the harness racing reference to rate women. Integrating references from other shared activities and interests into novel areas of conversation gave the guys a sense of a unique bond. In a very short time, the guys would develop unique references creating their own private language. This exemplifies the social construction of new understandings and discourses through interaction (Edley, 2001; Elias, 2000/1939; Frosh et al., 2000; Howard, 2000; Phinney, 2005; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). Within the context of friendship and a shared socio-historical context, the men were able to imaginatively and reflectively construct new uses and meanings for language, often for humorous effect. This also inferred the existence of a reflective capacity to create discourses rather than be limited only to those already available within one’s environment or subjected to dominant ones (Castoriadis, 1997a/1990; 1997d/1989). The overarching priority within group contexts was to create humour and laughter. Shared parlances helped achieve this, as did making extreme claims and observations.

The findings of this study also indicated a strong need for intimate relationships. This dimension had two components, namely, sexuality and intimacy. Sexuality was seen as related to but different from intimacy. While the two could go together, the need to have sex, and the need to have intimacy with a partner were generally treated as separate issues. As discussed earlier in reference to Spiros, sexuality was also a skill or competency as well as being a need and a desire. Sexual aggressiveness and attempting to pick up women was one of the competencies that men admired. Discussions of sexual conquests were also a source of humour and of bonding. It was also expected however that men used humility and restraint when discussing their sexuality. The ideal was a contained boastfulness. For each man, and over a period of time, this involved story telling and description of their sexual lives, this contained a mixture of boastfulness, humour, the sexual objectification of women, self-deprecation, and rejection. This was also mediated by the overarching discourse of powerful heterosexual desire. Alex and I discussed the attractiveness of various women, which afforded Alex an opportunity to tell one of his stories.



Magilla: "A lot of guys like blondes though"

Alex: "I don't rate by hair colour. Ty asked me how I rated Karmen Electra...I said about 8, then Ty said you've got to be fuckin kidding, she's a 10."

Magilla: "She's a brunette though isn't she?"

Alex: "She goes blonde as well though. I picked up a good African girl from a clothing store on Chapel Street...Oh mate she was gorgeous looking...they don't muck around, they're pretty straight kind of women"

Magilla: "Was she Muslim?"

Alex: "I never discuss politics or religion with women...that's a waste of time, I don't care what they think, I don't care what they believe in"

'Picking up' attractive, exotic girls in everyday situations, and for sexual gratification, positioned Alex as the embodiment of masculine heterosexual fantasies. Stories of a sexual nature told by single men were a source of humour and enjoyment, especially for attached men. These discussions were a source of escape, and release for men who were unlikely to ever have similar experiences. Rather than focusing on explicit sexual details, the men's stories of sexual activity focused largely on the chase, and on the physical endowments of the women. Most men found explicit sexual details too personal to divulge and to listen to. The discourses of heterosexual attraction and sexual promiscuity were understood and shared by most men, and despite individual differences, men were easily able to communicate and connect on this level. Male heterosexuality had become so well characterised that it offered vast opportunities to perform these identity characteristics to meet many different ends. In this extract from a one to one interview, Spiros talked about his techniques regarding the awkward first move in dating situations.

Spiros: "That's my attitude because you know what, when you get knocked back or whatever, it tells you something about the person. I wanna know how they handle someone that goes for the kill straight away. I wanna see how they handle it cause if they handle it the right way, it means ok I've done the right thing, I respect you more. But if I bed you the first time that I ask it means that everyone else has done it as well."

Magilla: "So does that make you wanna have a go"?

Spiros: "You always go for it, you know, you create the mood, you know what your doing, you go for the kill, and um, if you get knocked back, ok great."

Spiros had developed a rationalisation so that 'going for the kill' is a win-win situation, as you either get laid or you gain respect for the woman. In developing this rationalisation he also can pre-meditate behaviour in dating situations. He can also lessen the hurt of rejection by creating a win-win situation. Generally speaking, the ideal attribute was to be bold in one's endeavours to bed women. Stories such as Spiros' emphasise the normality of pursuing sexual conquest.

Another aspect of the intimacy dimension was the before mentioned need to have a family to protect and serve. Old-fashioned family values were admired and were at the core of most men's reported value systems. I asked Spiros what the role of a man was today.

Spiros: "That's interesting. I think men are losing their identities...I think there's a huge identity crisis. Men don't know who, um, I don't think a man is a person who goes out beating women and has to, you know, pound their fists on their chests like a cave man, or like an ape."

Magilla: "Yeah"

Spiros: "I think a man, a true man, is someone who's respectful and someone who honours their partner, you know, um, is compassionate. But at the same time he is the protector of the home, a protector of family and to be able to basically, if he needs to, you know, pick up his family and put them over his shoulder if he has to, do you know what I mean? Um, today men and women are virtually sort of blending into one."

Magilla: "That's an interesting point"

Spiros: "You know, you go through certain types, and I've got nothing against homosexuality or that kind of thing, but every second or third person is bi-curious, or bi this or bi that, I mean what's going on?...the people today are just going that way cause its the trendiest thing to do"

Magilla: "That really didn't apply in the past did it?"

Spiros: "Some guy, I remember, he said to me, you know your G-spot's in your ass, and I thought you know mate, it could be bells and whistles...it could be the best thing since sliced bread, you know what, I'm not sticking anything up my arse, you know what I mean?"

Magilla (laughing): "The G-spot in your ass, that's a beauty"

Spiros associated traditional roles and family life with heterosexual monogamy, and associated the blurring of roles and fractured family life with bi-sexuality,

homosexuality, and experimentation. Adhering to the masculine gender role of family head and provider is preferred to an uncertain life of blurring boundaries, particularly in the long term.

While the men tolerated promiscuity to some degree and problematised monogamy, they also aspired to a traditional family set up. This apparent contradiction was something that the men struggled to negotiate. The men were socialised to understand and to some degree incorporate two paradoxical discourses. One discourse positioned the men as sexually promiscuous hunters, and the other positioned the men as loyal heads of families. In combining and negotiating the two different discourses the men developed a wide range of different thoughts, feelings, and behaviours relating to their intimate lives. Those who aspired to monogamy and a stable family life adopted strategies to disable and deconstruct the sexual predator discourse. At the other extreme some men deconstructed the monogamy discourse and glorified promiscuity. When men were sharing a space and discussing sexuality it was a far more popular (and humorous) position to deconstruct monogamy, and support promiscuity (as long as it was heterosexual). It was evident from the one to one interviews that some of the men held back their true relationship beliefs and behaviours (in group contexts) in order not to lose their reputations in front of other men. In a one to one context I observed a more reflective view. This was evident throughout the interview process and can be seen in Spiros' testimony. Within the gym environment, and surrounded by other men, Spiros would be unlikely to express his need for intimacy.

The men who were in intimate relationships needed to negotiate the conflicting discourses of traditional family head, and promiscuity. Within the interview, Spiros shifted between presenting himself as a loyal family man and as a sexual hunter. One of the most common experiences for the men who were in a relationship was a lingering doubt over whether there was, could be, or should be, just one person for them. At times these men envied the sexual and lifestyle freedoms of single life, at other times they pitied the loneliness of single life in comparison to intimate support. Despite occupying a substantial portion of the men's contemplation and reflection, the situation appeared unwinnable, and at least to some degree the grass was always greener on the other side. The men generally did not believe in the notion of romantic love, and did not believe that feelings alone could support a solid relationship. What was implied was that long-term relationships were something one

could get used to, adapt to, and work at. Spiros' parents were married through family arrangement and hence the focus was on their roles as husband, wife, mother, and father, rather than on a romantic attachment.

Spiros: "Arranged marriage, 50 something (years together), that just goes to show. Love means shit, I'm telling you, it's bullshit. Just the biggest phantom, cause pretty much if you love and infatuate someone at the beginning then eventually...eventually somewhere along the line there's a used by date somewhere, you know what I mean?"

Magilla: "There's a line in one of my favourite songs, how does it go? It goes 'you've got me figured out now, now we're both disappointed'"

Spiros: "You're probably right, it seems, it's always, how I'd do, if I was to try to analyse my parents, everyone had a role to play."

Magilla: "Yeah?"

Spiros: "And they did that, they really, they really love each other now, I can, I can assure you, they're so, um, you don't see open affection like you probably would with modern couples today."

For Spiros love was something you came to through understanding and commitment over a long period of time regardless of your starting point. It was also distinct from romance, infatuation, and of course, sex.

One of the underlying factors that drove the sexual predator discourse was a fear of rejection. In reaction, many men were reluctant to commit to a relationship and preferred single life or more brief encounters. Men who had been cheated on or left in the past were generally the most cynical towards relationships, and the biggest supporters of sexual promiscuity. Being betrayed by a partner appeared just as difficult for men to deal with as it would be for women. This hurt and anger was sometimes harnessed into sexually aggressive behaviour. Alex's sexual objectification of women and misogynistic testimonies were in some degree a response to the break up of his marriage. Although he rarely spoke about his divorce, his general tone was of hurt and betrayal, which appeared to fuel his promiscuous lifestyle. It was often almost impossible for men such as Alex to trust a partner again. Some men forged what could be described as alternative narratives of intimate life. For instance Alex intended to play the field until well into his late 40s. Then, and for the practical reasons of receiving emotional and physical support in late adulthood, Alex intended to marry a young, trained nurse, from a third world country.

Some men also felt pressured to meet high physical and material standards, and experienced some gender role confusion. The paradox between the sexual and intimate discourses can result in uncertainty and anxiety. Even within a satisfying intimate relationship the men felt a constant uncertainty about whether the relationship could last. It appeared as if they could never be sure in trusting another person or themselves, or in believing there was no one else more suited to them. They were sure however that family values were the most important thing in their life. Here Stopper was again lamenting the material values of women and of society, but then turns it around and blames man's problems on nature.

Stopper: "Its the way we're made up, we're animals mate, its like saying can you trust your partner, I don't think you can trust anyone, I mean you can have a dog for ten years then one day it turns around and bites you in the nuts, they can turn at any time, they're unpredictable creatures"

This comment was at the end of a long discussion and Stopper changes his argument from nature as man's friend to nature as the root of mistrust. Underlying this confusion is anxiety regarding relationships and trust. It can also be seen as an effort to use rational argument to normalise these feelings. Earlier his sexual drive was explained biologically and now human unpredictability is also being explained biologically. The need for this rationalisation may stem from the anxiety produced by competing beliefs regarding relationships. During the interview Stopper fluctuated between positive evaluations of married life and of having child, and negative evaluations.

There also appeared to be some gender role confusion and frustration in terms of women's motivations, and to what women expect from men.

Alex: "So if you're just a normal kind of guy women can't see any potential in you...they'll walk all over your chest, back, throat, and stamp all over you, in a vicious, vicious way!"

Alex was speaking as if about women in general, but the guys understood that his experiences of divorce were the motivation for these comments. It was common for him to group all women as calculating and as seeking financial opportunity. A little later he said.

"They've got their own mobile phones now, they're earning as much money, it's the new liberation, it's all fantastic but...I mean...the man's still responsible for

everything, he has to pay for everything, he has to be a gentleman, it's never a 50/50 game, never!"

Within this group conversation the guys then went on to discuss bill paying on dates and in relationships. There was a sense of perceived unfairness in that equal rights was a feminine tool and had only been applied to areas in which women were disadvantaged. The men felt that acts of male chivalry and generosity were still socially desirable and in the case of some women, expected. This set up the perception of lofty expectations and standards of appearance and behaviour that the guys needed to reach to find a partner and maintain a relationship. Both Alex and Stopper were consistently their frustrations and tensions regarding gender roles within sexual and intimate relationships (Schwartz et al., 2004; Watts Jr & Borders, 2005).

#### *Defining Man (Masculine Discourses)*

The findings of this study revealed what the men generally defined as ideal masculine characteristics. These were discourses of admired and idealised male attributes. The men consistently endeavoured to favourably position themselves in relation to these qualitative discourses. The men's conversations were predominantly in the service of generating humour and connectedness through sharing an understanding of hegemonic masculinity. As such, what exactly this hegemonic ideal man is became evident.

#### *Biologically Based*

The men presented themselves as being more sophisticated modifications of basic biological predispositions and drives. Most behaviour that was typically male was quite often reduced to its biological and instinctive origins. The men used animal metaphors and nature/nurture arguments to present a male essence that was modifiable but never completely controllable. The instinctive origins of man were constructed as pure, natural, and meant to be. In this quotation, Michael and Stopper discuss male sexuality.

Spiros: "I think men are very sexually oriented and I think there are a lot of sexually frustrated people around...a lot of people don't feel satisfied with their sexual lives, especially men"

Magilla: "A lot of guys are sexually frustrated whether they're getting a little or a lot"

Spiros: “I think it comes down to being animals and you look at any animal species...males, its in our make up to be sexually aggressive...you just have to look at history and the animal kingdom to see that we’ll never change”

Across all group discussions the men in general, associated sexual drives and behaviours, competition and sporting achievement with biological instinct. The need or want to do this form of biological reduction was in service of simplification, self-acceptance, and understanding. As noted by Town (2004), biological arguments help present oneself and one’s thoughts and behaviours as functional, normal, and in the service of nature. In opposition to this stance, the men seemed to consider the influence of socio-cultural forces as corrupting, tainted, and unnatural.

#### *Man has Simple Needs*

In keeping with comparisons between man and animal as normative, simplicity rather than complexity, was commonly presented and desired. A strong need was evident across the focus groups to present oneself as simple, clear cut, and predictable to other men. The men seemed to value ‘black and white’ responses and opinions, as well as following one’s instincts. This is not to say that the men were not complex within their total identity, but the presentation at least of oneself as clear, simple and biologically predictable appeared to be preferred. Thus each man had a caricature that they performed and that was easily recognised by the other men.

Stopper: “I think the male species is very simple I mean all we really need to be happy primitively speaking is just food, sex, and shelter”

Michael: “Great point! Great point!”

The preferred simplicity and predictability of ‘mano a mano’ was positioned against media and culture as being primary contaminating agents. The men indicated they were situated against the forces of capitalism and the materialistic nature of current society. They felt pressured and forced to compete across socio-economic groupings. If one didn’t compete then one would be left behind and miss out in all ways.

#### *A Competitive Spirit*

It follows that in such a competitive environment those who compete successfully and in the spirit of fair play are admired. Competition takes many different forms. As mentioned previously, there is the competition over women, but the most common aspect of competition discussed was sport. Alex and Magilla argued over which sport is more demanding, tennis or boxing.

Magilla: “Federer used to be soft, all that ability but a pea heart. Then he turned it around as if it was a switch, its all relative though, I reckon professional tennis players are the best athletes on the planet”

Alex: “What do you base that on, fitness, flexibility?”

Magilla: “I think psychologically it’s the most difficult sport”

Alex: “How would a five setter compare to a 15 round title fight?”

Magilla: “I don’t know but it’s gladiatorial like a fight”

Alex: “Would you rather be looking over at Ivan Lendl at his best or look across at a menacing Mike Tyson?”

A brief silence ensued then Alex gave further weight to the boxing over tennis (in terms of difficulty) argument by reliving his experiences as a former boxer. By this stage Alex was impassioned and used body gestures to further emphasise his point.

“When you’re getting clocked in the head and your mind gets confused, it’s a weird experience man, you’ve gotta dig something from somewhere you’ve never dug before.”

Within this conversation the men went on to compare individual competition to team sports in which cooperation is required. For one to engage in team sport, it was argued that it was very important that their team-mates and rivals respected them for their competitive spirit. Alternatively, they also argued that perhaps individual success was more difficult to achieve, as you had no-one to help you or to fall back on. Hence, to battle it out in a boxing ring or in singles tennis was argued to be more psychologically draining than team sports. However, although less difficult, team sports were seen as a great way to bond and share with other men. In this case, working together towards a singular goal gave the men a great sense of belonging. Therefore both were worthy and considered valuable demonstrations of specific admirable attributes.

The group discussions around gym and weight training also revealed strong evidence of a competitive drive to be better and stronger than others. In addition there was a sense of pride and achievement amongst the men on the basis they believed they were improving their health and physique. Generally speaking competitive physical activity gave men a feeling of productivity that relieved guilt that would otherwise be felt, for being, as they described, idle, or lazy. The men expressed a feeling of pride and a sense of superiority over men who were inactive. They saw their engagement as a form of superior control of self and believed that those who



were inactive lacked the discipline and pride in themselves to maintain regular exercise.

*Managing Others*

Another area of manhood that the men discussed was associated with dealing with other men who presented as being superior. This was particularly salient in the context of when one attempts to raise their status by putting down another. While this behaviour in extreme was looked down upon, the ability to stand your ground and save face was respected. The men talked about hypothetical threats and unknown men or casual acquaintances that tried to 'put one over' them. They described particular groups of men who had chips on their shoulders due to physical characteristics such as being short or being bald. These men, they pronounced, were more likely than other men to be confrontational in order to try to compensate for their physical deficiencies. Again, the common theme was to overcome this positioning by holding your own, rising above, and finding a way to retort under pressure.

Michael: "You come across blokes that you've never met before and in five minutes they're a better human being"

Magilla: "You can sense their malice in their operations can't you? What do you think that is?"

Stopper: "Maybe their mummies and daddies didn't love them enough...I honestly don't understand it"

Michael: "It's like they're trying to stake their claim as far as I'm concerned. And again it comes down to a power shift. I'll dominate you, well hey, no you won't! No! You! Won't!... I need to have a comeback for it. I would feel like I'm as weak as piss"

Stopper: "That's exactly right and I mean it all comes down to pride"

Much of this attitude seems to be strongly linked to the Aussie tall poppy syndrome (Feather, 2003). In these cases feelings of jealousy and comparative inadequacy, that resulted in someone attempting to chop the other down. The 'tall poppy' perceives that the other man thinks he is better than him, and this triggers a retaliative response. Simultaneously, while the men frowned upon one-up-man-ship, independent thought and the strength to stand out, resist peer pressure, and be different, was respected. In one instance, Stopper talked about the pressures of settling down and starting a family. In this example he brings up the tendency for guys to be threatened by those who are different and don't conform, and the tendency for guys to

pressure each other into conformity (an attitude strongly presented by these men also). However on a more personal level he's also saying that he's not like that and that he respects the other guys' difference and uniqueness.

Stopper: "If you let people influence how you live your life you should be in a paddock eating grass. I could easily say to you guys, you're getting on, when are you going to settle down? I wouldn't. Other blokes in the same position would cause they'd like to see you sucked in like they've been sucked in"

This overt display of confidence and security in oneself to stand-alone and not to conform to the pressure of others was much supported by the other men. The 'balls' to stand up for what you believe was evidently a much-admired quality amongst the men in the group discussions.

#### *Independence/Autonomy*

The men displayed a strong need to be independent and to control their own destinies. The power to make decisions about one's life was continually fought for, while relinquishing that power to another or others was resisted. Independence equated to having places of their own and of their choosing they could retreat to. It also equated to having multiple friendship and familial relationships they could turn to. They generally avoid a life that was socially enmeshed, or where they had few social networks at all. In the case of the former, the men feared the situation where everyone they knew, also knew each other. They would be completely predictable, open, and exposed, with no privacy. The men craved the flexibility offered by having multiple worlds, for instance a work crew, a number of different friendship networks, a nuclear family circle, and broader family networks. The desire was not complete separation but enough separation to feel independent and autonomous to at least some degree. The men avoided the feeling of being trapped into a lifestyle not of their choice. I discussed with Stan the situation surrounding him not being invited to Billy's wedding. As discussed in a previous chapter Stan and Billy had been friends for many years and Stan was shocked and hurt by being left out of his wedding.

Stan: "I don't know whether it should be effecting me that much, but that's the way I am, and I'm not gunna be at peace till I speak to Billy about it. And at least let him know that if that was my situation, he would be in my top five or six invited. I have to tell him that, just so he knows what my take on our friendship was. Obviously he's different"

Magilla: “I don’t think he thinks any less of you. It’s this thing of compartmentalising. For him and a lot of blokes they don’t want their Mrs (partner) knowing about this place, they want separate worlds”

Stan: “Well Petro doesn’t want his wife Nancy here. She’s wanted to train here a number of times in the past and he’s always said no, this is my place. He’s been doing that for 9 or 10 years.”

Shortly after this we discussed the issue of gender differences in the interpretation of life events. Stan’s ex-wife had recently gone on a date with a friend of his. Stan was furious and felt betrayed that his mate had done this, especially as he had not approached Stan for his permission. Instead, Stan was informed of the date by a third party. He had told me about opening up to another woman, a gym member and wife of Fabulous Frank, was not helpful.

Stan: “I made the mistake of telling Kate. What a hard ass bitch she is. She’s as hard as nails.”

Magilla: “I reckon she locks Frank away at home in a gimp outfit.”

Stan (animated): “Jump Frank! Jump! Oh, how high Kate, how far? Fuckin hell, Jesus.”

Magilla: “But that’s the revenge thing coming from a woman’s perspective, because you left her”

Stan: “She said to me, she said what are you worried about? She’s allowed to do what she wants; you don’t live with her no more. I said I’m not talking about my ex-wife I’m talking about him (Stan’s mate) who I’ve known 25 years.”

Magilla: “Girls aren’t gunna see it that way”

Stan: “She was hearing it but not taking it in. She kept coming back to my ex-wife. She can do what she likes. Me and her are still good friends, but this cunt (Stan’s friend).”

For Stan it was a matter of disloyalty within friendship. Within these male circles dating an ex-partner without first getting permission is an act of betrayal. In this case their friendship would never be the same. The different perspective offered by Kate, and potentially by other outsiders/partners, could upset the applecart of what normally was a contained space where the men could express themselves without being confronted with different perspectives. For many of the men in this study, the gymnasium and the friends within it offered them a sanctuary. It was a separate world they could enjoy and it was largely out of the reach of others in their life. Most men

deliberately kept it this way while others appeared to maintain separateness on a more unconscious level.

Another way of presenting this need for independence and autonomy is as a need to have multiple aspects of identity. Keeping different life worlds necessitated the utilisation of multiple aspects of identity according to context. It enhanced the perception of autonomy and gave the men a greater variety of experiences. In this way it made their lives more socially stimulating. The alternative was being marked with a predictable and static repertoire of identity characteristics that one was implicitly pressured to repeat for sake of consistency and authenticity. The men constantly attempted to balance their need for recognition by significant others, with their need to express multiple aspects of their identity. A too fragmented life made difficult the task of reflecting on a coherent overall identity, and made difficult the task of forming satisfying relationships. Alternatively, sameness limited and stifled the expression and development of multiple aspects of identity.

#### *Defining Woman*

Interestingly some of the discourses used by the men feminised the felt materialistic forces. In this conversation Stan and Spiros discussed what women look for in a man.

Stan: "It's that unbeatable combination of money and status as Stopper said, I'd say 90% (women) look at that as a no brainer. They exclude the physicality of a man if they've got those two attributes"

Spiros: "That's a fair point and I think a lot of guys are frustrated cause they do the right thing, work hard, and take care of themselves and feel like they can't get anywhere cause, like, women are so materialistic now. Unless you're a pop star you don't get a look...and I think its western society in general"

As shown in the excerpt above the men are arguing that a basic need for protection and shelter is now represented by the female having developed a materialistic need, and a calculated assessment of a potential partner's providing capabilities. The pressure the guys feel to compete in terms of jobs, status, and material wealth is being projected onto women as carriers of this superficiality. In this next excerpt Alex expressed a similar lament.

Alex: "If you woke up tomorrow and wealth and cars didn't mean anything, and girls changed their philosophy so you didn't need a great job, great car, great hair style to pick up and everyone was the same, do you think you'd be chasing so hard to

get that car? We're doing it cause everyone else is raising the bar and we don't want to be left behind"

It was very clear throughout the focus group conversations that these men were strongly defensive of their position within the overall socio-cultural parameters of Australia.

### *Summary*

#### *Group Talk*

The conversational style and language used by the men in their groups was informal, relaxed, jovial, and off the cuff. The opinions expressed and self-presentations appeared extreme, almost caricatured. Humour was used in the service of relieving anxiety and establishing rapport and a sense of belonging.

As such the primary motivating factor for the men in engaging in their groups appeared to be to join in and gain acceptance and friendship. The men generally shared knowledge of hegemonic masculine scripts and performed and manipulated these to generate humour, and to sure up solidarity. Connectedness was the result of shared socio-cultural values and understandings. Primarily these were understandings of masculine discourses and shared family values. The men utilised humour to create a fun and interactive environment and told stories in the service of shared nostalgia. Central to the conversational repertoire were extreme opinions and statements that were easily recognised, and presented individuals as black and white caricatures.

The group discussions revealed that the men performed and negotiated their identities around specific masculine discourses. Even those men who were not so active in promoting their heterosexuality, animal instinctiveness, and competitiveness understood the others' need to do so and happily went along. To interpret this text at face value we would assume that the men identified with these characteristics and modelled themselves in this image. This however would be an exaggeration. Firstly, in an all male, informal, and relaxed environment, these hegemonic masculine discourses were heightened and intensified. We also need to factor in the performative aspect of masculinity as well as the motivations for presenting oneself in these ways.

Simply sharing these understandings of male discourses brings the men together. The men knew that the performance of extreme and non-politically correct versions of masculinity is taboo in most areas of life, making these situations an enjoyable escape. I too, found it fun to act in politically incorrect, even misogynistic ways, knowing that our targets of derision were nowhere in site, and knowing that this

acting did not reflect my own personal values. Hence much of the humour and enjoyment in exaggerating masculine stereotypes, telling outrageous stories, and taking extreme positions, comes from knowing that it can only happen in this type of relaxed and friendly all male environment. This is not to say that these identity characteristics play no or little part in their overall identity formations, but rather, they are an important component. The ability and opportunity to connect with other men, to vent frustration, and make light of life issues is an important part of the men's lives. It is an aspect of their lives that they enjoy and it gives their lives balance.

Hence, it is important to interpret the men's conversations in light of their aims and needs. It must also be said that these men were generally quite skilled at interacting with other men, at reading cues, and at presenting themselves as a non-threatening equal. The reward was a sense of belonging and friendship, and some needed light-hearted relief. There was at least some level of understanding amongst all the men that the identity characteristics presented were exaggerations, and sometimes even completely false. It was generally understood that in a different life context a man's values and behaviour might change. While some men were more reflective in this way than others, the men consistently commented that the masculinities others presented were not always true reflections of their personality. Hence presenting a masculine caricature was generally well received and was a source of humour.

#### *Mano a Mano*

When engaging with the men on a one to one basis the conversations while still relaxed and at times jovial, were also at times reflective and contemplative as the men analysed their experiences within the group. This reflective style of relating was not common in group contexts where masculine scripts were played out in a more literal sense. Hence one to one discussions gave evidence of the individual negotiation of masculine discourses. For example, discussions were commonly centred on justifying identity positions that differed from hegemonic masculine scripts. Consistent across contexts were their definition of hegemonic masculinity. The men presented this hegemonic man in both one to one and group contexts as being biologically driven, and hence innate and natural. Hegemonic man was also seen to be seen as simplistic in outlook and needs rather than complex and unpredictable. The complexities of identity were sometimes evident in one to one contexts but in groups the men liked to present an ideal masculinity as having an essence that was

predictable and easy to please. Competitive abilities and grace under pressure were greatly admired and were applied to sporting activities, dating, and controlling others. In addition the hegemonic man had a powerful heterosexuality where 'getting some' was the primary focus of interaction with women.

The one to one discussions revealed that a reflectivity was often evident and appeared to be the component of identity that functioned to oversee and manage the multiple elements of identity. The men varied greatly in the degree and type of reflectivity shown, although it must be said that this reflectivity was difficult to evaluate externally. The one-to-one interviews offered the men a chance to discuss their lives and the group dynamics at the gym, and also to give reflection. The men negotiated their own core values in relation to societal values and discourses. The men needed to adapt to a variety of different contexts while maintaining a sense of wholeness and unity. This difficult task required constant reflection and evaluation of one's daily life. Faced with novel situations or differences in values the men's unity was threatened and defence mechanisms, particularly rationalisation were needed to adjust. Without the reflective capacity to process difference, the men felt great guilt and shame resulting in anger or highly defensive behaviours.

It was clear that the men needed a strong but not rigid set of core values that acted as a general guide for life challenges. Having a personal lens from which to interpret coincided with a sense of ownership of one's overall identity. A degree of guilt and shame fuelled the reflective process but too much guilt could be overwhelming, and a black and white stance would be taken. Reflectivity allowed the men to be more comfortable with grey areas rather than relying on rigid black and white beliefs that come under scrutiny in the face of difference. Reflectivity was displayed in understanding and manipulating socio-cultural discourses.

For example, hegemonic masculine discourses were learnt and were incorporated as a part of identity but are not rigidly adhered to. Instead they were used as sources of humour through exaggeration and subversion, or used as a vehicle to forge friendships and belonging. This was in addition to their incorporation in the more literal sense as a personal value. Hence, reflectivity allowed for flexibility and the ability to utilise multiple aspects of identity while maintaining a cohesive sense of self. For instance Spiros needed to negotiate intimacy, love, sex, infatuation, and arranged marriage to form some guiding principles for his own relationships. At times

he was a sexual predator, at other times an old-fashioned family man. He was also a good son in a traditional European family, and part of a modern world with increasing choices and blurred gender roles. He was able to choose a position according to context and hence function as a member of different social groups. In his own reflective space, however, it was conceivable that these multiple positions were a source of tension and anxiety.

A lack of reflection was observable as a defensive stance in which men were guarded and regularly suspicious. Other characteristics included insecurity, a tendency to overreact, aggression, and one-up-man-ship. Masculine expectations were sometimes felt as personal values and failure to live up to expectations produced guilt and shame. These feelings were evident in some of my fieldwork relationships. The result was a failure to move beyond the acquaintance stage and to develop a friendship. In these cases I could not build a rapport such that I could gain insight into their identities and reflections. I wondered who these men discussed their life issues with, if they did at all, and also wondered as to the degree of their reflective opportunities and reflective vocabulary. As many social expectations are unrealistic, the men I was able to get to know used reflectivity to find a more balanced perspective and to work on feeling okay when one didn't measure up. Reflectivity offered some relief from feeling enslaved to rigid and unrealistic social expectations. I suspected that social connectedness and opportunities to negotiate these aspects of identity with other men played an important part in both the individual and collective management of these tensions. Much of this reflectivity occurred unknowingly and unintentionally. Reflectivity is a process used so commonly that it becomes a seamless extension of self.



## Chapter 10

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to contribute to knowledge of the everyday lives of men through an ethnographic exploration of two small sub-cultures of young adults.

Through participant observation the researcher described in detail the ways in which masculinities were constructed in everyday life. The gymnasium world was just one part of each of the men's overall lives but was an important one none the less, as it contributed to their overall sense of identity. The men actively constructed a complex network of behaviours, values, rules, and friendships, resulting in a unique environment. While these individuals displayed characteristics that were representative of the broader population of Western men, their enactment in a particular time and place accounted for variation and uniqueness. This uniqueness is the very topic of ethnographic research. This thesis, and in particular my engagement with participants, was a journey that contained challenges, fascinating phenomena, the mundane and everyday, and much humour. As a researcher it drew me out of my comfort zone, leading to greater understanding and personal development.

This study stands as part of a history of men, as well as a more recent history of the academic (in particular psychology) study of men. Psychoanalytic theory was one of the first academic areas to investigate masculinity and led the way for cognitive and behavioural investigations within social psychology. The current study is part of a new direction that emphasises the complexity and diversity of men's experiences, and critically reflects on the relationship between research, theory, and the health and well-being of men. Part of this new direction is to re-evaluate and update theoretical and methodological history as it relates to men.

This is particularly important as academic findings, in addition to being informed by men's experiences, have the social standing to influence public perception and to influence men directly. Evident from the findings of this study was the men's knowledge of academic understandings of men. The men commonly used language from identity theory, sex role theory, masculinity, femininity, and gender, and used psychological terms such as self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and adjustment. Hence, as academia learns from the populations it samples, the information produced is disseminated back into the population. As noted by Connell (1995, 2000), this relationship is not of equal standing with academic knowledge

being the more influential. Academic understandings of masculinity including those offered by gender studies, sociology, politics and psychology interact with each other and with everyday (lay) understandings to produce ever changing gendered understandings. Hence, we cannot rely on existing knowledge and must continually update our understanding of men. Studies such as this one are needed to accurately present groups of men as they are right now, including their needs and desires. We need also acknowledge the importance of the findings we produce to the overall well-being of men.

Noticeable in this study was the influence of psychology and psychological language. Most men were aware of the debate surrounding a male 'crisis of identity'. They were also aware of men's reported 'lack of emotionality' and its alleged psychological consequences. Within the gym environment the men enjoyed taunting each other playfully in psychological terms. The prominence of psychological discourses within male circles has complex implications. Self-diagnosis and diagnosis from friends and family can influence self-perceptions so that normal life challenges are sometimes perceived as crises or as psychological failings. This form of psychological hypochondria can adversely influence men's lives by opening up and making worse insecurities based on social comparisons. Generally speaking, the men liked to feel as if they were similar to other men and that their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours were normal and not novel. As a researcher from a psychology department it was very important that I played down my psychology background. Many men found it threatening, and building rapport was much more difficult when men knew I was from a psychology department. The psychological discourse within these circles is understood as the study and treatment of abnormality. By raising this discourse one is automatically instigating inward reflection.

Hence the gains that psychology makes through raising awareness of mental health issues, and reducing stigmas surrounding psychological illness and utilising psychological services, are in a way, a trade-off for psychological hypersensitivity. The most effective strategy for reducing this sensitivity, from a fieldwork perspective, was to deconstruct psychological discourses by making fun of them. The men enjoyed it when I made fun of psychology, belittled its assumed knowledge, or admitted psychology's and my own theoretical and practical failings. This allowed the men to also deconstruct psychological discourses by stripping them of their power and their relevance to their own well-being. In this way men were better able to use

psychological information according to their needs. The ideal would be to use psychological knowledge as a tool, which is adjustable from context to context. Problematic is the promotion of psychological knowledge as a narrowly based clinical discipline that is all knowing and all-powerful. As such, the psychological research focus on men's alleged emotional deficiencies and alleged identity crises has the potential in some contexts to become a self-fulfilling prophesy (Cohen, 1992; Glick et al., 2007; Reid & Fine, 1992; Willott & Griffin, 2004). It is also important, as Loftland (2002; 2006), suggested for psychological researchers to negotiate a relationship with male participants that facilitates learning and understanding.

To avoid the construction and maintenance of potentially oppressive power relations we need to acknowledge and emphasise the limitations cultural diversity places on a science of psychology, and indeed, a science of masculinity. Psychological theory needs to deal with the issue of culture. In particular, we need to work on furthering our understanding of the relationship between society and the individual, rather than treating culture as an independent variable or extraneous variable. To this end this study presents a dynamic psychosocial theory of male identity that describes the social/individual dialectic.

#### *Dynamic Psychosocial Male Identity*

Traditionally, Freudian and neo-Freudian approaches have been interested in mapping masculinity as a consequence of early development. Specifically, masculine characteristics were seen as inevitable products of identification with the father based on desire for the mother and fear of persecution from the father (Freud, 1991b/1923; 1991d/1926). Instead, dynamic psychosocial theory (Castoriadis, 1997a/1990; 1997b/1975; 1997d/1989) emphasises identification with a person other than the primary caregiver as the means by which individuals become social, thus beginning the ongoing process of social identity development and negotiation. The child is introduced to broader society and must give up his omnipotence. However, this is never complete hence the dialectic between individual omnipotence and social membership is the fundamental scaffold of identity.

Dynamic psychosocial theory can be reduced to the ability to imagine, self-regulate, and be socialised, hence the psyche's fundamental character is a socially creative one. This is an important distinction from psychoanalytic theories that reduce the psyche to a closed system based on biological drives. In this way dynamic psychosocial theory posits early childhood as the time in which the ability to make

social connections is developed. The three processes involved in being a social individual that have been highlighted within this thesis are identification, sublimation (and repression), and reflection (Castoriadis, 1997a/1990). The emphasis is not on the form the social takes but on the very process of social engagement. At the same time reflective capacities are formed and rely on identifying with and psychologically investing in (through the process of sublimation) social-cultural information from one's environment. Hence early development is important in forming the tools for social engagement, rather than fixing concrete identity characteristics.

Conceptualising identity as a process has important implications for current theoretical understandings of male identity and male wellbeing. The process of identification allows men to learn a broad range of characteristics and social discourses to draw on according to context. Sublimation allows men to psychologically invest in these characteristics and discourses, and hence engage in social life. Reflection is the process that allows men to utilise multiple identity characteristics according to context, and to monitor, defer, and control psychological investment in their social worlds.

In reviewing the current empirical literature for understanding men and masculinities, I have identified three major schools of thought. These are developmental theory, symbolic interactionism, and social constructionism. I argue that while all these theories offer valuable insight into men's identity and wellbeing, they are better understood, and indeed contextualised, through dynamic psychosocial theory. In particular, the process of dynamic psychosocial reflection illuminates their theoretical relevance to the everyday lives of men. Table 4 illustrates the ways each theory is contextualised and qualified by the process of dynamic psychosocial reflection. The table is summarised below beginning with developmental theory.

#### *Developmental Theory and Reflectivity*

As mentioned previously, it has been argued from a developmental perspective that men's well-being is greatly influenced by early childhood experiences (Cushman, 1990; Freud, 1991a/1920; 1991b/1923; 1991e/1914; Kohut, 1971, 1977, 1987; Sutherland, 1994; Tolpin, 1971). Hence researchers have focused on parental relationships and familial experiences as key determinants of well-being.

From the perspective of dynamic psychosocial identity theory early childhood constructs the psychic framework for the social individual. The emphasis is on opening up the psyche's omnipotent underpinnings to allow it to develop a social

Table 4. *The three major lenses for conceiving of men's well-being contextualised by the Process of Dynamic Psychosocial Reflection*

<p><b>Developmental Theory</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early development crucial to men's Resilience and well-being.</li> <li>• Individualised perspective</li> <li>• Core self, true self capable of meeting life challenges, masculine discourses, and expectations</li> <li>• Freud, Winnicott, Sutherland</li> </ul>	<p><b>Dynamic Psychosocial Reflection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early development crucial for reflective capabilities</li> <li>• Allows reflection on and maintenance of identities</li> <li>• Reflection is the organising principle of identity</li> </ul>
<p><b>Symbolic Interactionism</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on identities</li> <li>• In particular, hegemonic masculine Identity roles and discourses and how they position men</li> <li>• Masculinity as potentially constraining</li> <li>• Male need to embrace wider range of Identity roles, especially feminine emotionality</li> </ul>	<p><b>Dynamic Psychosocial Reflection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflective process allows social groups to construct, change, and negotiate dominant forms of masculinity</li> <li>• Reflection allows men to actively engage with hegemonic masculinity</li> <li>• Reflectivity directly related to negotiating potentially restrictive effects of hegemonic masculinity</li> <li>• Allows men to embrace a wide range of identity characteristics with minimum anxiety, fear</li> </ul>
<p><b>Social Constructionism</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on multiple identities</li> <li>• Masculine discourses used, performed as a utility according to context.</li> <li>• Recognise that men construct both hegemonic and alternative discourses and as well as being effected by them</li> <li>• Focus on in-depth studies of sub-groups of men</li> <li>• Multiple masculinities and identities constructed through intersection with race, ethnicity, socio-economic, sexuality etc</li> <li>• Well-being defined on a group by group basis</li> </ul>	<p><b>Dynamic Psychosocial Reflection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Link between social positioning and reflective functioning</li> <li>• Reflectivity responsible for utilisation of masculine discourses according to context i.e. performance</li> <li>• Reflection related also to power, social class, poverty, sexuality, race, ethnicity</li> <li>• Need to assess male reflective processes at sub-group and individual levels</li> </ul>

identity. Whilst early childhood is considered the crucial period for constructing the important dialectic between the desire to be unique and important, and the desire to belong, this process of negotiation continues over the lifespan and is relative to one's socio-historical setting.

Hence, early development begins the reflective process which, from that time onwards, is responsible for ongoing identity development and negotiation. It is

possible then to emphasise the importance of early development without prescribing to an essentialist view that identity and well-being are fixed in this period. Rather, the process of reflectivity and identity negotiation is started. Moreover, reflection is a collective as well as an individual process. As identities are socio-culturally mediated and interactive, the process of individual identity making coincides with the collective development of identity discourses, including those popular discourses surrounding masculinity. The fundamental characteristic of the reflective process is imagination and hence humans can construct new ways of being.

#### *Symbolic Interactionism and Reflection*

The second major perspective identified within the literature is symbolic interactionism (Clare, 2000; Hoffman, 2001; Kehily & Nayak, 1997; Spain, 1992). This perspective argues that male identities are socially constructed in relation to hegemonic masculine discourses and roles. It is conceived that men must negotiate their own identities in relation to the dominant definitions of manhood. These hegemonic masculinities are nationally and globally defined and act as boundaries for men's identity repertoires. Much of the gender role theory could also be classified under the label of symbolic interactionism, as it acknowledges the social construction of ways of living as a man and then critiques and evaluates the functionality of these hegemonic discourses for men's well-being.

As such in recent times hegemonic masculinity has been criticised by symbolic interactionist theorists for lacking in emotional expression and for its opposition to, and fear of, femininity. The characteristics that men can incorporate into their identities then are limited by masculine prescriptions and are potentially problematic to men's psychosocial well-being. Hence, from this perspective to promote men's well-being is to change and broaden the hegemonic definitions of manhood.

From a dynamic psychosocial perspective the process of reflection and identity negotiation mediates the felt effects of hegemonic masculinity. As shown in this study some men and some groups of men are more easily able to deconstruct, alter, play with, and/or transform hegemonic masculine scripts. As such hegemonic masculinity is not always and necessarily restrictive. Many men have the reflective opportunities to construct new ways of being and incorporate aspects of femininity as identity characteristics. It is only when hegemonic masculinity is set up as a personally felt and inflexible ideal does it become problematic. In addition,

reflectivity and identity negotiation results in the continual process and dynamic evolution of hegemonic masculinity. Men create as well as are affected by hegemonic definitions. It is argued then that symbolic interactionist understandings are relevant to some men and some groups of men but should not be used as the doctrine for understanding men's well-being.

*Social Constructionism and Reflection*

Social constructionist perspectives conceive identities as fluid, multilayered and used as a social tool according to context (Edley, 2001; Frosh et al., 2000; Phinney, 2005; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). Rather than understanding men's identities in relation to hegemonic scripts, social constructionism identifies multiple masculinities and ways of being men. It is acknowledged that men actively construct masculinity and are not just affected by masculinity.

Hence, the focus is on the ways other socio-cultural factors such as age, race, ethnicity and socio-economic class intersect with masculinity to create multiple ways of living as men. According to dynamic psychosocial theory, opportunities for reflective practices and identity negotiation are integrally linked to these other social belongings of men. For instance, the opportunity to reflect on one's identity and to construct identity is dependent on belonging to subgroups of people, on support and acceptance, and on other factors such as poverty, racism, and oppression. As such while the reflective process is initiated in early life it is also continually mediated by these intersecting factors. Reflection is at once individually and socially mediated.

Men's well-being is defined then on a group to group basis rather than being premised on hegemonic understandings that have the tendency to generalise men's experiences, and to function to perpetuate and self-fulfil through repetition of discussion within academic and public arenas. Social constructionism has had difficulty dealing with individual consistencies in identity and the psychic need for unification, and at times simplicity. While acknowledging the diversity of men's experiences, dynamic psychosocial theory offers social constructionism a means of conceptualising individual consistencies. It recognises that individual and group consistencies emanate from a psychic desire for unity, consistency, and belonging. Most importantly the reflective process is creative by nature and resists stagnant classification, thus encouraging us, and indeed allowing us, to continually critically assess our understanding of men.

*Overview*

The implication of a more open, creative, and socially based theory is the possibility of different social meanings and configurations. For example, I acknowledge that new familial arrangements in early childhood are producing different masculinities. But rather than problematising development that differs from a prescribed nuclear set-up, dynamic psychosocial theory seeks to document and understand these changes. Importantly, dynamic theory offers us a means of describing and understanding our social development in early childhood. We are able to emphasise its importance to human life without being limited by a closed understanding that is mono-cultural and biased (Gergen, 1993; Sinha & Kao, 1997; Sonn & Fisher, 2005). Hence, the developmental importance of early childhood can be emphasised without promoting one particular social arrangement. Masculinity then is the particular knowledges applicable for being male in any social environment. Early development is crucial to the ability to learn and adapt within one's social world, whatever form that may take.

Dynamic psychosocial theory also allows for the possibility of change. Masculine identities are not fixed but socially negotiated and performed. The imaginative nature of the psyche allows for an endless array of identity characteristics. The psyche also allows for reflection on an individual level, which coincides with broader social change through our social interactions. We are also able to reflect on the type of societies we are producing, and indeed the types of men we are producing. At the broader social level we are required to document, analyse, and discuss men and masculinities in relation to social values. Continually being informed of the current status of men and masculinities is preferred to simply prescribing ways of raising boys or adjusting existing models of masculinity (Benjamin, 2000). Predicting future outcomes based on the past is always problematic as it underestimates the creative potential of our social imaginations (Castoriadis, 1997b/1975). Moreover, it is important we move away from the individual pathology discourse that psychoanalysis promoted as its preferred model. As mentioned earlier this discourse appeared problematic for the men in this study. Instead, a broader social perspective is required.

In light of dynamic psychosocial understandings, our identity is more than just the accumulative effect of socialisation on each physically contained unit (Berry, 1998). Rather it is the result of the interaction between the primary imaginary component of the psyche, and social learning. This identity is also contingent on our socio-historical context (Mauss, 2000; N. Rose, 2000). The individual and society are



interconnected (Elias, 2000/1939), and should not be conceived as separate entities (Bandura, 1974; Crits-Christoph et al., 1994). Hence identity should not be viewed from either an essentialist view of a true core self (Kohut, 1987; Sutherland, 1994; Winnicott, 1989), or from a relativist view as completely radical. Instead, both these characteristics make up identity, and also interact dynamically.

Traditionally, social identity theories have concentrated on mapping and discussing masculine and feminine gender roles. By focusing on gendered social groupings it removed the focus from the individual as it had been with psychoanalysis. This also represented a shift from a clinical focus to a social focus. Change then was possible through critique of gender roles. This was an important development and was utilised by the feminist movement to deconstruct patriarchal systems. According to Connell (1995), sex roles came to connote oppression as behaviour was limited to those contained within the social definition of your sex. This served a particular political purpose in terms of feminism, and raised awareness of the social construction of gender roles.

The conception of restrictive and oppressive roles has limited value within a dynamic approach, as well as more contextual social approaches (Edley, 2001; Frosh et al., 2000; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005), which instead view gender roles as more fluid and contested. Moreover, the sex role movement has also stigmatised men's roles and characteristics for lacking emotionality in comparison to women. In terms of a new men's movement it is important we move on from sex role theory as a means of understanding men. Masculine characteristics need not be interpreted as necessarily emotionally limiting and psychologically problematic. In addition, concentrating solely on shared characteristics understates and devalues the diversity that exists within male populations. We run the risk of missing important changes and developments by constantly repeating and perpetuating stagnant male gender roles.

Hence it is important to our understanding of men, as this study has shown, to investigate smaller groups of men in detail. The findings of this study raised many issues in relation to the men investigated in this study and men from similar socio-historical circumstances that required further discussion. One such finding was the need to develop skills and competencies.

#### *Skills and Competencies*

Gaining the feeling of pride through acquiring skills and competencies requires opportunities. This includes family and friendship support, social capital and

resources, and physical aptitude. The men from the fishing village took great pride in their work competencies and hence were heavily reliant on employment infrastructures. The gymnasium men were less reliant on work as they also had their fitness training and sports amongst other things. They appeared to have a wider range of opportunities to develop and have recognised their competencies. Men who are unable to feel good about themselves based on skill acquisition may take up a defensive orientation. Anger, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy often arise in the competition over achievement.

As such, men must balance these feelings through achievement and having one's skills recognised and appreciated. As witnessed in this study, friendship circles are an invaluable resource in gaining that sense of achievement through others' recognition, appreciation and acceptance. Gaining a sense of pride through belonging is contingent on being able to negotiate an identity within group and friendship dynamics. Moreover it often involves passionate engagement in a shared activity (e.g. sports). Indeed, this study supported the notion that the primary task of life is to psychologically invest in objects in the social world (Castoriadis, 1997a/1990; N. Rose, 2000). As noted by Castoriadis, in social time pleasure is deferred and anticipated awaiting the completion of a socially defined goal. When multiple goals exist at once, the person is actively engaging as a social being. For the men in the gymnasium, physical activity was a means to various goals in the foreseeable future. Working towards these goals gave their lives a sense of purpose, and was a source of energy and passion. With limited opportunities to engage in one's social world, a man is more likely to look inwardly and potentially pathologise his existence. Feelings of hopelessness might result from a lack of engagement in one's social world.

Current social discourses promoting reflection over doing, and nurturing over training, may be problematic to this end. While it is important to nurture and support young men it must not be at the expense of training and doing. Men need to take ownership of a particular activity and develop competency. In this way support and praise can be based on tangible activities rather than transparent rationalisations. The self-esteem movement which has been unsuccessful in improving the psychosocial well-being of young people promoted the cathartic effects of unconditional positive self-evaluations (Stout, 2000). Instead, positive self-worth must be derived from social engagement, learning, and the acquisition of skills (Alper, 2002). The 'no one fails' policy does not remove the competitive and comparative element of social life,

but merely camouflages it at an institutional level. A sense of satisfaction will always be based around meeting socially desirable criteria, and removing the criteria at an institutional level does not remove the discourse at a social level. The findings of this study have demonstrated that male competition and male social comparison are a fundamental part of the identity making process. While this competition can be problematic when extreme, generally it provides opportunity for self-improvement, achievement, as well as fostering male friendships. Hence, it is argued here that emphasis on the promotion of strong identities needs to replace the current emphasis on self-esteem enhancement (Harder, 1984; Hoalt & Hoalt, 2002; Raskin et al., 1991a, 1991b).

Identities are formed through social learning and achievement, are multidimensional, and reflect a wide repertoire of social knowledges that can be drawn upon according to context. Additionally, the notion of identity can be adapted to various cultural groupings and contexts whereas self-esteem promotion was based on a Western mono-cultural value (Sinha & Kao, 1997; Sonn & Fisher, 2005). Literally this value states that positive self-evaluations are directly responsible for psychosocial well-being. This is inaccurate even in Western cultural contexts. The notion of dynamic psychosocial identity is reliant on the sharing and learning of cultural knowledges rather than the specificities of that knowledge. Promoting identity development implies supporting people to psychologically and physically invest in their social worlds, and to negotiate the particular discourses that are applicable to their lives.

#### *Connection with Friends and Friendship Circles*

In terms of male friendship circles, and as mentioned previously, acceptance often involves contributing to the group in terms of skills and competencies. Many men will be more likely to include someone as a friend or as a group member if they 'bring something to the table'. That is, they offer something such as sporting knowledge or ability, or a great sense of humour. This makes them more pleasurable to be around and improves the comparative standing of the other men in the group. This competency may not necessarily be a socially desirable one in the broader sense. Proficiency in antisocial behaviour may also be accepted and admired according to the relevant masculine discourses. For example, in the gymnasium context Aaron's extreme and humorous use of profanity became his point of difference and a valued identity characteristic. Alex's 'player' lifestyle and attitude were his point of

reference. The findings of this study were similar to those of Harrington (2003) who suggested that male friendships involve the giving and taking, or as Castoriadis (1997a/1990) put it, the attribution and imputation, of identity labels. As such, identities are negotiated by presenting one's attributes and qualities within interactions, and having them acknowledged and accepted by others.

In the context of a school playground for instance boys who are bullied or who have few friends would benefit from assistance and encouragement in developing a competency that is within their means. In that way the boy can impute the characteristic as part of his identity and the other boys would be able to recognise and attribute this identity marker to the boy. The boy would then bring an identifiable characteristic to the group and negotiate an identity within the group. Becoming a part of a male friendship group involves complex implicit knowledge. Members need to contribute to an overall sense of pride and goodwill without trying to dominate or act superior. In this way masculinity is actively constructed within groups of men (Frosh et al., 2000; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). Competencies, skills, and identity markers are continually negotiated in the service of building and maintaining friendships, and gaining a sense of belonging. When something new is 'brought to the table' men will process and incorporate it into existing understandings.

Subverting and exaggerating masculine discourses is a particularly important part of this process. Pressures and anxieties that arise from the social expectations of men can be released, at least for the time being, through humour. Expressing a masculine failure to other men in a comical way can act to reduce the collective fear relating to that particular failure. Men also admire the courage to degrade oneself in this way, however, if done too regularly as was the case with Stopper's baldness remarks; it can have the opposite effect. These processes require that men have both the skills of friendship and connection, as well as the opportunities to apply them. Male role models are needed for identification purposes in order for young men to learn the rules of male engagement. Men need to learn and to develop what it is that they can 'bring to the table' so that they are accepted within male circles. They need to learn to interpret different men and different contexts, and to learn how to choose appropriate strategies and behaviours.

The fundamental basis for connecting is the sharing of socio-cultural discourses. Problematic then are situations of isolation and disconnection that may result because of immigration and contexts where there are limited shared

understandings and limited opportunities to connect with other men (Sinha & Kao, 1997; Sonn & Fisher, 2005). Men require the basic resources and networking opportunities in order to have friends and practice and develop the skills that lead to acceptance. The implicit knowledge and expectations of male engagement mean that negotiating cultural difference is difficult and takes considerable time. Men require contact with other men from similar socio-cultural backgrounds. My partial engagement with the men from the rural community also exemplified the difficulties involved in overcoming socio-cultural differences when forming relationships. Masculine identities are multiple because they intersect with factors such as location (Fraser et al., 2002; Judd et al., 2003), ethnicity (Edley, 2001; Howard, 2000; Phinney, 2005), and age (Frosh et al., 2000). It also highlights the need to encourage subgroups of men to conduct research from an insider perspective. If we are to learn more of the heterogeneity of men and masculinities we rely on the voices of these different groups of men themselves. As seen in this study, because of the reflective and imaginative nature of identity making, it is the processes by which men interact with discourses surrounding masculinity, ethnicity, age, location, and social class that have greater explanatory power than the discourses themselves.

While the men in Study Two were brought together by the convenience of gym membership and a shared sporting interest (Seidler, 1992; Spain, 1992; Wellman, 1992), to assume a superficiality or lack of depth of relationships based on this convenience would be to belie the group's complexity. While other gym members maintained a superficial distance, the group in question demonstrated a willingness, need, and appreciation for friendship development and maintenance. The implicit rules of this group were both overtly behavioural (coming to the defence of your mate) and subtle (respecting individual personal boundaries). It can be concluded that some groups of men at least will develop meaningful friendships given the opportunity. Moreover, this opportunity need not necessarily be a formal men's community group or spiritual group (Castellini et al., 2005; Smith & Winchester, 1998). Through engaging in their everyday lives and in the here and now this particular group of men were able to connect by making the most of interpersonal opportunities within the convenience of the gym context. The functionality of a men's group or shared space is dependent on the connections and friendships that are formed. This can occur through a formal structured gathering, or by contrast, out of convenience.

In regards to emotional sharing, in the two years I spent with the group there were very few examples of 'emotional talk'. In fact group conversations revolved around sport, working out, women, music, and jibes between one another and hence could be described as typically masculine (Rokach & Brock, 1997; Seidler, 1992). Yet, the group dynamic and each friendship dynamic contained complex emotional understandings. The connections were sometimes subtle and not overtly demonstrative or verbal such as the case of Michael's relationship problems, and other times more overt and demonstrative, particularly in a group context. Support could also be given and received within the gym environment through work out advice, encouragement, and physical assistance. This combined with light-hearted conversation and humour often facilitated a connection. An often unstated mutual understanding was developed and evidenced over the two year study period, and required the ability to pick up on verbal and non-verbal emotional cues. Some of the men appeared to be adept at reading between the lines. While they did hide their negative fantasies, it was as much to protect others from the embarrassment of hearing them as it was a fear of an individual rejection. This type of expression was simply out of place. Hence the men were far more collectivistic than past research has attested (Seidler, 1992). Within this collective 'emotional talk' was not valued and hence was not important to the well-being of the group (Wong et al., 2006; Wong & Rochlen, 2005). Rather than pathologise men's emotional lives based on their difference to feminine emotionality, we need to better understand these emotional experiences. In turn, gender differences in emotionality can then be more functionally negotiated within male/female interactions.

Within the male friendship circles evidenced in this study, controlling one's emotional expressiveness was an implicit part of being accepted. One could not be too boastful, too angry, or too sentimental. Crying and expressions of sadness were not acceptable unless under extreme duress. The implicit taboo regarding this form of expressiveness was more about sparing the 'cryer's' audience from an awkward situation, than it was a fear of showing vulnerability. This type of expression would have interrupted the established group dynamics. It is also likely that men are aware of the social rewards of being in control of one's emotions, and of presenting a brave face. Playing the role of the stoic hero is something these men had rehearsed over and over again and was an established identity characteristic. As Boon (2005) and Shields (2005, 2007) suggested, male controlled emotion and the male hero myth is socio-

historical creation that functions to soothe anxiety in times of uncertainty. A man skilled in playing this role is socially rewarded in employment settings, attractive to many women, and admired by many men. As such it is no surprise that this emotional style was characteristic of the men in this study.

The findings of this study are also in line with more recent research that has highlighted the emotional benefits and satisfaction derived from all male friendship circles (Fink & Wild, 1995; Hodgetts & Rua, 2006; Mankowski & Silvergleid, 2000; Markiewicz et al., 2000). Moreover, as proposed by Wong and Rochlen (2005), the men in this study were found to utilise verbal, behavioural, and contextual cues to nurture their friendships and provide each other with mutual support.

It must be said that the men in this group were by definition capable of learning the rules of the group and to at least some degree were able to gain acceptance and friendship. Missing from discussion in this study were those men from the gymnasium who might have wished to be a part of the group but were unable to. Hence it would also be beneficial to find out the processes by which men are excluded from or denied entry to the group.

#### *Intimate Relationships*

Many of the men in this study lamented over the perceived high expectations demanded by female partners. Some men perceived they were expected to conform to popular conceptions of love and romance while still providing financial and physical support and protection. Some men felt like they had to be old-fashioned providers as well as sensitive new age guys. While this may be more a perception than the reality, and was confined to some but not all men (particularly Alex, Stopper, and Spiros), it also gave evidence of some gender role confusion (Schwartz et al., 2004; Watts Jr & Borders, 2005).

As evidenced in this study, men tended to invest more predominantly in the sexual side, particularly in the early stages of a relationship. The enjoyment of sex in this early stage and the desire to have sex as much as possible often distracted men from other issues that may need to be addressed. Rather than being honest about themselves and upfront about their needs and characteristics, the men tended to want to portray a side of themselves that was pleasing to their partner. This caused problems in the relationship later on when the woman, who had been given an unrealistic representation of the man, began to notice significant changes. With the lure of sexual gratification diminishing and infatuation subsiding, the men would

begin to present these needs more realistically, and the women perceived this as the man changing. For example, both Stan and Michael found themselves in situations where their need to support their football teams on the weekend was not understood and supported by their partners. In the early days of the relationship, however, they were often content to miss the football and instead pursue their partners' interests. Often when men attempt to readdress this, women often quite rightly responded by stating that if it is so important, why has it only come up now? Hence, when people's interests differ significantly in a relationship it appears important that one's most important needs, passions, and interests, are explained in order for them to be tolerated.

Commonly, the men I engaged with had failed to explain their needs, fearing they will be condemned as unimportant or trivial, or fearing that those needs will result in rejection, or through simply not realising the importance of them. As a consequence, some men in long-term relationships felt guilt for, or were not allowed to, pursue their passions due to a lack of honesty and discussion in the early stages of the relationship. At the very least these men have to work very hard to negotiate some time for these activities. Many 'nice guys' who bent over backwards to be good boyfriends and husbands, particularly in the beginning of their relationships, end up forgoing some of their passions and interests due to inaccurate presentations and inadequate communication. In addition, discourses that trivialise many of men's interests such as sports conceal the psychosocial importance of these interests to men's lives. Paradoxically, these discourses are commonly created and perpetuated by men themselves.

What is often created then within intimate relationships is the myth of great gender differences and an unbreachable divide in terms of relationship outlook. Men perceive some of their own interests, needs, and values to be out of reach of their partner's perception and put it down to gender differences. Instead, gendered discourses need to be deconstructed and renegotiated within the relationship. Full understanding is not required, as it was apparent that at least some appreciation and acknowledgement of different needs would have improved the everyday lives of men in relationships.

It is important then for men within intimate relationships to present themselves in a way that accurately reflects their everyday lives, needs, and interests. They need to present themselves in a manner that is sustainable in the medium to long term, if



indeed such a relationship is desired. This is required to gain an acceptance that is honest and potentially long lasting. This requires that men firstly recognise and address these aspects of their identity, and then become vigilant and resolute in their presentation. Unfortunately, as was evidenced in this study, many men have problems both recognising and articulating their own needs. Gender differences, and the perception of gender differences can be reduced through communication. In a general sense, change is possible through the dialectic of gender relations. Communication between men and women makes possible the construction of new ways of understanding gender and new ways of interacting (Connell, 1995, 2000). The findings of this study highlight how, in male environments, masculinities are more easily constructed according to complex implicit and explicit shared knowledges. The process of gender construction between men and women appeared more difficult, and contained fewer shared understandings. This is not an unbridgeable gap however, and new intimate gender relations are imaginable on reflection.

Within intimate relationships men must also negotiate the two conflicting discourses of the sexual hunter and the family man. One of the most common experiences evidenced was a lingering doubt over the functionality of monogamy. This appeared to be true whether a man had a history of promiscuity, or whether they were even capable of promiscuity. Despite occupying a substantial portion of the men's contemplation and reflection the situation appeared difficult to manage. Some of the men in relationships, however, had developed strategies to lesson the strain of feeling like they were 'missing out'. These strategies included avoiding contact with attractive single women, convincing themselves that their partner is special enough to warrant the sacrifice, discussing the issue with male friends particularly other attached men who share similar issues, and reinforcing the positive aspects of their partner and the relationship. Over time these strategies appeared to improve the men's intimate relationship experiences and lesson the tension the sexual discourse produces. It also appeared beneficial to release some of the tension created by the conflicting discourses by performing, or acting the sexual predator discourse within male circles. Ironically, it appeared that the literal pursuit of sexual gratification was far less cathartic than talking about it or play acting it. As such, in this sense, masculinity can be performed playfully as a means of negotiating identity tensions.

*Independence and Autonomy*

Along with a need for intimacy the men required a degree of independence and a sense of control over their lives. This also must be negotiated within friendships, familial relationships, and intimate relationships. In practice however, keeping optimal separations could be problematic. Men ran the risk of offending family and friends by excluding them from some aspects of their lives. This was evident within the gymnasium when both Aaron and Billy did not invite Stan to their weddings. They made a clear demarcation between the gym friendships and outside familial relationships and probably did not even seriously consider inviting Stan. The result of these actions was to alienate Stan and jeopardise the friendship. In addition, the men were reluctant to bring partners into the gym, also suggesting a need to maintain separate worlds. This need often operates against pressure from others to conform and be more inclusive and open. Along with this is the social discourse that openness and sharing is more conducive to fostering relationships than maintaining independence. The result can be feelings of guilt, shame, and confusion. The pressure to share their worlds was often felt most strongly within intimate relationships and close family circles. In these relationships a man's need for some separation and independence was sometimes interpreted as fear of intimacy, secrecy, sneakiness, selfishness, lack of love or respect, or even disloyalty. This was a common experience for the men.

Certainly in the case of Alex, independence did represent fear of intimacy and secrecy, which manifested from his marriage break up. More often though independence appeared to allow the men to utilise a wider range identity characteristics according to context. The men were able to maintain a gym persona and a familial persona at the very least. When this independence was threatened it appeared to cause feelings of suffocation and of resentment and anger. The issue of independence and autonomy is complex and creates complications in terms of all types of relationships. While men have a strong need for companionship including friends, family, and intimate relationships, they also have a need to maintain a degree of exclusivity between some of their social worlds. This mirrors the dynamic identity process where developing an individual identity also means becoming a social being (Castoriadis, 1997a/1990). It is the sum of the individual's social belongings that forms his perceived identity. Maintaining some degree of separation allows men to utilise multiple aspects of identity in different contexts while concealing the overall

sum of parts, and allows them to feel like their perceived overall identity is private, coherent, and in their control. In this way the need to belong to social groups and the need for independence and control are met simultaneously. Paradoxically, the need for independence is also socially mediated.

The socio-cultural discourses surrounding the normative degree of independence vary depending on the type of relationship. Certainly in intimate relationships feminine discourses are seen as more functional than masculine discourses. This often means that male needs, attitudes, and feelings carry less weight in intimate settings. Most importantly when men perceive their needs to be less important or even disrupting in these domestic contexts they are less likely to communicate them. In these cases men will always feel there is a part of them that is misunderstood or has to be concealed. Hence men often struggle to position themselves in intimate relationships and can feel like they have to keep some needs to themselves. This prevents open communication that could result in an agreed level of mutual independence that would contribute to a stronger relationship.

Within this study, younger men, and men who were less reflective and less likely to deconstruct discourses, had more difficulty identifying and articulating independence needs within relationships. A reflective capacity appeared to facilitate the recognition and communication of needs. It appeared that many young men merely performed relationships as they are presented within popular discourses, in particular media discourses. Often they interpreted their uneasy feelings as personal flaws, and were reluctant to communicate them.

Many men discussed these issues of control with other men sharing similar experiences within intimate relationships. This could be cathartic but could also breed an acceptance of what appears to be a universal gender difference in relationship closeness needs, and prevents the men from beginning the process of initiating personal boundaries. In these cases, particularly the men's group discussions, the conversation was based around inherent gender differences that are unchangeable and must simply be tolerated. These were very commonly heard discussions between men where gender differences and the unrealistic needs of women are made fun of as a release of tension. Negotiating personal boundaries required a degree of reflectiveness in regards to one's needs, and the needs of others. This was often difficult for men especially when strong emotional and physiological responses are involved, as well as when felt needs conflicted with hegemonic discourses.

The ideal situation for men may then be a more authentic connection with intimate others based on a mutual understanding of their identity and their needs. This would consist of multiple familial and friendship networks with independence between at least some of the worlds. The man would feel in control of his destiny and autonomous, and would also have social support networks. When one or more of his worlds feel like they are closing in on him he would have other options or sanctuaries in which to go. In these situations it helps if the people within a sanctuary are not connected to the people of concern in his more troubled world. The gymnasium environment functioned in this way as the people and the activities were often in no way connected to significant others. The discourses that dominated this environment were also different from ones faced in other areas. Men were able to enter a different space almost entirely.

### *Reflectivity*

Regardless of our reflective capacities, learnt social values and expectations are always also to some degree felt as personal values. The forging of an identity that is unique is built upon learning social discourses and hence all that is learnt regardless of our reflective capacity is in some way (unconsciously or consciously) a personal value. This was evidenced by the necessity for men to negotiate two opposing intimacy discourses regardless of one's personal attitudes towards them. Depending on the social importance and emphasis, some discourses will be subject to negotiation through reflective thought for all our lives. Prioritising discourses, and sensitising and desensitising ourselves to discourses is an ongoing process and the results are never certain. Emotional reactivity and unconscious materials that present themselves often limit our rational reflective processes. Reflectivity however is often effective in working through these thoughts and feelings. In terms of masculine discourses, men perform and communicate them in order to negotiate them as part of their identities. This involves repetition to consolidate some elements and expel or modify others. This is an ongoing process as the job is never complete and reflective goals are continually changing.

The need for reflective process is rarely discussed or emphasised in popular culture and hence is largely perceived as a private endeavour. Moreover one of the most common ways men choose to present themselves is as simple and clear cut. In male group settings in particular, extreme opinions are often valued more than considered opinions. Hence, reflection requires concealing the process from those that

it threatens. On the other hand, presenting extreme characteristics, in some circumstances, is a functional part of the reflective process by making light of anxiety provoking discourses. Men must often conceal their complexity in interaction with others, particularly in contexts where men are rewarded for more impulsive communication and actions.

Interestingly, despite often presenting extreme and simplified caricatures of themselves the men were able to both collectively and individually work through issues through discourse. For example, making fun of a common fear such as baldness or rejection helped the guys collectively work through that fear. At the same time each man had their own particular sensitivities which they would repeatedly introduce into group conversations. Stopper would always enter baldness as a conversation topic, while Alex would lament the untrustworthy nature of women. In doing so Stopper and Alex were utilising their group belonging to help reduce their anxiety, and help negotiate this issue within their identities. As long as this was achieved within the context of lighthearted conversation the other men would engage these discussion topics.

Some men were able to discuss reflective issues with others on a one to one context. Commonly, close family or intimate others offer this opportunity. Some men also utilised close friends to work through issues of identity. Unfortunately many men lacked the opportunities and significant others to work through issues. Men preferred to utilise their rational faculty to work through issues, and hence reflection very often took the form of problem solving. When the men discussed and worked through life events and challenges they generally applied rational logic and core values to develop narratives of what has happened and how action can be implemented towards a goal. By constructing a logical narrative they were able to continue it forward and attempt to predict future outcomes. Men particularly struggled in this regard when events were uninterpretable through rational logic. Emotional outbursts and illogical displays were considered anomalies to considered action. While feelings were sometimes discussed and considered they were viewed largely as something to overcome on the path to rational solutions and objectives. Feelings were not ignored, but rather, were worked through over time through their association with and relevance to rational narratives.

Reflection of this kind is also facilitated by a sense of acceptance and belonging. Sharing similarities with others and feeling a part of a group allows for a critical reflective capacity that is not available when one is off-balance, insecure, or

simply desiring to fit in. As such people in minority cultural groups or people in a context in which they are marginalised would be less likely to reflect on dominant discourses in the way the men in this study did. In learning and understanding the values of a different culture one is necessarily less likely to be forthright in challenging norms and in being secure in one's difference. Moreover, the dominant group often creates discourses regarding minority groups and hence minority groups are assigned identity characteristics and hence rarely begin interacting from a neutral perspective (Phinney, 2005; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). The men in this study shared similar cultural backgrounds and were generally from the dominant cultural group. Hence this thesis is limited in its ability to discuss identity development in minority groups or marginalised groups. In addition this thesis achieved a partial engagement and hence a partial understanding of the group of men from the rural setting.

Reflectivity also facilitates decision making as to which identity markers to utilise depending on context. The term multiple identities or multiple aspects to identities refers to the broad range of cultural knowledges and practices that we can draw on. The ability to form and maintain relationships and to procure social privileges is dependent on knowing what is required in any particular context and then drawing on that knowledge. Men with broader knowledge of social discourses and greater reflective capacities were better at getting along with people and were rewarded in social exchanges.

Similarly, reflection allowed men to harness and control emotion in the service of presenting a controlled masculine façade. I would argue that emotions are felt similarly by men and women, and that it is the expression of this emotion that differs. Verbal expression, as Shields (2005, 2007) suggested, is incompatible with the male hero myth of self-control, and emotion as a motivating, creative force. Rather, for men it represents reactivity, instability, and irrationality. Men express and negotiate emotional responses through rational means, physical expression, and introspection more often. As such men are often uncomfortable with verbal emotional expression, and this is related to the social disadvantages (work, family, financial, power, attraction) of 'controlled emotion'.

## Chapter 11

### Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to gain knowledge regarding the everyday lives of young adult men. Of particular interest were male identity constructions within the context of a contained and predominantly male space (gymnasium). Utilising a qualitative, ethnographic methodology I aimed to actively engage with these men and learn about male identity, male friendship, male emotional styles, and masculine discourses.

The rationale behind this thesis was that little is known of the everyday experiences of men, outside of gendered comparisons (Frosh et al., 2000; Hodgetts & Rua, 2006; Wong & Rochlen, 2005). Moreover it was argued that it is the reporting of these everyday experiences that can ultimately lead to an improved understanding of men's health and well-being needs. It was not the intention to generalise the findings of this thesis to all young adult men, but rather, to describe particular ways of living as a man evidenced through a sub-group of men. It was hoped that these ways of living would contribute to an improved overall understanding of men, and also to contribute to the development of a dynamic psychosocial theory of male identity.

#### *Approach*

I aimed to actively engage with a group of men from a small coastal village in Australia. It was hoped that the researcher could become an insider to the group and gain in-depth understanding of male identity construction within this rural context. It was also planned to collect focus group and interview data in this location, along with participant observation data in the form of journal notes. After a brief and intense period of participant observation, it was decided to suspend data collection due to difficulties in accessing and engaging with these men. It was decided that the time, cost, and personal sacrifice required to reach an indepth understanding of these men's everyday lives was beyond the reach of this thesis. Nonetheless, the observations were informative, particularly regarding male identity, the practical demands of ethnographic research, and the difficulty in gaining academic understandings of remote subgroups of men (Denzin, 1997; Frosh et al., 2003; Loftland et al., 2006; Marcus, 1998; Parker, 2005; Sonn, 2004; Willig, 2003b).

I chose a second location, a gymnasium in a metropolitan area, and began a period of two years of participant observation. I was able to gain an insider's

perspective and understanding of a small subgroup of men who regularly frequented this setting. Within this period participant observation data, as well as interview and focus group data, was collected, and ultimately analysed and reported.

The ethnographic data was reported as a set of narratives (Ricoeur, 1983, 1984, 1985). It was decided that a narrative style was most suitable to represent the everyday experiences of the men. In addition, I utilised my phenomenological understanding of the men's lives as well as social constructionist theory to interpret the data. This meant that as well as describing in detail the everyday lives of men, this thesis placed the men within a socio-historical context as autonomous individuals. The triangulation of narrative, ethnographic, phenomenological, and social constructionist perspectives and practices contributed to a detailed discussion of the everyday lives of the men.

### *Findings*

#### *Male Friendship and Emotional Styles*

One of the major insights of this thesis was learning how men formed and maintained friendships that consisted of complex implicit and explicit understandings. Given that much empirical literature had problematised male friendships as being based on convenience and lacking in psychosocial beneficence (Clare, 2000; Cohen, 1992; Reid & Fine, 1992; Seidler, 1992; Spain, 1992), it was important to describe a set of friendships that, although based on the convenience, were highly valued by the men.

Having the gymnasium, and the friendships within, as a part of a weekly routine, the men were able to derive a sense of belonging. They were able to construct a unique identity as a part of this group of men (Edley, 2001; Elias, 2000/1939; Frosh et al., 2000; Phinney, 2005; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). The gymnasium environment also functioned as a place to vent frustrations, share common interests, and promote their physical and mental well-being through exercise. The group members were able to generate group norms and expectations including styles of engagement, shared stories and histories, external targets of derision (e.g. women, homosexuals), and familiar topics of conversation. The most salient characteristic of the group was its ability to generate humour. It was clear that given the opportunity, men were capable of developing and deriving benefit from same sex friendships. This did not imply that the men overtly discussed or expressed their fears, anxieties, and sadness. This type of behaviour would have simply been out of place. Instead, men discussed life issues



using rational means, made jokes of common fears and anxieties, directed their frustrations and energies into discussing and participating in sports, and offered each other support in non-confronting covert ways.

As such it was concluded that the men's emotional and interpersonal styles consisted of a wide array of behaviours and understandings (Fischer et al., 2004; Wong et al., 2006; Wong & Rochlen, 2005). As members of a friendship group, the men were often expected to know when and where to raise a particular topic of conversation, talk around a topic rather than directly at it, use non-verbal and physical communication, and sometimes avoid contact altogether. These men's emotional and interpersonal lives could be described as complex and unique. It could also be expected that other male friendship groups are also complex and unique (Gutmann, 1996; Hodgetts & Rua, 2006; Mankowski & Silvergleid, 2000).

#### *Masculine Discourse Negotiation and Reflection*

It was evident that the men in this study shared an understanding of the hegemonic discourses surrounding being a man. These included heterosexual attraction, grace under pressure, competition, simplicity, and loyalty to your friends and family. In order for these discourses to be negotiated and to not become restrictive unrealistic personal expectations, the men were required to deconstruct them both on a personal and collective level.

In group conversations the men would talk around these issues using humour, exaggeration, cynicism, and simplification. The men identified with these characteristics but used their reflective capacities to control their degree of sublimated emotional investment as personal ideals or values (Castoriadis, 1997a/1990; 1997d/1989). This process occurred on a social/discursive, as well as a personal/reflective level, simultaneously (Elias, 2000/1939; Frosh et al., 2003). Within this thesis discursive and phenomenological analyses were combined to illuminate this reflective process in everyday life. For example, when within one of the focus group discussions the men were questioning women's trustworthiness, analysis revealed that they were using their discursive practices to alleviate anxiety relating to the expectations and paradoxes of masculine heterosexuality. In addition, the researcher's phenomenological understanding of each individual identity and subsequent analysis allowed the finding that it was Alex who continually raised this topic and had a particular need to work through issues of intimacy in this way. The researcher was aware of Alex's past marriage break up as the likely determinant of his

need. Within this discussion some of the other men were also aware of Alex's history and need for such conversations and were able to 'play along'. The need to reflectively and discursively negotiate masculine discourses appeared to vary from person to person. Other issues such as status, popularity, position in the group, power, and sense of contentment in one's manhood appeared to mediate this process. The data collection and analytical techniques used in this thesis facilitated illustrations of dynamic psychosocial identity construction and negotiation in context. It was concluded that the psychosocial processes of identification, sublimation, and reflection are central to understanding the ways male identities are lived and experienced. By utilising both phenomenological and discursive research methods the researcher was able to illustrate in everyday life the dialectic between the social and subjective elements of identity. Rather than viewing these two methods as incompatible (Edley, 2001), this study demonstrated how the two can be utilised side by side to offer a greater depth of understanding and interpretation. This is particularly important given that within social psychology, researchers utilising discursive methods such as discourse analysis or conversation analysis have had difficulty in accounting for individual consistencies (Berzonsky, 2005; Elias, 2000/1939; Frosh et al., 2003).

#### *Engaging in One's Social World*

These identity processes were also evident in men's levels of engagement in their social worlds. The majority of men were passionately involved in work, hobbies, or interests, and this appeared to positively enhance their everyday lives. The men had identified with these processes and these social phenomena, had invested sublimated psychological energy, and derived both pleasure and frustration from this investment (Castoriadis, 1997a/1990; 1997d/1989). For example, the activity of weight training was a long term investment in a socially recognised pursuit. The goal of transforming one's body into a desired state is never completely achieved, and as such, this deferment of pleasure in social time facilitates passionate life energy. Men who were invested in multiple activities, and were subsequently developing skills and aspiring to goals, were more likely to experience a sense of connectedness and belonging with others. These men felt they were contributing to their social worlds.

Given the passionate nature of these men and their need to psychologically invest in their social worlds, it is important that men are given opportunities to do so (Hodgetts & Rua, 2006). I argue that it is more functional for men to engage, and

develop identity markers in sports, skills, hobbies and work than it is to engage in naval gazing, evaluation and discussion of emotions (Clare, 2000), or giving and receiving empty praise (Mecca et al., 1989; Stout, 2000). The findings of this study also suggested that it is this same passionate energy that can be invested in drug and alcohol culture and criminality, particularly when men perceive they are in some way excluded from mainstream society.

#### *Relating to Women*

While many of the men appeared proficient at developing and maintaining friendships with other men, the men's testimonies revealed that this task was more difficult with women. In their relationships to women, the men had to negotiate the sexual predator discourse, as well as the loyal family man discourse. In addition, they often perceived significant gender differences in values and in character. They were more likely to place women and homosexuals as 'other' than any other social groups. While this served to galvanise group friendships, it also suggested some confusion in regards to opposite sex relations and dynamics (Schwartz et al., 2004), and ambivalence towards homosexuality (Butler, 1997; Hill, 2006; Hopkins, 1998; Whitehead, 2005). This suggested that both perceived and 'real' gender differences can only be negotiated within interpersonal dynamics, and with improved understanding and communication of male and female needs (Connell, 1995, 2000). Detailed investigations of male/female dynamics are also needed if we are to better understand and improve gendered relations.

The major contribution made by this thesis has been to highlight and illustrate the direct link between men's everyday lives, and men's identities and sense of belonging within their social worlds. In doing so this research has also made clear that men's lived experiences are complex and diverse and so must be the strategies to understand and promote men's health, well-being, and engagement in their social worlds. In addition, this thesis presented a dynamic psychosocial theory of male identity that describes the oneness of the social and the subjective elements of identity (Castoriadis, 1997a, 1997c, 1997d, 1997e). This theory was illustrated within the context of men's everyday lives by combining discursive analysis, and phenomenological ethnographic interpretation. As such, this thesis offers researchers a theory and methodology for researching and understanding dynamic psychosocial identities.

### *Limitations and Future research*

The findings in this thesis were obtained from a small sample of young adult men and hence generalisation was not sought. Research of this nature is best understood as part of a collection of studies that have looked at different subgroups of men in detail. Unfortunately the scope of this thesis was unable to offer great insight into the everyday lives of the men from the rural location (Judd & Humphreys, 2001; D. Wilkinson & Blue, 2002). Issues of intersectionality, that is, the ways masculinities intersect with race, ethnicity, and social class were also beyond the scope of this research (Phinney, 2005; Rezende & Lima, 2004; Sinha & Kao, 1997; Sonn & Fisher, 2005). As such it is recommended that other forms of masculine identity be explored in everyday life. In particular, it is hoped that the combination of phenomenological and discursive research practices, as was demonstrated in this thesis, be applied to continue building an understanding of the complex and diverse experiences of men. As noted in regards to my experiences in engaging with the men from the rural area, it is often necessary to have a degree of familiarity with a group prior to conducting the study. To this end I encourage men from rural locations and men who share a specialist activity to research and report their experiences. In addition, this thesis suggested that research regarding the intimate and platonic relational dynamics of men and women is much needed and underrepresented in the literature.

### *Implications*

I recommend that the process of *reflective engagement* be applied to address men's psychosocial health and wellbeing. That is, I argue that *reflective engagement* in one's social world should be promoted as the strongest indicator of men's wellbeing.

As found in this thesis, to be engaged in one's social world is to invest sublimated emotion. To engage is to psychically invest in social time, that is, to desire, to set goals, and to develop, in relation to activities that are socially defined. Pleasure is deferred when a man applies his will and desires, and pleasure is received in accomplishment. Most importantly, men need to be engaged in multiple activities at once such that engagement is maintained and is an ongoing and inexhaustible process. It is the continual and overlapping deferment of pleasure through social engagement that is the energy of life. Most of the men in this study were passionate, and had multiple sources of engagement such as hobbies, sports, body building, family life, sex, and intimacy. Engagement also facilitates the acquisition of skills and

competencies, which affords men social standing, belonging through identification and identity negotiation, and competitive social commodities.

While engagement is a key element of wellbeing it is not sufficient of itself. It is common for men to be engaged in activities that are socially or individually destructive or harmful. Drugs and alcohol, violence, and risk taking behaviours, when extreme or excessive, are a broad societal problem. In addition, as was found in this thesis, there are also complex social rules of engagement to be negotiated in order to gain a sense of belonging in social groups.

As such, men require a reflective capacity to mediate their engagement. This includes social learning through identification, an understanding of oneself as a unique individual, and an understanding of one's positions within society. Reflectivity is essential for joining social groups and maintaining one's position, as well as developing and maintaining identities. In the current socio-historical climate I believe we are placing too much emphasis on individual self awareness and self evaluations as indicators of men's wellbeing. What I would describe as 'reflexive' (not reflective) awareness indicators such as self-esteem, are only a component of one's reflective life, just as verbal emotional expression is just one component of emotionality. Men require also, to be able to understand and evaluate their social environments and their place within it. Individual autonomy and agency is achieved through reflective engagement where individuals co-construct their social worlds and their identities. In focusing on encouraging men to look inwardly at themselves and their emotions, we are not only neglecting the full range on men's reflective capacities, we are also de-emphasising the importance of everyday engagement in social activities.

Men's reflective engagement is both an individual and social project. As presented in this thesis reflective engagement is dependent on early developmental experience as well as socio-historical discourses. Reflective engagement offers psychology a tool for understanding and addressing individual male problems, as well as a broader vision for men's health.

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