MASCULINITIES AND WHITENESS:
THE SHAPING OF ADOLESCENT MALE
STUDENTS' SUBJECTIVITIES IN AN
AUSTRALIAN BOYS' SCHOOL

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Helen Hatchell
June 2003
ABSTRACT

In my thesis I explore ways in which adolescent male students negotiate and interrogate discursive ideologies relating to hegemonic masculinities and to the normality of ‘whiteness’, specifically within one English classroom in an Australian private single sex boys’ school in Perth, Australia. A feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework is employed to explore how gendered and racialized positions available to adolescent males contribute to the shaping of their subjectivities, and how the social constructions of masculinities and femininities contribute to the ways in which adolescent males represent themselves. A qualitative approach, which included classroom observations, questionnaires and interviews, provided me with tools essential for examining the complexities of the effects of social constructs such as gender, sexuality and ethnicity on masculinist positionings at school. The study reveals the complexities surrounding discourses of hegemonic heterosexual masculinities and privileges of whiteness on the situationally specific formation and negotiation of subjectivities in adolescent males’ lives in one school.

Central findings of the study show that adolescent males in this single sex boys’ school easily maintained socially constructed ideas surrounding the feminization of females and masculinization of males, with notions of homophobia embedded in discourses of hegemonic masculinities. A resistance to alternative masculine discourses shows the impact and maintenance of hegemonic heterosexual masculinities for adolescent males. However, through the use of particular texts, female teachers in the all boys’ classroom were able to open up spaces for male students to interrogate hegemonic forms of masculinities, to interrogate power relationships, and to access alternative masculinities. In a similar vein, my findings show how easy it is for students to ignore social injustices in relation to racism and stereotyping of Indigenous Australians, and to retain notions that reinforce these injustices.

A major conclusion of the study is that social injustices are easily maintained through educational institutions as active agents of reinforcing ideas and ideologies, particularly when changes mean disruption of privileges, such as privileges associated with hegemonic masculinity or with whiteness. Although this study was
conducted within a middle class milieu, and thus students were from an advantaged position in life, this does not justify their ignorance of issues of social justice. Indeed, the findings highlight the importance of this kind of critical approach with middle class boys in single sex schools. Important implications of this study are that findings contribute to the discovery of ways of changing deeply ingrained ideologies such as perceived gender dichotomies, the masculinization of males and the feminization of females. My findings also contribute to ways in which privileges, such as the privilege of whiteness, can be deconstructed and interrogated by those in privileged positions. My findings have potential significant implications for pedagogical practices. Education provides a means by which tools can be utilized to deconstruct and interrogate notions which maintain privileges, and in this study particularly white male privileges. Within the educational system, an understanding relating to how subjectivities are shaped within a classroom setting will also lead to greater educational insights into how specific texts and classroom interactions affect students’ self-representation and understanding. Thus a gender equity and social justice curriculum committed to interrogating the ways in which male students subscribe, invest and negotiate hegemonic masculinities is advocated and has particular relevance to those males already in privileged class positions in terms of working towards a more socially just society.
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PREFACE: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE

When I talk to myself now, I talk in English. English is the language in which I've become an adult, in which I've seen my favorite movies and read my favorite novels, and sung along with Janis Joplin records. In Polish, whole provinces of adult experience are missing. I don't know Polish words for "microchips," or "pathetic fallacy," or The Importance of Being Earnest. If I tried talking to myself in my native tongue, it would be a stumbuling conversation indeed, interlaced with English expressions... Occasionally, Polish words emerge unbidden from the buzz. They are usually words from the primary palette of feeling: "I'm so happy" ..., The Polish phrases have roundness and a surprising certainty, as if they were announcing the simple truth.

(Hoffman, 1989, p.272)

I begin with a 'critical autobiography' (Griffiths, 1995) because I believe that including the status, site and position of a speaker is important within any specific context. As a female from a non-English speaking background, I am researching and writing on masculinities and whiteness in a multicultural society. My life experiences led to a distancing of my own language and culture similar to that of Hoffman’s exposition (above) through assimilation into the English language. I found that some of the students in my research made similar complex journeys. The significance of my personal story is that I was brought up within a dominant masculinist, Eurocentric schooling system where there were often little or no allowances for differences. My understanding of differences was experienced through living in and among various cultures around the world and, although my understanding was enhanced through these experiences, I also feel that it is crucial not to trivialize different lived realities. Coming from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, I grew up simultaneously with and interweaving between two cultures. Expectations from these two cultures were equally important, but sometimes contradictory and at other times complementary.

I grew up in England in a large Polish family with five brothers and one sister. The values reinforced while I was growing up were that academic and professional
success was important for males whereas success for females was confined to private spheres. Males often experienced privileges, while females often experienced invisibility and insignificance, a situation that strengthened notions relating to the dichotomous nature of gender. Moreover, it appeared that ‘white’ Anglo males remained empowered with more privileges and significance than other males. I felt there remained a need to disrupt the continual reinforcement of normalized values in society, and a need to acknowledge and be critically aware of the hegemonic masculinist society in a manner that would lead to greater social justice.

As a single parent family, my two children and I are fairly recent migrants to Australia. Arriving in Perth, after spending approximately sixteen years travelling and living in many parts of the world, I suddenly found myself in a fragile, vulnerable position, because of my new situation. Separating from my (now ex-) husband, the disadvantages of being a female and a single mother became obvious. Following a lifetime of being categorized as a father’s daughter, a brother’s sister, a husband’s wife, or a son’s mother, there was also a struggle to find ‘me’. The structure of society appeared to advantage males. Female roles of motherhood are often at the expense of work experience resulting in far-reaching consequences. Marriage itself is a power relationship (see for example Dempsey, 1997; MacInnes, 1998). The divorce process revealed how easily females became disadvantaged, with the structure of society reinforcing these disadvantages. For example, divorced females, particularly if they are also mothers, are often immediately disadvantaged due to lack of paid work experience. In addition to the emotional upheaval, for females there is also a “downward mobility … that commonly follows divorce” (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Messner, 1994, p.206). If changes are to be made to improve gender equity in such areas in society, then males need to be included and to be part of the solution.

My experiences were significant to the ‘choices’ I made, although the use of the word choices does not clarify to what extent choices are possible in reality. For example, once I was married, and more significantly once I had children, my real choices were reduced substantially. Thus I find it necessary to explore to what extent research is coloured by experiences. Nothing can be objective. Experiences are contextual so that for this research, for me, it was within the context of Australia. A pertinent example of how experiences are significant relates to my own children, a girl and a boy, who until migrating to Australia exhibited no prevailing notions that female toys were different to male toys and they played with ‘their’ toys. A
favourite, vivid image that comes to mind is of one warm and sunny Saturday afternoon at an international school where my older child attended. My (at the time) seven-year-old playing baseball while my (at the time) three-year-old was, with a friend, pushing a ‘baby’ doll in a pram around one of the playing fields. This scene was not in any way perceived unusual by the large crowds around this school. However, my seven-year-old playing baseball was a girl, and my three-year-old and the friend playing with the ‘baby’ were both boys.

Another related image that springs to mind—again contextual—is when very suddenly at the age of eight, very shortly after settling down in Australia, my son refused to play with certain toys because his ‘new’ friends considered them as girls’ toys. In a parallel vein, my daughter (then aged twelve) suddenly was made to feel she was no longer ‘good’ at science and thus she ‘decided’ she would no longer continue with science subjects at school although her up-until-then interests were always in the science area. I was able to help my daughter in this instance, partly through changing schools and moving her to a single sex girls’ school where she was encouraged to pursue science subjects. Greater encouragement enabled her to continue her education into university, receive a first class honours degree in genetics and thus enter employment in the scientific research field. However, these and other similar experiences led me to ask myself: was my son becoming a boy and my daughter becoming a girl as conceptualized\(^1\) within Australian society? Why were issues like this so important to get ‘right’ within school and with their peers? It appeared that my children were not too concerned about their ‘reality’, but wanted to fit in with dominant discourses and expectations of being a ‘boy’, a ‘girl’, or an ‘Australian’, even though they did not initially fit the ‘mould’.

My choices to send my children to private schools in Australia led to unanswered questions as to why my own children ‘fitted’ in private schools better than state schools. By sending them to private schools did I become “part of the problem and not the solution” (Cochran-Smith, 1995, p.85)? I moved my son to a private boys’ school because he would receive many academic, sporting and social advantages, which he was not receiving at a state school. Yet I understand that this presented me with a dilemma: I did not want him disadvantaged but how could I ensure that he obtained benefits yet also understood the power embedded and re/produced in

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\(^1\) My hybrid background led to my hybrid spelling. I use mainly English Australian spelling with a sprinkling of Americanisms, for example the use of z instead of s in words like ‘conceptualize’ and ‘analyze’. Is this the result of my migration patterns, global media or American hegemony? I leave this speculation to the readers to determine.
schools. As Arcana (1983, p.2) recognizes, “whether we choose to challenge the power structure or not, we all can see it”. Accepting normative male cultures of private boys’ schools and accepting the associated privileges as unproblematic, reinforces hegemonic masculinist discourses. My experiences led me to believe that one site where the interruption of hegemonic discourses—which reinforce advantages for specific groups of males—can be effectively addressed is at a private boys’ school at a site where hegemonic masculinist culture is often normalized.

I find subjective and autobiographical accounts to be significant in research. These accounts form the basis of research, what is chosen to write about, and the approach used during the research process. My own background played a significant role in my approach and choice of research. My early experiences as an ‘other’ and as living on the margins or the borders of dominant cultures played a significant role in the development of my ideas and thoughts and in how I have come to view ‘the world’. For example, I was part of an ethnic minority during my school life in England and entered school speaking Polish. However, I was expected to learn to read, write and speak English in a school culture that required children to work quietly and not speak in the classroom. On the other hand, I also experienced living in many ‘non-white’ countries where again I was one of a ‘minority’ but in a ‘privileged’ position as an expatriate. This life-style meant that I experienced many different school cultures, both as a teacher and as a parent where, during their school-lives, my daughter attended nine different schools around the world and my son attended six different schools. Throughout my life I moved between different cultures, and through my writing I am able to interweave between significant theoretical perspectives to negotiate a space of my own. My story, however, is not only embedded in my history, but also in other people’s stories, so that the story I tell is historically situated and is only one fragment of a whole.
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CHAPTER 1
MALES AND MASCULINITIES AT SCHOOL:
FRAMING THE STUDY

The issue that needs to be addressed is the investment that many boys, men and schools have in promoting a particular version of masculinity which is to their detriment in the sense that it limits them from developing a wider repertoire of behaviours and ways of relating.

(Martino & Meyenn, 2001, p.xii)

Research aims

In this thesis I explore how a group of male students attending a middle class single sex boys’ school negotiate their masculinities at school and more specifically within the context of a Year 10 English classroom. I argue that there is a need to provide spaces for these boys to interrogate power relationships and to reflect on their own uses of power and the limits of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity (Frank, 1987). Moreover, I explore attempts by two female English teachers to help these boys develop capacities for interrogating power relationships and their own uses of power and the limits imposed on them and others by subscribing to such versions of masculinity. This is part of a social justice agenda. For example, Beckett (2001, p.78) highlights in her research with privileged boys “the importance of addressing masculinities within a gender equity framework that is committed to exploring the ways in which hegemonic heterosexual masculinity impacts on boys and their experiences” which, she argues, must involve “assisting them to interrogate the role that dominant constructions of masculinity play in their own lives at school and in the wider society”. This research further highlights the need for this kind of critical approach with middle class boys in the single sex school that is the focus of this research. Thus a gender equity and social justice curriculum committed to interrogating the ways in which male student subscribe, invest in and negotiate hegemonic masculinities is advocated and has particular relevance to those boys
already in privileged class positions in terms of working towards a more socially just society (see Kenway, Willis, with Blackmore, & Rennie, 1997).

In this thesis, therefore, I explore ways in which male students negotiate discursive ideologies relating to hegemonic masculinities and to the normality of ‘whiteness’, specifically within one Australian private single sex boys’ school in Perth and within a social structure which is greatly influenced by a white Eurocentric middle class model. Within this context I explore how adolescent male students of different ethnic backgrounds (but many of whom identify as Australian) position themselves and are positioned according to their gender, sexuality, ethnicity and social class. In this research I also examine how male students construct their understanding of their own and of female subjectivities. I incorporate ways in which female teachers in an all boys’ school are able to open up spaces for male students to interrogate hegemonic forms of masculinities through the use of particular texts in the English classroom. I also examine the possibilities of using specific texts to disrupt deeply ingrained discourses such as perceived gender dichotomies, and the masculinization of males and the feminization of females. Through the use of specific texts I challenge the “taken-for-granted features” (Delamont, 1992, p.45) of gender, masculinity and whiteness. I examine how issues of homophobia easily surface in the classroom (see Frank, 1994; Martino, 1995). Emerging issues of racism provide opportunities for an exploratory discussion of how white students perceive their whiteness, and how non-white students position themselves within a mainly white environment. A specific focus on the impact of masculinities on an Indigenous male in the Australian context is an important inclusion in my research. By problematizing such features as masculinity and whiteness, it is possible to highlight situations that are often ignored or negated so that these features effectively become less fixed, less established and less ‘taken-for-granted’. I further explore how students challenge or accept ways in which they are positioned in classrooms, and how their positionings affect or limit their educational choices and educational success. Through feminist approaches and with a specific focus on selected texts and classroom practices, I examine issues of masculinities and whiteness. This is something that has not been investigated in any significant capacity in the Australian context.

Sawicki (1991, p.109) suggests that “perhaps one of Foucault’s most important insights is his insistence that one’s theoretical imperatives and commitments be motivated by specific practical imperatives”. It was from specific practical
imperatives that my initial research question developed: How do male students adopt
gendered, heterosexualized, racialized, and socially classed subject positions? I do
this from a perspective that highlights whiteness as a social category. I question
what has really changed in the curriculum after over two decades of gender reform.
Definitive divisions for male and female roles linger, and the educational curriculum
remains very male oriented (V. Foster, 1999). How this affects male students was an
important question for me while taking into consideration that males are not a
homogenous group. I feel that the "politics of incorporation" has set 'women'
apart as a political category. Set apart, women can then "be added without
disturbing the agenda, and [leave] men situated as the unquestioned norm" (V.
Foster, 1999, p.5). Focusing on females only has had positive effects, but many
deeply ingrained discourses remain prevalent. There is, therefore, a need to turn
towards males not as the norm, but in such a way that both females and males
benefit, and that notions of gender opposites or of male dominance are not
perpetuated at the expense of non-hegemonic females or non-hegemonic males.
Through my research in an all boys' school it is possible, as Mills writes, to:

\begin{quote}
recognise boys' privileged position in gender relations ... [and] advocate a politics which goes beyond self-interest and instead encourages boys to act in the interest of social justice.
\end{quote}

(Mills, 2000b, p.236)

My challenge to what was perceived as the 'norm' seemed to find resistance at
many stages of my research, from females as well as males. I was told that Year 10
boys were probably the most difficult group to research, that their hormones were
working overtime, that they were very changeable, that they were just learning about
females. For these reasons (I was advised) Year 10 boys were definitely not the
'right' group to interview. I agree that Year 10 boys are at a period when they are
noticeably changing, but I do not agree with the above generalization unreservedly.
Do we all not continually change with our experiences? My son at the time of my
fieldwork was also in Year 10, and I agree that this is an influential period, but this is
precisely why I felt these were important periods to investigate, to disrupt any
normalized beliefs associated with these years, and to ask: What are these boys
thinking? And what can we do to help them more than just to 'incorporate' female
perspectives into the curriculum and into their lives? Further, how can we approach
research without immediately constructing males and females as different or as
opposites? Although differences exist between males and females, there are often
greater differences amongst males, or amongst females (see Collins, Kenway, &
McLeod, 2000). Feminists (see for example Davies, 1993b, 1994, 1996) have
highlighted ideas relating to the diversity of females. My research aims to examine what can be done to encourage males and females to celebrate diversity amongst males. But, more importantly, what can be done to help society understand male power in schools.

It is generally recognized that gender, race, and social class do not operate in isolation as discrete social categories, nor do they function in a simple additive manner. Until fairly recently, there have been limited attempts in research at addressing the "webs of identity" (Griffiths, 1995, p.1) — the complex intersection of 'gendered', socially classed, and 'racialized' subject positions (Epstein, Elwood, Hey, & Maw, 1998a). Gendered social constructs act together creating different relationships depending on a person's gender, sexuality, social class, and 'race'/ethnicity. Economic and social conditions remain significant to the political issue of social class differences. Gender and ethnicity add a further dimension to this political level. Thus, depending on the emphasis, issues can be viewed from different perspectives. As Phillips wrote:

> We live in a class society that is also structured by gender, which means that men and women experience class in different ways, and that potential unities of class are disrupted by conflicts of gender. To put the emphasis the other way round: we live in a gender order that is also structured by class, which means that women experience their womanhood in different ways, and that their unity as women is continually disrupted by conflicts of class. Draw in race to complete the triangle and you can see how complex the geometry becomes. No one is 'just' a worker, 'just' a woman, 'just' black. The notion that our politics can simply reflect one of our identities seems implausible in the extreme.

>(Phillips, 1991, p.155)

Further dimensions are added when taking sexuality—and its concealment—into account; dimensions which are often ignored, but are significant to ways in which males adopt different subject positions. The complexity of social positionings means that it is impossible to take any issue totally in isolation. I found Grimshaw to be further enlightening with the following quote: "Experience does not come neatly in segments, such that it is always possible to abstract what in one's experience is due to 'being a woman' [or being a man] from that which is due to 'being married,' 'being middle class' and so forth" (cited in Bordo, 1990, pp.149-150). Research within feminist frameworks highlights and emphasizes many salient experiences through exploring issues such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity and social class. Feminist poststructuralism (Weedon, 1997) provides me with tools within my
research allowing me to incorporate issues of gender and sexuality, ethnicity and social class which intersect to create different experiences and positionings for different students, particularly in respect to the ways in which students adopt or challenge hegemonic masculinity.

In this thesis, I also focus on ways in which power operates within classroom dynamics. Bradley (1996, p.9) suggests that "power relationships put constraints upon our ability to remake the world", and that social constructs like gender, sexuality, social class and 'race'/ethnicity are all situated within relationships of power. I felt that it was crucial to research in depth at the school level in an effort to understand and deconstruct relationships of power and how they inform a particular group of adolescent males in the negotiation of their own identities and masculinities. It is imperative not only to understand how these adolescent males are constructing their understanding of their own subjectivities, but also how they are constructing female identities, particularly in an educational environment with female teachers in a notably male milieu (see Bailey, 1996). The dominance of males in Australian educational management indicates that the education system "is masculinist in both orientation and in its taken-for-granted assumptions" (Lingard & Limerick, 1995, p.3). Contradictory power relationships are created through discursive positionings available to teachers and students. Mills (2000b, p.221) explores how male teachers are able to "challenge the existing gender order" through the confrontation of male privileges. Male students also need to confront existing male privileges. Importantly, male and female teachers also need to work cooperatively in respect of challenges to existing privileges and power relationships.

I specifically identify a Torres Strait Islander who is an Indigenous Australian. Members of this group recognize their own disadvantages and are usually disempowered in society. I explore what it means to be an Indigenous Australian on a scholarship within a privileged school. I also talk with the other students about racism and whiteness. Culture is a category with differing meanings which are seriously contested both politically and academically (G. Jordan & Weedon, 1995). 'White' is often considered the norm as if it requires no further investigation, and white students are not usually addressed as belonging to distinct racial groups (see Aveling, 1998). Hickling-Hudson (1997) further found that students associated the concept of 'culture' with something that related only to 'minority ethnic groups' but was considered irrelevant to society in Australia. The "common culture of the school, usually means middle class Anglo-Australian (and mostly male-dominant)
culture” (Marginson, 1993, p.244) and this was particularly evident in the Australian private boys’ school where I conducted my fieldwork. Schools thus normalize this ‘common culture’ and marginalize other groups such as gay students, gender non-conforming students, and Aboriginal students who do not easily fit into this culture. Students from other groups often feel that they need to choose between their own culture and the school culture. To add to the complexity, working classes were often considered to have no culture—or possibly to be more exact, no ‘artistic gifts’—although this idea is generally changing and, as Willis (1977) demonstrates, cultures definitively exist within the working classes. Significantly, Willis was one of the first researchers to explore class issues specifically, and how they impact on masculinities. For Kadi (1998, p.153), however, her ‘Arabness’ could not compensate for her working class status. She explains through her writing: “My working class family has no culture, no artistic gifts. Our Arabness made us a tad more interesting than our white neighbors, but even this ‘exotic’ element couldn’t outweigh class limitations and constraints”. In this way, social constructs such as ethnicity are often seen as more significant than social class and the middle class milieu of the private boys’ school marginalizes working class experiences, particularly if working class males are a minority.

It is crucial to problematize gender equity and unpack issues such as those relating to the recent rhetoric that girls are succeeding at the expense of boys. Connell’s work (1987; 1989; 1994; 1998) shows that males as males are privileged although at the same time he emphasizes that not all males are privileged. Students incessantly learn normalized gender relations which work against gender equity and social justice as a consequence of accepted power relationships of masculinity and femininity. In my research I have identified power as a central issue and at crucial times draw on theorists like Foucault (1972; 1981b) to investigate power relationships as they operate in an educational setting. The issue of power is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4.

The ‘patriarchal dividend’, to which Connell (1998) refers, gives material advantage to males over females’ domestic roles and is not decreasing but increasing (V. Foster, 1999). The ‘caretaking’ role of females persists within Australian society. I question how this operates within the context of an English classroom in this particular boys’ school. But equally important, were there possibilities of disruption of deeply ingrained discourses such as the binary nature of gender, the
masculinization of males, the feminization of females: dominant discourses that continually resurface and reappear with regular monotony and with little change.

To re-iterate, my research questions the ways in which male students negotiate their way within as well as outside of discourses of hegemonic masculinities, specifically within a private single-sex boys’ school and within a social structure which is greatly influenced by a white Eurocentric middle class model. I explore the ways students adopt gendered, racialized, heterosexualized, and socially classed subject positions. I highlight ‘whiteness’ as a social category. I specifically examine the possibilities of using texts in the English classroom to disrupt dominant discourses such as the dichotomous nature of gender. My investigations are conducted with an understanding that males are neither a homogenous group nor representatives of both males and females, but are situated in a relational position to females. Indeed, there are multiple masculinities (Connell, 1987, 1994, 2000; Davies, 1994, 1996, 1997; Martino, 1995). I also support Nilan (2000, p.54) who notes that more understanding is necessary in relation to gendered interactions in schools in an attempt to enable “fulfilling life prospects for girls and boys”. These questions relating to males and masculinities at school are explored throughout my thesis by utilizing the knowledge created by feminist poststructuralist research and feminist epistemologies.

The social context

Given that the aim of my thesis is to explicate ways in which a particular group of adolescent boys at a specific social site interrogate different forms of masculinities and represent themselves, it is important at this early stage to describe the context in which the research is undertaken. There are, however, issues of confidentiality that continually arise because there are only seven single sex private boys’ schools in Perth, Australia. As a researcher, therefore, when providing contextual information that is vital to the reader’s understanding of the social context, I have to simultaneously take care that I continue to protect the anonymity of the school.

The single sex private boys’ school in which I conducted my research is located in Perth, Western Australia and offers programs of study that will prepare students for university, TAFE (Technical and Further Education) or vocational pathways through structured work based learning. According to its web page, the school has identified education of boys as a priority and provides opportunities which it considers to be
specific to the education of boys. The school also claims to modify its curriculum and teaching styles in order to enhance boys’ learning.

The school has an emphasis on religious education and Christian service and Religious Education remains a core subject until Year 10. A similar emphasis on religion, whichever denomination, is reflected in most private schools as opposed to government schools throughout Perth. Most non-government private schools were founded in Perth to provide excellence in education with a religious importance, and religion remains the core of the ethos of the school. The school states that its mission is to enable all boys to realize their spiritual, academic, cultural, social and sporting potential, and for students to become ‘agents for good’ within society.

Within the school there is also a strong emphasis on sports education, with an excellent sports achievement record. As a member of the Public Schools Association of Western Australia—an inter-school sporting association which comprises the seven private boys’ schools in Perth—the school has a strong commitment to competitive sports including swimming, basketball, waterpolo, tennis, football, hockey, soccer and rowing. The closeness to the river allows rowing to be an important sport within the school culture.

Located on prime real estate land with river views also means that the property value of the school is high. In contrast, the school prides itself on ‘offering quality education for a relatively low fee’. The school fees are closer to fifteen per cent of the national average annual income, while the school fees of the upper range of private schools in Australia are closer to thirty per cent of the national average annual income. The lower than average fees compared with other private boys’ schools in Perth enable students of families who are not as well off and who do not earn in the highest salary bracket to enrol in the school. The school stresses its consideration for social justice issues and various scholarships and bursaries are offered, including a number of Aboriginal Scholarships, which enable students to enrol who would otherwise be financially unable to enrol in a private school. The availability of Aboriginal Scholarships results in a small number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to more easily enter the private system each year. The number of Aboriginal Scholarships remains in the single figures, and in terms of proportions in total school enrolments this is minute. The lower than average fees and the availability of scholarships also means that a number of students do not easily fall into a socio-economic ‘middle class’ grouping, but could fall into a socio-
economic working class category. During my time at the school, several students supported their membership to the socio-economic working class by referring to the financial struggles necessary to remain in the school, yet they could still be classed as lower middle class depending on other characteristics.

**The discursive fields within which Australian males construct their subjectivities**

Educational research often focuses on the disadvantaged, for example, females (Jones, 1993), underachievers, or specific cultural groups (May, 1994). In Australia, gender reform in the past has often been directed specifically at females: to “change girls’ choices”, to “change girls’ themselves”, to “change the curriculum”, or to “change the learning environment” (Kenway, Blackmore, Willis, & Rennie, 1996, p.242; Kenway, with Willis, Blackmore, & Rennie, 1993). The ways in which males have been previously theorized in a homogenous fashion has become clearer since the advent of the ‘What do we do about the boys’ debate, (Epstein et al., 1998a; Kenway, 1995; Martino & Meyenn, 2001; Yates, 1997). But, as mentioned earlier, it is recognized that not all males are advantaged. However, to view disadvantaged boys as ‘the problem’ would be similar to our experience of viewing girls as ‘the problem’ and will not necessarily influence or change dominant discourses which advantage particular groups in society. Recent research theorizing masculinities, calls into question the idea that ‘boys’ are a homogeneous group as well as the underlying essentialist assumptions of the ‘boys will be boys’ slogan (R. Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Lingard & Douglas, 1999; Mac an Ghaill, 1994a; Martino, 1999a; Mills, 2001b). Greater achievement by females—particularly in previously thought masculine domains—was associated, specifically by the media, with the idea that boys generally were disadvantaged.

Admittedly, *some* gains were made by *some* female students, but these gains were *not*—as often perceived—at the expense of *all* boys. The drive towards gender equity in Australia and the focus on girls and how they can change to be successful often also meant how to be more like the boys. Many policies emphasize the need for girls to achieve in maths and sciences. Then, when girls started to achieve, popular rhetoric promulgated how boys were being disadvantaged (V. Foster, 1994; Yates, 1997, 2000). In reality only certain girls were achieving within certain parameters—and boys were not generally doing worse but some boys were losing their ‘natural’ top places in areas such as maths and sciences (Teese, Davies,
Central in the promulgation of such discourses was mass media which generated “the myth that the feminist movement has completely transformed society” (hooks, 1994b, p.29). This ‘myth’ created the impression that power had been ‘inverted’ to the extent that males are often now believed to be victims and disadvantaged particularly at schools. In Australia, this belief corresponds to the fear that females may be outperforming males which was quickly followed by an inquiry into boys’ underachievement at schools. Thus there was a:

widespread push for a ‘Boys Education Strategy’, and a plethora of programs to address boys’ ‘educational disadvantage’ and help them to regain their supremacy in the high-status curriculum areas.

(V. Foster, 1996, p.49)

The idea that males are considered to be failing at school is further evidenced by a more recent parliamentary inquiry which led to the setting up of a research project to address the educational needs of boys (Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs, 2001). There were similar occurrences in other countries. Headlines such as ‘Hard times for Britain’s lost boys’, ‘The war on boys’ and ‘Boy burnout’ (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997a) commanded prominent positions in the British, American and Australian press. The popular press (see for example The Western Australia January 8, 2000) attributed blame to girls for succeeding at the expense of boys, without taking into account which girls were succeeding and whether this was in fact at the expense of boys. This attributed blame to girls continues. A recent newspaper headline in the United Kingdom, The revolution that means boys have become the new girls, impressed on its readers:

It is now boys, not girls, who are considered at a disadvantage in co-educational schools. It is boys who are being undermined by the superior academic achievements of girls. It is boys who are being sent to the back of the class and derisively regarded by girls as good for only one thing (and I do not mean maths). That is why my little boy is going to a big boys’ school. Torn between my delight at the emergence—after so many years of being artificially held back—of educational girl power and my concern for my son, I have pressured and pushed him into a school where he will not have to face the focused competition of girls. I am locking my son in rather the way that previous generations locked up their daughters to protect him from the opposite sex. Because it seems that only by segregating our sons... can we offer them a chance of gaining sexual equality with their female contemporaries.

(Gordon, 2000, p.6)

Ideas within this newspaper article operate to reinforce the binary oppositional nature of gender, as well as to inherently suggest an essentialized nature of boys as well as of girls. These notions, however, are also in direct contrast to thoughts
behind policies in the 1980s with the push for girls to achieve in subjects such as science and maths, and where if girls wanted to be successful it was considered beneficial for them to be like boys (Kenway et al., 1996; Kenway & Modra, 1992). In this way a deficit discourse, with suggestions that somehow the girls needed to be changed, was in operation. In contrast, it appears to be implicitly considered, as in the above headlines, that it is somehow undesirable for boys to be like girls, and that it is girls who are at fault and boys are now the victims. The victims approach and the protection of hegemonic masculinity approach represent two forms of masculinity politics identified by Connell (1995) as ‘masculinity therapy’ or the ‘mythopoetic men’s movement’, and the ‘gun lobby’ which defends hegemonic masculinity. Ideas relating to males being disadvantaged or being victims have led to greater support for people like Biddulph here in Australia, Bly in the United States, and Lydon in the United Kingdom. These writers have gained much support for their return to the ‘natural’ positionings of females and males with the associated ‘natural’ supremacy of (white) males. This shift in ideology effectively essentializes female and male roles. However, central to a return to essentialized notions of masculinity and femininity are the issues of power, thus the need to deconstruct power relationships and prevalent male power.

Choices for males are limited when they are seen as a homogenous group and when they also need to conform to a hegemonic masculinity identity. It is important to recognize that issues involved here are much more complex than a winning/losing discourse, of who ends up taking ‘masculine’ subjects and what happens by the end of the school years (Collins et al., 2000). Choices have consequences that may be perceived as successful or unsuccessful depending on societal perceptions. More importantly, other social constructs such as masculinities, ‘race’/ethnicity, and social classes and sexuality need to be considered to ask which boys and which girls continue to be disadvantaged. Many attempts at examining the ways females and males performed at school have been made. However, learning difficulties of particular groups of boys, such as literacy learning difficulties, have been generalized and used as evidence that male students overall are suffering (P. Gilbert, 1998; R. Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Kenway et al., 1997). In a recent report, Collins, Kenway and McLeod (2000) acknowledge difficulties and complexities in relation to issues surrounding students’ performance and behaviour at school. Although results from their research are still fairly generalized in respect of gender issues, the report gives the clear view that more research needs to be carried out to determine which boys and which girls are indeed disadvantaged.
Whitehead (2002, p.42) suggests that masculinity is “both illusion and reality” and that “to understand how this apparent paradox is sustained ... is the key to appreciating the social, political and individual importance of masculinity”. The necessity to explore and theorize masculinities in alternative ways has been emphasized through feminist epistemologies. Indeed, Webb and Singh suggest that feminisms have highlighted issues relating to gender generally:

In one sense this topic—the explicit study of men and masculinities as such—did not exist until feminists provided the assumptions and recognition of the importance of gender divisions in social (power) relations, and brought to the fore the imbalances in thought and actions between men and women in order to question, criticise and change. The experiences of gay, Eurasian and black men have explored relations between men and highlighted the need to recognise a multiplicity of masculinities.


Feminist insights provide significant contributions to the understanding of issues relating to boys’ underachievement and to the discussions on masculinity (see Epstein, Elwood, Hey, & Maw, 1998b). Significantly, as Skelton (1997a, p.350) notes, recent research into masculinities and education “have engaged with feminist issues as part of their research agenda”. There has been an explosion of theorization as well as empirical research in recent years which elaborate theories on males and masculinities (see Connell, 1995, 1998, 2000; Epstein et al., 1998b; R. Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; hooks, 1998; Kaufman, 1994, 1999; Kimmel, 1994; Mac an Ghaill, 1994a, 1994b, 2000; Martino, 1995, 1999a, 2000a, 2000b). Raphael Reed (1999, p.103), however, suggests that masculinity is still “relatively undertheorized in feminist literature”. Thus Lingard’s (1995, p.4) suggestion that “some alliance between women and pro-feminist men ... would appear to be politically useful” remains particularly pertinent.

**Research significance**

My research is significant as a feminist approach to research on masculinities and whiteness with its specific focus on texts and classroom practices. I focus on Year 10 adolescent boys. Thus my research provides greater understanding of the ways in which a particular group of adolescent boys at a specific social site interrogate different forms of masculinities and represent themselves, other males and females in general. Through my research I explore ways in which different forms of masculinities are available to boys, specifically in the English classroom. My
examination of students’ readings of texts shows how male students are limited or empowered in their attempts to deconstruct dominant forms of masculinity and to identify with multiple masculinities. This has implications for classroom practices, and all students’—both boys’ and girls’—life chances. Recent research has called into question that ‘boys’ are a homogeneous group and questioned the underlying essentialist assumptions of the ‘boys will be boys’ slogan (Lingard & Douglas, 1999; Skelton, 2001). However, gaps which relate to the theorizing of masculinities, especially when linked to social constructs such as whiteness remain. My central research questions which examine ways in which male students negotiate discursive sites relating to hegemonic masculinities and to the normality of ‘whiteness’—as well as the classroom interactions between male students and female teachers—remain relatively undertheorized. Greater empirical as well as theoretical contributions are required in this field of knowledge. Despite an increased theorization on males and masculinities, masculinities in relation to the significance of the often-invisible social construct of ‘whiteness’ specifically—whereby whiteness is perceived as the norm—thus remains an area that needs more investigation. For example, there has been little focus on the impact of masculinities on Indigenous males in the Australian context. This is an area that I explore in my thesis.

Mac an Ghaill (1999a, p.151) argues for “the need to produce local understandings of how people live with a plurality of differences”. Significantly, I am researching in a private boys’ single sex school with a focus on the need for feminist pedagogies. The understanding of subject positionings is further extended through exploration of these subjectivities through a framework that incorporates and acknowledges whiteness as a racial category (Frankenberg, 1993). To ground whiteness is significant since many of the students’ understandings and self-representations are learned through a lens of ‘whiteness’; in other words, through dominant discourses which position white as the norm and view social reality through a white perspective. As whiteness becomes synonymous with, and at the same time masks, privilege, power, and dominance (Giroux, 1997), it is important to deconstruct and explore how whiteness continues to be accepted as the norm and by highlighting it as a racial issue examine how it shapes our lives. In my research I explore how lives are racialized and marked—within boys’ own construction of masculinities—by additionally focusing on “the largely unexplored terrain of ‘whiteness’” (Aveling, 1998, p.301).
Since students are not just vessels to be filled but need to take an active part in education (Freire, 1996), the knowledge relating to how students are positioned and position themselves plays a significant role in classroom pedagogy. Both students and teachers are positioned in different ways according to their ethnicity/ethnicities, social class and gender. By contributing to the understanding of the complex issues relating to subjectivities and social positionings and by understanding the power relationships, teachers can be informed and consciously contribute to the interactive process with students within a knowledge creation framework. Recent research has shown how the move towards ‘efficient’ and ‘client focussed’ education has often led to the marginalization of equity issues (Henry, 2001, p.91). Greater awareness of specific identified issues by teachers would lead to greater chances of not marginalizing particular students or particular groups of students. Created understandings can be used as tools for change within the educational system and have possibilities for changes at the school level, through the curriculum, as well as at the teacher education level.

Overview of chapters

In this chapter I outlined my research aims, my research questions and the research significance. The topic of masculinities remains popular and significant. However, it is important to contextualize perceptions of masculinities and understand how new interpretations increase knowledge. Within a feminist perspective I identified fruitful research areas relating to masculinities for a particular group of privileged males. I identified the examination of the social construct of whiteness as important in regards to its significant racial implications. I examined how perceptions of equity have changed and play a significant role in educational policies in Australia. Overall, I identified the role of masculinities research as significant to the increase of gender equity and social justice.

In Chapter 2 I review empirical research which has proved to be particularly significant in the field of masculinities. I focus on empirical research within the schooling arena which influenced my own research. Although my research was conducted in an Australian school it is important to recognize that the issues surrounding masculinities cannot be contained by national boundaries but that influences and consequences spill out and are of global interest. Thus I was able to draw on research conducted outside of Australia as well as inside Australia. The
main authors discussed in this chapter include Mairtin Mac an Ghaill, Debbie Epstein, Jim Walker, Paul Willis, Pam Gilbert and Rob Gilbert.

In Chapter 3 I elaborate a conceptual framework that informs my research into adolescent masculinities in one private single sex boys’ school. I explore literature pertaining to the issues of gender and more specifically masculinities, social class, and ‘race’/ethnicity and whiteness. It is important to recognize that these issues are social constructs and are historically situated, remain dynamic and changing, and interact in complex ways. The recent popular rhetoric relating to boys’ underachievement at schools, a centralized and problematic notion, is explored and provides an impetus for research in this specific area in this specific historical times. I explore ways in which these social constructs interrelate and are dependent on each other within schools. Moreover, significant findings emerge when taking one of these issues as a focal point for research and, as I navigate through identified social constructs, a commonality is reflected and reinforced in pedagogical practices. I specifically identify whiteness as a racial category and explore its significance in relation to masculinities. I explore the meaning of whiteness and question why is it so often ‘invisible’ with deeply ingrained discourses suggesting that the category of whiteness is the ‘norm’. Within a single class setting, the many variables and experiences overlap as well as clash so that many different perspectives are perceived from what could be considered a single new experience. It is important to tease out these threads to produce a coherent reading which proves to be useful for developing greater theoretical understanding.

Chapter 4 describes feminist theoretical contributions. The epistemology underpinning these theories is significant to the ways masculinities and whiteness is theorized within my own research. I particularly highlight female feminist writers with a specific aim that they remain central and are not marginalized in discussions within the field of masculinities. However, feminism is inclusive of males and females, which means it is also inclusive of male and female writers. I identify additional political and power struggles—including power relationships—and these are discussed in relation to the rhetoric surrounding adolescent males at school.

In Chapter 5 I examine the rationale and justification of qualitative methods to investigate some of the deeply ingrained dominant discourses within society and more specifically within schools. Feminist epistemologies informed my choices at all stages of my research. In this chapter I initially examine my methodological
approach and explore how and why a qualitative approach provided an ideal framework for my research questions. Specific issues proved significant to the methodological approach—such as subjectivity, reflexivity, ethical issues, truth and validity, generalizability, reciprocity and relationships—and these I discuss in depth. I used classroom participatory observations, unstructured interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and students’ own written texts.

In Chapter 6 I discuss ways in which adolescent males are given opportunities to interrogate hegemonic forms of masculinities within the classroom. I found a great desire by male students to express their ideas and to have their feelings and problems understood. So through students’ narratives, I explore adolescent boys’ negotiations within the classroom, with peers, with female teachers, and through specific texts. Students’ voices are further heard to show their self-representations and how they have been able to take up specific ‘masculine’ positions within English classes. I initially provide an overview of the relationship of texts to literary representations for students in a single sex classroom. Three texts are introduced and their relationship to students’ construction of masculinity is examined. Finally, I explore pedagogical possibilities and limitations on issues of masculinities and on challenges to hegemonic masculinity.

In Chapter 7 I continue to explore how adolescent males negotiate discourses of masculinities at school but focus on students’ responses to issues relating to homosexuality and homophobia. Students’ responses are based on a specific incident in the classroom. Through exploration of issues relating to this incident I increase the knowledge of our explicit understanding of ways in which discourses of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity remain dominant for adolescent males at school, and of ways in which the gendered nature of classroom interactions affect constructions of students’ subjectivities. This unlocked some of the important issues relating to masculinities and maleness. Prevalent essentialist notions that males should be masculine and females should be feminine opened up issues of homophobia for these students. This chapter is particularly significant in showing how strongly binary oppositions—like the perceived opposites heterosexual/homosexual—are played out in schools and society. This dichotomy leads to hegemonic heterosexual masculinity remaining the ‘norm’ and thus restricts social positionings for many males (Frank, 1987, 1993, 1994).
Chapter 8 looks more specifically at racism and Australian-ness. With whiteness acknowledged as a racial issue and as a socially constructed category, different forms of whiteness are interrogated in this chapter through school texts. Further investigations highlight how a ‘whiteness’ lens can be deployed to investigate how self-identities are created or recreated. Issues relevant to Indigenous Australians are identified. It seemed that educational texts, as well as teaching, often marginalized one of the students, an Indigenous Australian from the Torres Strait Islands. The student was aware of this marginalization, yet he also felt he was able to remain ‘himself’ within a situation that he perceived gave him few rights. This chapter explicitly shows how students select from positions made available to them. This is a particularly significant chapter since very little educational research relating to Torres Strait Islanders has been undertaken within the selected type of school environment.

In Chapter 9, I discuss how gender, sexuality, social class and ethnicity contribute to inequalities and injustice in society and social positionings in Australia. Many inequalities in society are, to use Walker’s words, “hidden in plain sight” (M. Walker, 1998, p.95), unless we look, accept multiple truths, and deconstruct. An underlying feature of feminist poststructuralist research shows that people who are disadvantaged because of gender, ethnicity, social class, or sexuality are often denied agency through a process of shifting blame for prejudice to some other issue. I include an examination of ways in which the ‘personal’ interweaves with the political showing how social injustices resurface. My research has the potential for new knowledge to significantly influence teaching strategies and transform educational practices which can affect social justice issues.
CHAPTER 2
MALES AND MASCULINITIES AT SCHOOL:
REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Schools have often been seen as masculinity-making devices. In the
nineteenth century Dr Arnold saw his renovated Rugby School as a
means of forming Christian gentlemen. Other reformers in the years
since have given other schools the task of forming sober and
industrious working men, technocratic competitors, and exemplars of
the New Soviet Man. Research in the 1970s and 1980s, inspired by
the new agenda of feminism, suggests that Dr Arnold was right.
Schools do not simply adapt to a natural masculinity among boys or
a natural femininity among girls. Schools are active in the matter,
constructing particular forms of gender and negotiating relations
between them.

(Connell, 2000, p.131)

Introduction

There has been significant research conducted into the impact of masculinities on
boys at school. This research has contributed significantly to our understanding
about the negotiations and fashioning of masculinities in specific locations. My
study contributes further to the field of schooling masculinities in that it draws
attention to the situationally specific effects of social and pedagogical practices for
one group of boys in a single sex boys’ school in Perth. In this chapter I review
empirical studies that proved to be particularly significant in the field of
masculinities and which informed my research. Over the last ten to fifteen years,
empirical research on masculinities has provided greater understanding of males’
‘lived realities’. Debates suggest that there is a “complex conceptualization of
masculinity” (Mac an Ghaill, 1996, p.2) with a move towards the acknowledgement
of “notions of hegemonic masculinity and multiple masculinities” (Mac an Ghaill,
1996, p.2). Masculinities, like femininities, are a global issue and do not remain
within national boundaries. As Connell (2000, p.3) writes, “concern with questions
about boys and men is now worldwide”. I have, therefore, been able to draw on
research conducted in countries outside of Australia as well as inside Australia.
Although a significant amount of empirical research has been conducted in the field of masculinities (see Connell, 2000), I highlight research which has been specifically conducted in the secondary schools sector.

Earlier research on boys, such as that conducted by Willis (1977) and Walker (1988) had a greater focus on youth culture and provided insights into ways in which masculinities were played out by particular groups of boys, mainly in working class milieux. Building on this research and drawing from other recent theoretical concepts of masculinities to add a new dimension in this field of study, I am looking more closely at ways in which masculinities is played out by a particular group of boys in a privileged school. Many of the earlier studies identified “typologies of cultural groups among boys in schools” (R. Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998, p.124) and these represent important contributions to our understanding of schoolboy cultures and of masculinities in school. Studies, such as those conducted by Walker (1988), Mac an Ghaill (1994a), Jackson (1998), and Martino (1998a; 1999b; 2000b), have also shown how peer groups have a significant influence in boys’ relationships and learning in school. My research is able to use this increased knowledge, but also to examine ways in which adolescent boys take on and challenge these schoolboy cultures and masculinities, particularly through explorations of the normality of hegemonic masculinities.

Research that identified specific cultural groups within a much wider ‘male’ category was significant to the recognition of the notion of ‘multiple masculinities’, a notion reinforced in research by researchers such as Martino (1998a) and Gilbert and Gilbert (1998). Later research, which was conducted at approximately the same time as my fieldwork, was also used to identify masculine stereotypes as a kind of stepping-stone from which to examine more situational dimensions of the construction of masculinities. Francis (2000) looked at the gendered interactions within classrooms and the impact of gender constructions on students’ behaviour and learning. O’Donnell and Sharpe (2000) examined ways in which boys’ attitudes were gendered. Issues within masculinities, such as violence (Mills, 2001a) and sexuality (Epstein, 1998; Kehily, 2001; Kehily & Nayak, 1997), were also addressed.
‘Learning to labour’

Despite publishing in 1977, Willis’ (1977) research on male working class youth provides an important foundation for research on masculinities and retains its significant in-depth image of a specific form of masculinity. He focused on working class culture within schools and how it worked in an oppositional manner within school. Naming white working class boys as ‘the Lads’, he highlighted their working class characteristics and the power relationships at school which positioned them as inferior. His research establishes a specific type of masculinist working class youth culture which openly shows its opposition to authority and disdain of school, whilst flaunting group members’ sexist and racist attitudes. He showed how students affirmed their own masculinities through highlighting heterosexuality within their peer groups. Willis questioned why boys from working class backgrounds continued to leave school early and tended to gravitate to unskilled jobs and suggested it was too easy to say that it was through their own choice or that there was no other choice. He pointedly stated that: “The difficult thing to explain about how middle class kids get middle class jobs is why others let them. The difficult thing to explain about how working class kids get working class jobs is why they let themselves” (Willis, 1977, p.1).

Willis conducted his ethnographic research between 1972 and 1975 with non-academic working class males through their final two years at school and then their transition into the workplace. He used a case study approach with group discussions, interviews and participatory observations. Willis concludes that the ways in which working class boys accept working class jobs apparently through their own choice is a “form of cultural reproduction which helps to contribute towards social reproduction in general” (Willis, 1977, p.185). Willis accounts for students’ acceptance of working class ‘manual’ work in terms of the sexual division of jobs, whereby ‘mental’ work is seen as non-masculine. He explained that working class students mutually support and reinforce the division between mental and manual work relating to feminine (or effeminate) and masculine work. He emphasized, however, that:

Cultural forms cannot be understood with respect to themselves and upon their own base. In order to understand the counter-school culture we had to go to alternative starting points and construct the culture partly from outside: from the nature of labouring in modern capitalism; from general abstract labour; from sexism; from ideology.

(Willis, 1977, p.186)
Willis proposed, therefore, that the counter-culture was reinforced not only by school authorities, by the boys' own culture and hence also by their attitudes but also reinforced beyond by the labour market within a capitalist society. It was this reinforcement and attitude which prepared them for 'working class' jobs. Willis suggested that structural changes in schools as well as political changes were necessary for any significant development. Willis' identification of the culture of the Lads remains significant within the field of masculinities with similar characteristics captured by later researchers but also calling for a need for boys to change if they are to achieve at school (see for example Francis, 2000).

'Male youth culture'

Walker (1988) provides insights into youth culture particularly of the working classes in Australia in the 1980s. With the use of interviews and participant observation Walker conducted an ethnographic study of Year 10 boys at an inner Sydney 'disadvantaged' boys' high school. He followed the groups into their early twenties and like Willis (1977) through boys' transition from school into the workplace. Walker (1988, p.xii) set out to "understand how these young men perceived their problems and set about solving them". He found that gender, ethnicity and sport were three dimensions which greatly influenced students, but which were also affected by their relationship to power structures. Walker's important contribution to research is his exploration of ways in which the different peer groups hierarchically positioned themselves or were positioned. Sports were effectively used by students in the hierarchical positioning, with certain sports such as football and cricket more valued.

Walker focused on the construction of masculinities for working class boys with some reference to race/ethnicity. He identified four main groups: 'the Footballers', 'the Greeks', 'the Three Friends' and 'the Handballers'. The Footballers were "the backbone of the senior grade rugby union teams" (J. Walker, 1988, p.39) and clearly fitted a macho 'Aussie' culture. With football needing space, the Footballers also commanded the largest section of the grounds at school. Walker found that it was the Footballers who had the most social power and with this came greater self-confidence. The Greeks were conscious of their 'Greekness' and by preferring soccer to football provided a competitive challenge to the Footballers. In contrast to the Footballers, Walker found that the Greeks exhibited greater individuality at
school. Walker also found that these were the most successful of the four groups after leaving school. The Three Friends were ‘stigmatised’ by their artistic aspirations. They received rough treatment from other students and thus withdrew in a symbolic way by taking responsibility for producing the school magazine. Their dislike of sports and their indoor activities provided a contrast to the “Footballers’ restless, sweeping surges to and fro and usurpation of large tracts of public space” (J. Walker, 1988, p.52). Walker also acknowledged ‘the Asians’ as a group who like the Friends withdrew. The Asians, mostly Vietnamese boys, would often situate themselves physically on the furthest boundaries of the school grounds. However, this group was not interviewed and thus not discussed in any depth. The Handballers were noted for their friendliness and their ‘nice guy’ label, and were the most ethnically diverse and tolerant. They enjoyed sport but also enjoyed video games and pinball. They also valued their friendships and the opportunities to talk. Although four main groups were identified, Walker acknowledged that membership to groups was not always clear but at times blurred.

Walker investigated the social context of male youth culture in one site. He starts and finishes from the perspective of male youth cultures, and more specifically highlights various forms of masculinities. Walker examines the diverse cultures of students mainly through issues of sport, gender and ethnicity. He suggests that the dominant form of culture for males was that of “youthful self-congratulatory ‘Aussie’ masculinity, which highlighted standing up for oneself and one’s mate” (1988, p.3), a form of hegemonic masculinity which I found discursively persists amongst adolescent boys at school.

‘The interplay of masculinity and education’

Although Connell’s (1989) work was not within schools, one of the groups he interviewed was “a group of young men from the working class, recently out of school, growing up in the face of structural unemployment and in the shadow of the prison system” (Connell, 2000, p.133). His research, therefore, is clearly related to Willis’ research and that of Walker in that they were also conducting research at a time of transition from school to work. Connell found that the young men responded to a particular kind of masculinity whereby ‘trouble’ was both gendered and sexualized. Although this research was conducted in 1989, an important contribution by Connell was his findings that the indirect and hidden effects of schooling were very powerful on the construction of masculinity. Indeed, the
‘hidden curriculum’ was more pronounced than the ‘explicit curriculum’ when issues of gender were part of education. The structure of education provides a system of academic hierarchy to prevail thus conferring power in the form of academic success to some students thus resulting in the need for appropriating other powers through hegemonic masculinities. The hidden effects of ‘failure’ or streaming were to “push groups of working-class boys towards alienation, and state authority provides them a perfect foil for the construction of a combative, dominance-focused masculinity” (Connell, 2000, p.147). From his research Connell, however, suggested that although school was powerful, it was not always the major influence on construction of masculinity but that “the childhood family, the adult workplace or sexual relationships (including marriage) as being more potent” (Connell, 2000, p.146).

In some ways, his ideas reinforce Willis’ conclusions that it is necessary to look beyond school to understand how cultural reproductions occur within schools. Although important, this is beyond the scope of this research. However, I would agree with Connell when he notes that schools are probably the ‘most strategic’ places where gains on gender relationships and democratization can take place. Thus I would argue that it is important to continue empirical research within schools to explore ways in which cultural reproductions and hegemonic masculinities continue to be reinforced or challenged and to introduce educational policies and strategies that can disrupt these cultural norms.

‘Straight/strait jackets for masculinity’

Frank (1993; 1994; 1999) conducted a study in 1987 and 1988 with fourteen adolescent males at high school aged 16 to 19 years. This was followed up with interviews in 1992 and 1993 with fourteen young men aged 16 to 20 years, and interviews in 1996 with twenty-three young men. He investigated what he saw as the acceptance and celebration of gender and sex relationships which privilege some and disadvantage others. Students’ compliance to hegemonic heterosexual masculinity provided them with perceived and actual privilege and power over others. Frank’s (1999, p.219) project, ‘Everyday Masculinities’, “explores the ordinary, routine, everyday/everynight activities of boys and men… [and] recognizes the messiness of life, including all the ambiguities, tensions and contradictions, as well as the privileges and pain that men experience”. His study illustrates collective and individual practices of masculinity on students’ lives at school, which include
demonstrating heterosexuality and a macho masculinity, the role of sport in exhibiting that they were ‘real men’, and the role of homophobia in policing hegemonic masculinity. These sites, and particularly the body and sexuality, provided a significant platform from which to explore the practice of masculinity in my research. Frank found that male sexuality, as a human agency was always present and clearly evident in conversations with students. He also found that students were aware of the social privilege, social power and freedom they gained when practicing a hegemonic heterosexual masculinity, and that they would lose these privileges if they did not engage (or were not seen to engage) in these practices. He argues that schools are implicated in a process that maintains heterosexual masculine privileges. The normalization of heterosexual masculinity permeates every social situation at school generating privileges that are difficult to challenge. Significantly, Frank highlights ways in which hegemonic masculinity influences the educational and social welfare of adolescent males at school.

‘The making of men’

Mac an Ghaill’s (1994a) research has been particularly influential in the areas of masculinities and sexualities at school. In an ethnographic study over a period of three years with mainly a cohort of Year 11 students (in the 1990/1991 school year) in a state secondary school in the United Kingdom, Mac an Ghaill investigated ways in which masculinities are socially constructed and regulated within schools. The majority of students were of working class background. He argues that it is important to reconceptualize schools as “complex gendered and heterosexual arenas” (1994a, p.4) in order to understand the complex interplay between masculinities, sexualities and schooling. Mac an Ghaill (1994a, p.4) suggests that schools inform and are informed by “differentiated masculinities and femininities and the power relations that are contained within them” and through his research examines ways in which dominant masculinities are reaffirmed within schooling.

Through the presentation of case studies, Mac an Ghaill explores the interplay of masculinities, sexuality, class, ethnicity and schooling. He argues that schools are microcultures of societies within which femininities and masculinities are resolved and lived out. Mac an Ghaill specifically examines how males become heterosexual males within the school environment, how schools help in the production of a range of masculinities and provide an environment whereby adolescent males thus police sex/gender categories and various forms of masculinities. He premises his research with the notion that “male heterosexual identity is a highly fragile socially
constructed phenomenon” (Mac an Ghaill, 1994a, p.9). Like Walker, Mac an Ghaill illustrates the role of masculinity in the hierarchical power structure in schools. Importantly, he considers ways in which masculinities are played out and impact students’ educational and social outcomes.

Mac an Ghaill (1994a, p.54) delineated a range of male groups within the school in an attempt to provide a “conceptual map, on which to try to make sense of students’ masculine formation in terms of their own intercultural meanings within the local conditions of a secondary school”. He identified specific versions of masculinities and categorized typologies of groups of working class students that foremost described students’ relationships to schooling. The students did not necessarily use these categories themselves. The categories identified were the Macho Lads, the Academic Achievers, the Real Englishmen and the New Enterprisers. The Macho Lads related to the more traditional working class males who were anti-school and the academic ‘failures’ who deemed work as meaningless and authority as hostile. The Macho Lads support and provide evidence of the persistence of a particular form of masculinity which Willis (1977) described approximately twenty years earlier as the Lads, and Walker (1988) categorized as the Competitors and the Footballers. The upwardly mobile Academic Achievers related to a group of academic ‘successes’. Although members of this group were at time harassed by other boys as effeminate, they claimed that their academic interests were different to females in an attempt to affirm their masculinity. The Real Englishmen were the newer middle class who had aspirations for the professions and believed in their own natural talents, and thus believed they were ‘above’ members of the Academic Achievers and the New Enterprisers. The New Enterprisers related to working class students who were concerned for their future careers and took up the new technological and vocational subjects. Mac an Ghaill found that his groups tended to be less defined and more fluid than previous researchers reported. Mac an Ghaill’s groups, other than the white Real Englishmen group, consisted of African Caribbean, Asian and white students.

Mac an Ghaill (1994a, p.41) explores “the curricular conditions that contributed to the production of dominant and subordinated student masculine subjectivities”. He argues that the vocationalization of the school curriculum led to a hierarchical re-stratification for low-status and high-status vocational arenas. Thus, students deskill or upskilled through their academic achievements. He found that the instillation of social discipline, which was previously provided through employment, was now reflected in the vocationalization of the curriculum at school. From
research on identified groups Mac an Ghaill found that new masculinities were becoming available for higher academic achievers based on new technological occupations such as computer studies. This provided a new route and flexibility for higher-academic achievers to move into a different socio-economic class through occupation-driven education. His research showed that teachers were active agents in this process of social mobility, particularly for the Academic Achievers and the New Enterprisers. He also found (white) teachers to be active agents in “the process of constructing a new hierarchy of ethnic masculinities” (1994a, p.49). Thus Mac an Ghaill suggests that new power relationships need to be examined in relation to the ‘sex/gender regime’. It is this exploration of new power relationships which I felt was particularly pertinent to my research.

Mac an Ghaill’s research builds on Willis’ and Walker’s conclusions relating to occupational links to processes of commodification, commercialization and rationalization which occur in schools whereby students in ‘lower’ academic groups continue to be directed into more practical-based vocational subjects that reflect the ‘masculine world of manual labour’. In addition, he suggests that new identities informed by a social shift in the understanding of masculinities are emerging within schools. He adds that schools not only actively construct gender divisions within the workplace and home, but also actively construct heterosexual divisions. Mac an Ghaill’s research proves valuable in the way it highlights ways in which boys are marked or marginalized when they do not conform to acceptable boundaries of dominant masculinities. Mac an Ghaill particularly highlights the role of homophobia in the sex/gender regime where specific forms of masculinity are defined against femininity and homosexuality. These hegemonic forms of masculinity preclude open discussion of ‘emotional’ issues with other boys, thus a sense of loneliness is conveyed. Although I found some evidence of a ‘Macho Lads’ form of masculinity in my research, I concentrated more on how students made sense of the schooling environment and the ways in which this contributed to their creation of subjectivities and their understanding of their own masculinity.

Mac an Ghaill acknowledges the work of feminist, gay, lesbian, and non-white theories in the field of gender studies and notes how white heterosexual males continue to refuse to engage with and thus marginalize this work. In his research Mac an Ghaill also explores young gay men’s perspectives. He writes that “the young gay men in this study are especially perceptive in analyzing dominant male heterosexual power relations that pervade all young people’s coming-of-age in
England in the 1990s” (1994a, p.168). In my research homophobia emerges as a significant issue impacting on the policing and regulation of the boys’ masculinities and supports Mac an Ghaill’s claim for the need to conduct further research into its impact on boys at school.

‘Exploding the myth of the ‘black macho’ lad’

Tony Sewell conducted an ethnographical study in an inner city boys’ comprehensive school in the Greater London area. Although the locale of the school was a middle class suburb, the students commuted from ‘one of the most socially deprived areas of the city’. Out of 500 students, 62 were of Asian origin, 63 of African origin, 140 of African-Caribbean origin, 31 mixed-race students, 127 white boys and 23 others. Sewell found that African-Caribbean males were one of the most likely groups (by six times) to be excluded from school. In his words, he tried to unpack some of the oversimplifications that exist in the current debate about boys’ underachievement … [particularly where] African-Caribbean boys have been seen in this context as a unified lump, who underachieve academically and are driven by a phallocentric revenge impulse to repair their oppressed maleness.

(Sewell, 1995, p.124)

In his research, Sewell specifically looked at the interconnections of blacks and underachievement. He used Merton’s (1957) typology of ways in which students negotiated schooling, the conformists, the innovators, the retreatists and the rebels, but argued that students did not remain in these fixed categories with none of the group being unified in a simple fashion. However, by using these categories he found that 41 per cent of student participants were conformists who accepted both the means and goals of education, 35 per cent were innovators who accepted the goals but rejected the means of education, 6 per cent were retreatists who rejected both, and the rest were rebels who rejected both the means and goals and replaced these with their own agenda. Thus Sewell found no evidence to suggest that males were less positive than girls in respect of schooling with only 24 per cent of the boys rejecting both the means and goals of schooling.

Sewell also found that students felt that belonging to ‘the Posse’ (a gang of fifteen-year-old African-Caribbean males) provided power. Members of ‘the Posse’ believed that the school system had ‘failed them’. Their understanding of ‘manhood’ related to what Sewell calls the ‘money/sex dynamic’, which relates to
the ability of making money and babies. Thus disliking the ways in which they were treated like kids, students felt they had outgrown school. Sewell showed ways in which African-Caribbean boys were able to negotiate their own differing positions within an environment that perceived them as a unified unchaining group. My own research is able to incrementally add to knowledge relating to how non-whites are able to ‘fit in’ given a white Eurocentric style of education in the Australian context in an exploration of how one Indigenous Australian male student negotiates a racialized school environment.

‘Humour and the production of heterosexual hierarchies’

Kehily and Nayak (1997, p.69) explore “the role of humour in the cultures of young men at school”. Their research was conducted in two secondary schools in the West Midlands, UK between 1992 and 1994. The schools were located in predominantly working-class areas. The participants were both male and female, mainly white but also included some African-Caribbean, South Asian and ‘mixed heritage’. Kehily and Nayak used qualitative methods which included participant observations, group discussions and semi-structured interviews. They conducted approximately 100 interviews with teachers and students.

Kehily and Nayak (1997, p.69) suggest that “humorous exchanges are constitutive of heterosexual masculine identities [and] argue that humour is a technique utilised for the regulation of masculinities and the negotiation of gender-sexual hierarchies within pupil cultures”. They found that humour was deployed in the construction of differentiated heterosexuality which positioned students within ‘differing dominant and subordinate peer group sexual cultures’. Humour was also used to fashion and regulate conformity to sex and gender norms, and to structure masculine performances. Male students who did not conform to the practice of heterosexual masculinity were derided with ‘humorous rituals’ and thus became targets of abuse and banter.

Kehily and Nayak suggest that humour is comprised of masculine identities so that the ritual of humour enables hegemonic heterosexual masculinities to be continually displayed and for uncertainties and fears to be displaced. Through their research they reveal that humour has disciplining effects on students’ sex/gender identities at schools. Nayak and Kehily (2001, p.121) also suggest that humour is an ‘organizing principle’ in schoolboys’ lives and used as “a regulatory technique in
the way that boys performed their masculinities”. They found that humour was used as a way to ridicule when students did not conform to practices of heterosexual masculinity. When students in my research introduced gay issues, my observations of teacher and students’ reaction in the class support Kehily and Nayak’s ideas that humour is used as a disciplining force in regulating and fashioning heterosexual masculinity. Nayak and Kehily (2001) found evidence of the persistence of Willis’ ‘Lads’ and the need to exhibit a particular form of heterosexual masculinity associated with manual labour despite a difference in economic and employment climate since the 1970s. They thus question the need for ‘lads’ to continue to ‘learn to laugh’ when these boys no longer need to ‘learn to labour’.

Kehily (2001, p.173) further examines “the ways in which sexualities are shaped and lived through pupil cultures that are often marginalized or overlooked by teachers and rarely find their way into the official curriculum”. She shows how hegemonic masculinities are enacted in schools and constitutive through the ‘normative presence of heterosexuality’ that also emphasizes the fragile nature of sex/gender categories. Kehily’s findings provided insights into specific hegemonic practices of masculinities exhibited by students in my study, and provided a platform from which to explore homophobia and performances of hegemonic masculinities in more depth.

‘Failing boys’

In an ethnographic work Epstein (1998) interviewed gay and lesbian young people who attended school during the late 1980s and early 1990s. She found that schools were a difficult site for gay and lesbians to come out. Although Epstein did not specifically investigate and thus did not ask questions relating to boys’ academic achievement, she found that ‘scholastic’ boys were very often given “as the identifying marker for being the subject of bullying and of homophobic abuse” (1998, p.98). This was independent of the type of school attended. This supports Mac an Ghaill’s findings in relating to problems encountered by the group he named Academic Achievers.

Epstein examines how homophobia plays a central part in the construction and policing of heterosexual masculinities at school. Thus to deviate from the normality of heterosexual masculinities is punishable by harassment and by the way in which heterosexuality can be made compulsory. Males who are not ‘macho’, and females,
are defined against ‘normative heterosexual masculinities’ and become ‘Others’. Epstein suggests most boys define their masculinity against these ‘Others’. She shows that “homophobia is constitutive of normative heterosexual masculinities in schools and is also part of the daily misogyny of boys and male teachers alike” (1997, p.113) such that homophobia and misogyny are inseparable. Epstein thus found that boys felt they had to be ‘macho’ and, like teachers, to distance themselves from any form of homosexuality. She thus highlights the role of homophobia in the lives of teachers and boys at school. A ‘presumption of heterosexuality’ also effectively results in the practice of homophobia becoming normalized in schools. Epstein’s findings relating to a discourse of normative heterosexual masculinity were initially evident in my study but interviews also showed the complexities and difficulties of accessing alternative discourses. Although Epstein believes that greater research in the area is necessary, her work suggests that the ways in which males fashion acceptable types of masculinity hinders their own academic success, but is also at the expense of females and other boys perceived as ‘not real boys’.

‘Masculinity goes to school’

Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) conducted a study in one primary and one secondary school in Queensland, Australia to specifically explore boys’ attitudes and interpretations relating to schooling. Group and individual interviews were conducted with both secondary and primary students. They included primary students in their study because up until then primary students were underrepresented in youth culture research. Although my research focuses on a Year 10 secondary group, I have included Gilbert and Gilbert’s finding from both secondary and primary schools to show the similar ways in which hegemonic masculinity affects children of all ages.

Gilbert and Gilbert (1998, p.132) found that “primary school boys interviewed had a pragmatic view of school”. They also found that from an early age sport, getting into trouble, and walking around in groups and gangs was considered ‘cool’. Primary boys identified the stereotypes of nerds and scruffs (or oppositional boys who openly rejected school) but tended to place themselves in between the two stereotypes. Primary school boys thus emphasized how they completed schoolwork for pragmatic reasons such as preparation for high school, so that they could then do something else. They avoided ideas that they could in fact like school and
schoolwork. Gilbert and Gilbert found that secondary school boys tended to view themselves similarly as in between the stereotypes but tended to be more blunt about their ideas. Secondary students’ pragmatic approach was, however, problematic for them if they wanted to succeed at school and retain a hegemonic form of masculinity because of the implicit contradiction.

Group interviews showed that primary boys found security and confidence in being part of a majority and so would present themselves as “out to have a good time, but pragmatic in their understanding that school success was important” (R. Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998, p.136). During individual interviews, however, the primary boys presented a less-clear stereotypical picture and showed that family approval was important, embarrassment at school was feared, but a masculine emphasis that to be seen as active was important. Students generally felt they could be ‘good’ at school if they also were involved in sports.

Gilbert and Gilbert conclude that oppositions—masculine/feminine, active/passive, sporting/bookish, popular/isolated, and playing/reading—continue to be significant when boys are constructing their own form of masculinity. Students therefore struggle with the construction of a form of masculinity that is satisfactory to them. This struggle involves ‘competing with and putting down alternatives’ and effectively conflict with any desires relating to schoolwork success. When constructing and securing an acceptable masculinity within a classroom environment, students experience tensions brought about by power relationships. Boys are expected to behave in particular ways in school and this affects their social relationships and academic achievements. Gilbert and Gilbert surmise that discourses of masculinity, as practiced at home and with leisure groups, conflict with discourses of schooling and the literate child. Discourses of sexuality and ethnicity add to the tensions. Gilbert and Gilbert’s conclusions provided an important platform in my own research in that students recognized how opposites were constructing their own masculinities. However, as a consequence of this recognition my research reveals ways in which they were at times able to challenge the deeply ingrained dichotomous nature of gender.

‘Interrogating masculinities’

Martino (1998a, p.50) argues that masculinity is “an effect of a set of techniques and regimes of practices which are tied to particular categories of the self in their
historical and cultural specificity”. His research conducted with boys at a middle socio-economic status high school in Perth, Western Australia investigated ways in which adolescent male students fashioned their masculinities. Martino explores masculinity within a framework that is non-dialectical by using Foucault as a tool, and suggests that students are not split, gendered subjects. He also argues that there is not one masculinity but many.

Martino (1998a, p.531) suggests that “texts can and do become implicated in the production of masculinity”. Readings of different masculinities, however, may not be available to students because they are not required to problematize masculinity on any kind of regular basis. Martino’s research required boys to problematize masculinity. He suggests that boys refuse to engage with particular types of literary texts. He found that students did not read for gender or masculinity but read within a hegemonic masculine interpretation of text. Martino (1998a, p.624) posits that the “literature classroom is an ideal site for deploying certain texts within pedagogical regimes designed to strategically target the effects and the politics of masculinities”. I take Martino’s premises relating adolescent boys’ engagement or lack of engagement with particular types of literary texts and focus my research in the literature classroom using specific texts.

Martino’s (1995; 1999b; 2001) research shows how many adolescent boys identify English and particularly literacy as feminized subject areas. His data demonstrates ways in which masculinity is perceived to be in opposition to literacy, whereby hegemonic masculinity is empowering and enables engagement with more powerful discourses than those of literacy and English. Martino identifies how rejection of ‘feminized practices’ of the English classroom is exhibited in ways in which homophobia often regulates male students’ participation in the English classroom. Taking on the construction of hegemonic masculinity together with its strength and power leads to a disassociation, and as Martino shows, also a pride of this disassociation with subjects such as English and literacy. Thus by their post-compulsory years, boys do not perceive English and literacy as significant school subject.

Martino (1999b) also argues that to be adept at sports is often more important to adolescent males than to achieve academically. Sports are thus used to create specific school environments and cultures, particularly in middle class schools with students from higher socio-economic backgrounds. The macho connection to sports
(Martino, 1999b) and the ways in which mucking around in class was connected, by the middle class students, to being ‘cool’ and being tough (Martino, 2000b) is reminiscent of the anti-school construction of masculinity of working class males in Willis’ (1977) study.

‘Boys, girls and achievement’

Francis (2000) takes up the challenge provided by the media that there is a ‘crisis of masculinity’ and that girls are out-performing boys at school. She found that “boys as a whole were not underachieving” (2000, p.122) but that “results were actually improving year on year” (2000, p.122). She found that “other structural differences, such as social class, actually have a greater impact on achievement than does gender” (2000, p.122). Her research was conducted in three different secondary schools in the London area during the school year 1998-1999. Students were in the 14-16 age groups and represented various ethnic groups and various social classes, although the majority from each school was from working class backgrounds. My fieldwork was at a similar time in Perth, Australia during the school year 1999 and the amount of research conducted around this time period worldwide supports Francis’ notion that research on masculinity within the academic arena was on the increase. Through classroom observations Francis aimed at observing the gendered interactions in classrooms and then, through interviews, to question students regarding their opinions and their interpretations of the interactions.

Francis’ research shows the importance for students to somehow ‘fit in’ at school. Students’ efforts to portray their gender often meant that their behaviour changed within the classroom to explicate their delineation. Thus females used feminine characteristics and behaviour such as appearances and chatting to construct their femininity, and males used masculine behaviour, such as dominance and violence, homophobia and attention to heterosexuality to construct themselves as masculine. To study academically remains a non-masculine image and Francis found that more boys than girls feared the label of being ‘too studious’. She found that primary school perceptions such as girls were ‘sensible’ and boys were ‘silly’ were transformed to girls were ‘mature’ and boys wanted to ‘have a laugh’ or were ‘immature’. The construction of gender was in relational opposition for males and females.
Hegemonic forms of masculinity and femininity had the effect that enabled students to construct themselves as ‘normal’. Francis (2000, p.119) argues that “one of the facets that made pupils potentially popular or desirable was their successful construction of gender”. The successful construction of gender was that they were seen to be ‘normal’. This supports Salisbury and Jackson’s (1996) observation that “boys’ ‘macho’ … constructions of masculinity are hindering their own learning at school” (Francis, 2000, p.120). Francis (1999) earlier found that two thirds of students interviewed, including two thirds of the boys, believed that boys’ ‘laddish’ behaviour was detrimental to their learning at school. On the other hand, her classroom observations support the notion that boys’ laddish behaviour was in fact detrimental to other students’ learning. However, Francis points out that all students did not take up the hegemonic forms of masculinity and femininity and in part of my research I was able to examine ways in which students challenged hegemonic forms of masculinity. Francis notes that to not ‘fit in’ would often lead to being bullied, ostracized or marginalized and she alerts us to the ways in which homophobic labels such as ‘sissy’ were used when male students were not ‘masculine’ or ‘macho’. Francis found that boys constructed masculinity in different ways, from rejection of school values to inclusion of specific school values such as competition. She also found that some boys did not construct themselves as masculine. However, she found that a ‘laddish’ construction was the most acceptable form of masculinity for 14-16 year olds.

Francis has contributed to the ‘poor boys’ debate by showing that a ‘laddish’ construction of masculinity tends to have negative effects on boys’ learning and by showing that girls have greater motivation for achieving. Her research supports the findings of Collins et al. (2000) and Kenway et al. (1997). Her research is also significant because it highlights how ‘having a laugh’ can enhance the power of some boys at school. Francis (2000, p.131) suggests that “we need to encourage boys to understand the consequences of their behaviour and to expand their constructions and outlooks”. However, strategies to “combat underachievement in schools” should be “based on sound research and clear understanding of gender issues” (Francis, 2000, p.132). She suggests that much of the strategies to combat underachievement do not take into account the laddish gender culture.

Like Francis I have not categorized boys into groups such as the Footballers (J. Walker, 1988) or the Lads (Willis, 1977). I agree that although such labels effectively illustrate ways in which males fashion masculinity in different ways, out
of context these new labels become reified and students do not conform to the categories in all situations at all times. However, I have also avoided comparing males and females as again comparisons too easily become oppositions while differences within groups are ignored. Francis’ comparison of male and female students is very useful in presenting a picture of interactions in co-educational schools, but it is also important to examine how boys react when in isolation from female students. My study in a privileged boys’ school environment presents representations from a single sex environment and examines what males say about other males and about females, how they relate to females and envisage female roles in society thus further contributing to the understanding of societal constructions of femininity and masculinity.

‘Uncertain masculinities’

In their research O’Donnell and Sharpe (2000, p.2) examine ways in which “boys’ attitudes are gendered and, in particular, how they come to think and behave as ‘masculine’”. Their research was conducted with Year 11 students (most of whom were 15 or 16 years of age) in four London schools. Questionnaires were given to 262 boys, and 44 of these boys were interviewed. Just over fifty per cent of the students were working class.

O’Donnell and Sharpe found that although some boys felt threatened by the achievements made by girls, through specialization and subject choices boys were able to gain some gender advantages at school. They found that boys expressed how they were more ‘troublesome’ than girls both inside and out of school, but that it was only outside of school that they were able to convey their ‘real’ values. O’Connell and Sharpe (2000. p.87) found that groups were more often ‘formed on ethnic lines’ and that “social class-based anti-school subcultures … did not appear to have strongly developed in the schools”. They mention one group that came to their attention which was the ethnically based self-styled ‘Underachievers’. However, they suggest that the most common type of masculinity constructed by students was the ‘mixed up man’, which were males “who had learned something from the gender equality agenda but still retained significantly patriarchal and sexist attitudes and patterns of behaviour” (2000, p.87). O’Donnell and Sharpe found that although racism and sexism were often considered unjustified and unfair, racism and sexism remained a part of students’ everyday discourse.
‘Shifting masculinities in classroom talk’

In an ethnographic study conducted in a co-educational Catholic school in rural New South Wales in 1990, Nilan (2000) ‘problematises the discourse of masculinity in the co-educational classroom’. The site chosen was a drama elective class for Year 9 and Year 10 students. She suggests that the exhibition of ‘masculine’ behaviour was crucial in a subject such as drama which is considered a ‘feminine’ subject. Nilan analyzed the boy-girl interactions using discourse and content analysis techniques with features such as suggestion, expansion and clarification. She concludes that masculinity at school is not a fixed social identity but a ‘social accomplishment’. Consequently, even when patterns appeared similar, situations were different and new and thus demanded an upgrade of presentation of a masculine identity or even a reinvention into a different man. Her research suggests that students changed their specific behaviours in different situations in a “process of ‘becoming’ adult men in each life interaction” (2000, p.67) whereby closure on a fixed single masculinity is not achieved. Although researching in an all boys’ school, I found some of Nilan’s observations as significant in this different environment where specific forms of masculinities, such as those related to ‘the gentlemen’, were more acceptable and were thus part of a ‘social accomplishment’.

‘Schooling the boys’

Although Skelton conducted her study in the primary sector I have included her research because, like Willis (1977) and Mac an Ghaill (1994a) amongst others, she highlights the importance of the local in the construction of masculinities. The reminiscent laddish behaviour (Francis, 2000; Willis, 1977) and macho style (Mac an Ghaill, 1994a; J. Walker, 1988) is also evident at the primary level. In one primary school Skelton (1996) found that a specific form of masculinity was evident within the school. The specific form of masculinity, characterized by intimidation, physical aggression and competition, was reflected from the wider community within which the school was situated. Her findings support the notion that forms of hegemonic masculinities are socially created, are not ‘fixed’ and will vary at different sites. Skelton (2001) found that hegemonic forms of masculinity were integrated into management and control strategies at schools, thus affecting ways in which both girls and boys were positioned or positioned themselves within school. She argues that in order to confront the problem of boys it is important for schools to recognize these dominant patterns and forms of masculinities operating within
their sites and which schools themselves construct. At the same time she warns against creating strategies that focus exclusively on boys.

Skelton’s (2001) ethnographical research was conducted over one year in the north east of England in two inner city primary schools: a Year 2 class (6-7 year olds) and a Year 5 class (9-10 year olds). Her main concern was the ways in which primary schools constructed specific hegemonic images of boys, how schoolboys negotiated these dominant forms and how schoolgirls’ experiences were affected by ‘masculinity’. Through feminist perspective a central issue was the examination of male power. She also explored ways in which primary aged boys learned to position females negatively.

Skelton (1997b) found that students’ oppositional constructions of gender potentially empowered males and disempowered females whereby boys’ construction of masculinity was itself a source of power. Skelton showed that issues relating to sexual harassment are situated within institutional hegemonic masculinity which varies at different schools. She found that primary male students drew upon, negotiated and rejected features of hegemonic masculinity of their particular school when they constructed, negotiated and re-constructed their own masculinities within their peer groups. However, in earlier research Skelton (1997a) also found that the educational achievement of female continued to improve despite the masculine dominance of the curriculum content and the ways in which male students continued to dominate in the classroom in terms interactions and of demand on teachers’ time. She questions the popular rhetoric that females at school are achieving at the expense of males.

‘Challenging violence in schools: An issue of masculinities’

Mills (2001a) conducted case studies in two schools in Queensland, Australia. He interviewed students in three age groups of 13-14, 16-17, 17-18 years of age. He also interviewed teachers. He specifically looks at violence in order to address concerns of male masculinities. His data suggests that violence is predominantly performed by males, directed against marginalized groups and that it is homophobic, racist and gendered. Mills identifies four signifiers of masculinity which point to a hierarchy of masculinities. These are sport as a culture, work as an important outcome of education, men’s power over women and men’s power over other men.
Writing from a pro-feminist perspective Mills (2000b, p.221) suggests that male teachers have a responsibility to “challenge the existing gender order”. His research is significant to the field of schooling masculinities in that he shows how male teachers are able to challenge existing gender orders through programs that confront male privileges but not with the aim of empowering male students. Mills (2000b) found that some males may feel powerless, but at times they may also be the oppressors. He suggests that respect rather than empowerment is necessary. Mills proposes that confronting male privileges includes the exploration with male students of the relationships between violence and hegemonic masculinities. In my research I found that the confrontation of male privilege could be conducted by exploration through texts and discussions, but that access to discourses other than hegemonic masculine discourses often remained indistinct and at times allusive.

Reflections

The purpose of this literature review has been to highlight issues within the field of masculinities and to provide an overview of significant research in the area of schooling masculinities. The research analyzed generally supports the notion that in schools middle class students are educated for middle class jobs and working class students are schooled for working class jobs through the persistence of strong implicit discourses identified by Dr Arnold as early as the nineteenth century and expressed by Connell (2000) in my opening quote for this literature review. However, research also highlights the complexities surrounding the stubbornness of dominant discourses that lay claim to this notion and the resistance to changes. Some of the earlier empirical research reinforces this notion and identifies particular groups within a working class culture, for example the Lads (Willis, 1977), the Footballers (J. Walker, 1988), and the Macho Lads (Mac an Ghaill, 1994a). These studies represent an important contribution to our understanding of schoolboy cultures and of masculinities at school. Research in the 1980s and 1990s opened up discussions in the field of schooling masculinities and showed ways in which a range of masculinities are influenced by ethnicity, social class, and sexuality and vary depending on the local sites. The growing research in masculinities shows how “international continuities are emerging” (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2001, p.33) whereby ‘real boys’ are constructed in opposition to females and the feminine or in opposition to a feminized version of masculinity. Renewed concern over male students’ perceived underachievement at school thus led to the consideration of hegemonic masculinities and multiple dimensions of masculinities together with the
related power relationships. Recent research also identified situational dimensions of the construction of masculinities which included gender interactions, violence linked to masculinity and sexuality issues in schools. It is acknowledged that masculinity is fragile and variable, that gendered males are also racialized and sexualized, and that students can construct and reconstruct their own masculinity depending on the situation.

From this literature review it is clear that peer groups play an important role in male students’ negotiation, renegotiation and acceptance or rejection of hegemonic masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity appears to be institutionalized within the education system so that alternative masculinities are difficult to access. A recurring idea is that students want to and need to ‘fit in’. Thus a normalization occurs in the process of negotiation where particular types of masculinities, such as the macho-type masculinity, are considered the ‘norm’. Research continues to show that students who do not easily fit into dominant masculine groups are often alienated, marginalized or labelled through homophobic references. The strength of homophobia within educational institutions remains. In relation to this normalization of dominant masculinity discourse, the theme of power and hierarchical masculinities reoccurs in pertinent research, whereby males identify with particular groups or particular types of masculinity in order to feel empowered. Writing from a feminist perspective, I would concur with Mills (2000a) that it is important not to introduce educational policies and strategies with an aim for the empowerment of males since the issue at stake is not similar to the earlier feminist movement to empower females who were, as a generalized group, disadvantaged. Instead, it is crucial to implement strategies that enable male students to explore various masculinities and to provide students with skills to access alternative discourses to the dominant hegemonic masculinity ones.

From the research examined it is apparent that not all males conform to what is perceived to be the ‘norm’ and to dominant masculine discourses, which can lead to marginalization. However, some males are able to challenge discourses of hegemonic masculinity and go on to succeed. Research clearly indicates that there are no simplistic answers, particularly in respect to the implementation of educational policies and strategies. Indeed, it is apparent from empirical research that a range of issues needs to be considered in order to address the educational needs of boys. I found a ‘group indicator’ approach, whereby a group is defined by a single criterion such as boys, or middle class boys, to be problematic at times because there
is a risk of ignoring the differences within the group. There is also a danger of highlighting differences between groups at the expense of differences within groups, for example boys’ characteristics being perceived as opposite to girls’ characteristics. I have therefore approached my research through a focus on analyzing the situationally specific formation and negotiation of subjectivities in adolescent boys’ lives in a localized context in one particular single sex boys’ school. Through this approach I draw attention to how sexuality and ‘race’/ethnicity is implicated in gender and social class in individual boys’ lives at school. I highlight specific effects of masculinity through a focus on students’ responses to and engagement with specific texts and their female teacher in the English classroom. In this way I also produce further knowledge about the gendered relations and effects of particular pedagogical practices and their influence on male students’ fashioning and negotiation of their masculinities.

In this chapter I have highlighted empirical research in the field of schooling masculinities that has greatly influenced my own research. In the next two chapters I explore literature pertaining to the implications of relevant social constructs such as gender and masculinities, social class and ‘race’/ethnicity, and explore the theoretical perspectives underpinning my research.
CHAPTER 3
MALES AND MASCULINITIES:
LINKING SOCIAL CONSTRUCTS

Male heterosexual identity is a highly fragile socially constructed phenomenon. The question that emerges here is: How does this fragile construction become represented as an apparently stable, unitary category with fixed meanings?

(Mac an Ghaill, 1994a, p.9)

Introduction

In this chapter I elaborate a theoretical conceptual framework that informs my research into adolescent masculinities in one single sex boys’ school. In so doing I highlight, as Mac an Ghaill claims, that hegemonic masculinities, though often represented as ‘apparently stable’ and ‘fixed’ are negotiated in complex ways by individual boys. In this sense, I draw on feminist poststructuralist and critical sociological theoretical frameworks to explore how gender, social class, ‘race’/ethnicities, sexuality and whiteness impact on the way individual boys at one particular school fashion and negotiate their masculinities.

Constructed subjectivities

In my research I investigate factors that contribute to the shaping of subjectivities of adolescent males within one classroom setting. In this section I explore some of the literature pertaining to issues of constructed subjectivities to provide depth and background to the topic. The social construction of masculinities and femininities contributes to the ways in which adolescent males represent themselves. Boys and girls are treated differently from birth, so children learn what it is to be masculine and what it is to be feminine from an early age at home and at school (Archer & Lloyd, 1985; Davies, 1989b, 1989c; P. Gilbert, 1997; E. Jordan, 1995; Kenway & Willis, 1995; J. Mosse, 1993; Poynton, 1985; Rosser, 1988). Schools are powerful sites where children learn to be male or female. The social construction of
gender—and more specifically for my research the construction of hegemonic masculinity—restricts choices for males and females at school. With Yelland (1998, p.1), I would suggest that the social “construction of gender is a systematic process that begins at birth and is continually shaped, moulded and reshaped throughout life, according to the sex of the newborn”.

Socially constructed roles have further implications when different gender roles are considered. Connell (1989, p.300) suggests that “the hidden curriculum in sexual politics is more powerful than the explicit curriculum”. Results from other studies (S. Acker, 1994; Spender, 1989; Weiner, 1994b) reveal that through the hidden curriculum males are implicitly considered more important. Boys are often praised for ‘male’ achievements and girls for ‘girlness’, to the extent that language becomes masculine or feminine. Clark (1990, p.13) gives pertinent examples of perceived gender characteristics when teachers would describe students with phrases such as “She’s naturally quiet” or “He’s naturally boisterous”. In this way expectations are reinforced and fulfilled. The idea that girls and boys are particular kinds of learners can be taken further and subsequently lead to females taking feminine subjects and males taking masculine subjects at school as a means of establishing their gender, and thus reinforcing the ‘naturalized’ binary nature of gender (Davies, 1993b). This reinforces the dichotomy between ‘hard’ sciences for males versus the ‘soft’ sciences more often chosen by females.

Schools represent a central arena where learning takes place. It is also one of the places where social class, ‘race’/ethnicity and gender are constructed. Pinar (1993, p.60) suggests that it is at school where “arguments over the curriculum are also arguments over who we are … including how we wish to represent ourselves to our children”. Indeed, schools can actively shape or change the future. Thus, as Griffiths further elaborates:

> Education is concerned with both individual and collective well-being. It is highly personal and individual, and also highly social, political and public. To put this another way, education can only be understood as a practice, in a particular social and historical context, but it also depends on the unique-ness of personal relationships, constructed as they are within social and political structures.
> (Griffiths, 1998, p.66)

Many societies, like Australia, are multicultural, multisexual and multiracial. Despite this, ethnic groups have often been denied access to their history and culture through the school curriculum. At the same time, it is also within school curricula where
‘whiteness’ is accepted as the norm, while other ethnic characteristics are devalued or repressed. Thus underlying racism goes unchecked, while allowing Eurocentric values to remain dominant. For example, Australian history is usually taught as beginning with European people ‘discovering’ this land, inferring that prior indigenous ownership does not really constitute history per se. Although European movement to Australia is part of Australia’s history, it is not necessarily the most significant part for the Indigenous people living in Australia. School curricula can thus communicate powerful images through its representation of identity, ‘race’ and difference (Pinar, 1993), and images of who we are can be shaped and re-created within the educational system. The ways in which the multicultural element relating to the backgrounds of students intersected with the white middle class Eurocentric values of the school provided some understandings of the power of representation.

Rhedd-Jones (1995) suggests that the school curriculum, even from the primary level, contributes to developing different skills for females and males. The different skills enable males to become successful in the materialistic world whilst females move more towards a gendered ‘fantasy’ world. Since different skills can be developed through activities such as writing from as early as eight years of age, schools become an important arena for awareness and possible changes. Some feminists have long argued that the performance of masculinity plays a dominant role within schools (Mills, 1997) and the hegemonic construction of masculinity affects social positionings for females as well as males. The existing situation for shaping subjectivities in particular gendered ways needs to be transformed if equity for females and males is to be achieved. Gilbert and Gilbert (1995) support Weedon’s recognition of the non-existent un-gendered space for female students within schools. An un-gendered space is also recognizable for male students whose actions and words either comply with, or resist, hegemonic male norms. Like females, males are not a homogenous group but must be seen as being positioned and positioning themselves within social and cultural discourses.

**Gender is not neutral**

My feminism came from the suburbs, where I knew no white, middle-class woman with children who had a job or any major activities beyond the family. Yet, though a girl, I was promised education, offered the pretence of gender neutrality. This island of illusions was a small world...

(Snitow, 1996, p.534)
Pretence to neutrality benefits specific groups of males through identification of feminine and masculine roles where these roles exist in binary opposition to each other. Classification by gender affects our lives and makes it impossible to be ‘gender neutral’ in our society (Bordo, 1990). Beliefs and attitudes are coloured through identification with either socially ascribed femininity or masculinity within a particular culture (Dauphin et al., 1996). Some males remain advantaged. This advantage forms part of a deeply ingrained ideology where females can clearly identify advantages to being male but where males can identify very few advantages to being female (Commeyras & Montsi, 2000). Although femininity and masculinity are constructed culturally, they “become permanent sites of a political struggle over meanings which have real effects for individuals” (G. Jordan & Weedon, 1995, p.185). Thus the socially constructed categories of ‘women’ and ‘men’ homogenize females and males while they disguise their association with ethnic and social class identities (Pettman, 1992) and effectively reinforce their links with femininity and masculinity.

Apple (1993) suggests that in the past, given the way a ‘zero-sum game’ is deployed by dominant groups in society, gains by females have regrettably sometimes been made at the expense of ethnic minority groups. This increases divisions between females and ethnic minority groups, and strengthens dominant masculine discourses. Misrepresentation is possible if distinctions are not made. For example, there are crucial differences—such as income, prestige and power—between an elite female working abroad and a disempowered female from the third world (Behdad, 1993). Additionally, different cultures stress different values and thus produce different experiences and understandings. For example, research in the United States found that in Latino cultures mothers often taught their daughters that females were inferior to males, whereas African American mothers seemed to warn daughters of males’ ‘undependability’ and ‘unreliability’ (Chodorow, 1994). Indeed, identities of females are multiple and associated with such factors as culture and social class interacting in a complex way to produce different experiences. The ways in which identities are multiple and fractured are equally applicable to males. In Australia this means that for some groups, for example Indigenous Australian males, issues that need to be confronted are not only influenced by hegemonic masculinity in a Eurocentric environment, but also need to be confronted in their own cultural setting. Thus, as I found in my research, Indigenous Australians also need to deal with issues of racism that effectively
position Indigenous males and females as the ‘Other’. Issues of racism that position students as ‘Other’ also affect other ‘non-white’ students.

**Gender is not synonymous with female**

Gender has generally been associated with females and gender policies in schools (see for example Kenway & Willis, 1993; Yates, 1993) have often been aimed at females and been implemented specifically to help female students improve. However, it is important to recognize that “gender performs an invaluable function in analysing how women and men are made rather than born” (Oakley, 1997, pp.29-30), thus recognizing how gender functions as a crucial tool for analyzing ways in which males as well as females are socially constructed. However, gender is persistently treated as a question relating to social differences rather than treating differences as consequences of the way gender has been socially constructed. In other words, gender becomes the “sexualization of inequality rather than an explanation of this inequality itself” (Oakley, 1997, p.51).

Gender issues relate to both males and females and contradictions should be seen as “evidence of political differences” and not as “some sort of failure”. Indeed, it is possible to become more aware and “more competent readers of the culture” (Kenway, Willis, Blackmore, & Rennie, 1994, p.196) by providing a positive step towards self-awareness and towards deconstructing ‘naturalism’ as it is often perceived. Instead of focusing on girls as the problem, there is a need to address issues of masculinity in boys’ and girls’ lives at school. Wright maintains that:

> A feminist approach to male subjects must be ventured, in part because they must also be rendered as private persons influenced by women and involved in the social reproductions of gender relations in the intimate as well as the extradomestic arenas…

(Marica Wright cited in Reinhartz, 1992, pp.142-143)

My thesis goes some way towards discovering ways of changing dominant discourses and stereotypes, through exploration of pedagogical exchanges within classrooms. Feminism enables boundaries to be stretched but it is important not to think of feminism as only for females or as in opposition to males. Gender is often coded to mean women (as race is often coded to mean black) – so that “men’s spaces are frequently represented as ungendered or neutral” (Pettman, 1992, p.61). Ungendered or neutral representations are questioned by writers such as Griffiths (1995). Within classrooms, teachers aware of ways in which ideologies and
stereotypes restrict students can effectively question such representations. Male students need to acknowledge such ungendered and neutral representations for changes to take place (Mills, 2000b) and for them to question representations which relate to negative stereotypes and non-hegemonic masculinities. In my research I explore ways in which ideologies and stereotypes are effectively challenged on a more permanent basis.

While males and females may be biologically different, cultural traits of femininity and masculinity are often treated by society as opposites. The fluidity and political power of sex and gender differences effectively disappears so that sex means gender and gender means sex. In a previous study (Hatchell, 1997) I found that female students often did not want to be treated in an opposite way to males, but felt that society often demanded that they were. Gender inequality is frequently “built and legitimated” because of “biological differences” (McNay, 1994, p.99). Although males are “not exploited or oppressed by sexism” (hooks, 1998, p.270), they may still suffer as a consequence. Gender may not necessarily be the most significant component of a male’s identity, but it may have a relational influence with other social constructs like ethnicity. For students in my study, their middle class status as males immediately places them in a privileged position and thus affects their experiences. Similar to experiences for females, experiences for males will also be influenced by, for example, their ‘race’/ethnicity, social class, and sexuality.

Although we are all multipositioned in variable degrees at different times, theorists like Davies (1996; 1997) and Kenway (1996) criticize the dichotomous structuring of gender. There appears to be an inevitability in the way binary pairs are or have been constructed: male/female, white/black, we/they, us/them. Binary pairs become so fundamental to our way of thinking that often “we do not even notice ourselves using them to make sense of the world” (Davies, 1998, p.289). This ‘western’ definition of feminine/masculine dichotomy has been challenged by most feminisms (Hekman, 1990). Butler (1990) explores how the binary nature of gender maintains stable gender identities, often defined hierarchically, at the expense of, for example, gay people. Ferber (1998) cites Derrida as proposing that it is terms which come first that are accorded greater worth, while second terms are often derivatives and subservient. Hierarchically arranged binary categories are often constructed unconsciously or unintentionally through the processes of language. In this way, oppositions are created out of what are “elusively” only differences (G. Greene & Kahn, 1985, p.11). hooks (1990) zealously challenges the need to discuss how
important it is to continually talk of differences, since talk of the ‘other’ also tends to be talk of the oppressed. Groups who are already privileged or prejudiced by gender, ethnicity and social class are further advantaged or disadvantaged through being positioned within or opposite power-linked categories such as male, white, and ‘us’. Variables along social constructs provide potentially multiple positionings. The spaces in between binaries can be negotiated through disruption and by focusing on ambivalences which emerge from what could be labeled as binary ‘cracks’ (Arber, 2000). Through feminist deconstruction, binary opposites are metaphysically transformed to become multiples (Davies, 1997). Binary opposites are frequently seen as fixed unchanging categories, but if seen metaphysically in the way Davies suggests, these categories become part of a range of possibilities. Understanding multiple masculinities at school provides male students with possibilities to adopt alternative non-hegemonic positions.

The whole question as to how and why an individual needs to belong to a category is challenged within feminist poststructuralism to enable differences—within a range of any particular elected category—to exist without the inevitability of binary opposites, and without the need to be categorized in any limiting position. A general feminist theoretical recognition of the idea of diversity within categories continually eludes many ethnographers in respect of issues relating to masculinities, resulting in suggestions for a need to move beyond these “falsely conceived theoretical dichotomies” (Conway-Long, 1994, p.77). It is important to recognize diversity amongst different group of boys. An example drawn from Mac an Ghaill’s (1994a) study shows that binary opposites operate within masculinity also. He found that on asking about how processes within school helped in the shaping of male heterosexuality, the question was generally understood to mean as opposed to becoming gay. It was, therefore, important to recognize that similar to females, males are also a non-homogenous group, and that for males there cannot be one dominant masculinity to describe all males (Connell, 1995). As Hearn and Collinson (1994) further reveal, because of, for example, cultural specificities, intersexuality or gender change, not all men are necessarily also males.

An analysis of the seeming inevitability of binary oppositioning becomes important when issues relating to everyday life are examined. Inevitability of binary opposites may be reinforced because we learn to see binaries as part of “the way the world is and therefore ought to be – what is constructed as truth becomes an [apparently] absolute unconstructed truth” (Davies, 1997, p.9). Through binary opposition,
political issues allow identification of others to become the source of societal problems. In such ways, particular groups are identified as others or they, with them being undeserving and/or getting something for nothing. Adding to this is a discursive notion relating to people getting what they deserve and work for, so that by not succeeding ‘you have only yourself to blame’. As Hoffman wrote:

So many people have made good, if you don’t, it appears that you have only yourself to blame. This—this corrosive logic—is the other side of the New World dream, the seemingly self-inflicted nightmare in which you toss and turn in gut-eating guilt.

(Hoffman, 1989, p.129)

Although writing in the United States, Hoffman’s words ring equally true in Australia. To recognize structural and social disadvantages for different groups of males and females is important. It is not enough to just blame or victimize particular groups. The theory of binary oppositioning can be taken a step further to where our ethnic backgrounds melt together into generic ‘blacks’ and ‘whites’. For example, “as in generic ‘white folks’ who were once Irish, Polish, Russian, English, etc, and ‘black folks’, who were once Ashanti, Bambara, Baule, Yoruba, etc” (Yamato, 1990, p.23). Each time binary oppositions like male/female, white/black, are reinforced as part of a natural state, so too other binary opposites are reinforced, like powerful/powerless, truth/untruth. White males thus retain a power through reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity. Non-white male students who do not easily fit a hegemonic masculine framework are often revealed as disadvantaged. The disadvantage is intensified by a lack of easily accessible alternative to hegemonic masculinities discourses. However, the complexities of situations reveal that non-white male students can just as easily be homophobic and sexist (Davis, 2001; Sewell, 1998).

A focus on differences reinforces dominant binary discourses which continue to position groups, such as females, non-whites, working classes or under-classes, on the ‘border’. An example of how the significance of differences becomes a central focus, despite the existence of many similarities, is a quantitative study which found that: “Overall, the results suggest that there was a fair degree of uniformity between girls and boys. However, of most relevance to this article is the finding that, quite clearly, there are also differences in girls’ and boys’ interests...” (Woodward & Woodward, 1998, p.394). Similarly, at the Boys in Action international conference (in Perth, Western Australia, June 1998), I found that one speaker spent most of the time showing how similar girls and boys were in their behaviour, thinking, learning
and communicating. Despite the notion that similarities were enormous, the speaker concluded that males ‘on average’ were different to females ‘on average’ in minor ways—for example, males would focus more on analyzing rather than expressing emotions—and then emphasized these differences in the conclusions and through this act negated many of the similarities. Thus males were fixed as one group and females as an oppositional other group and the multiplicity and disparity within each group was disregarded. Reinforcement of dominant binary discourses restricts access to multiple positionings for both males and females irrespective of their social class positioning and ethnicity.

The film industry, like the media, plays a significant role in creating binaries. Influence can be seen to have a global effect through, for example, American movies that reflect hegemonic masculinities to a worldwide audience (M. O’Donnell & Sharpe, 2000). However, Mac an Ghaill’s (1994a, p.2) exploration of “male heterosexuality as a dominant but unstable sexual category” highlights the fractured and fragile nature of identity construction for males. His exploration incorporates feminist tenets, through a recognition that social discursive practices have the effect of contradictory positionings for males. The structure of education and school itself becomes a central arena where masculinities and femininities interact and are played out. The use of films as texts at school provide opportunities to challenge discourses such as those of hegemonic masculinities and the showing of Gallipoli (1981) in the classroom during my research provided me with opportunities to examine ways in which dominant discourses may be challenged or to what extent they are unproblematically taken on board by these privileged students.

Masculinities

My research focus is on adolescent male students at a middle class private boys’ school and how they adopt different subject positions, so in this section I explore masculinities more specifically. I also explore the recent popular rhetoric relating to perceived boys’ underachievement at schools, which positions boys as ‘victims’ of school systems. The rise of essentialist discourses, which posit girls and boys as essentially different, has created a new anxiety, a new fear which is perceived as a new crisis that boys are falling behind girls or even failing at school. Discursive practices surrounding essentialist notions enable boys themselves to believe they can continue to play, to not work, to not take schoolwork seriously, yet implicitly understand that they will succeed academically. In cases where they do not succeed
they understand themselves as disadvantaged. This essentialism relates to what Thompson (1999, p.67) calls “oppression privilege”.

Gender equity reforms have been prominent in Australia. However, discursive practices remain where “current discussions about boys are more strongly concerned with ‘equal opportunity’ and men’s movement concerns than with fears about gendered and racial patterns of poverty and violence in society” (Yates, 2000, p.306); (see also Yates, 1997). Or, as Mills (2000a, p.242) pertinently suggests, “many of the ‘what about the boys?’ rumblings can be read as being more about a response to challenges to middle class masculine privilege than they are to issues of boys as a disadvantaged group”. In other words, equal opportunity is not taken within a historical perspective but taken within an immediate framework where boys need more help because they are perceived to be underachieving. Despite its middle class status, the school in my study has taken up the challenges underlying the ‘what about the boys’ rhetoric, identifying boys’ education as a priority and providing opportunities that are specific to boys’ education. However, as my research identifies, these opportunities are provided within a hegemonic masculinist environment. This coincides with Mills assertion (above) that the rhetoric is a ‘response to challenges to middle class masculine privilege’.

Despite having always received more resources than female students, male students are now said to need more because females are improving faster than they are. Feeding on these ideas, the media positions males as threatened and as “exhausted and disempowered in a climate of gender dislocation” (Pearce, 2001, p.50); (see also Kenway, 1995). The brief period of ‘favourable treatment’ received by female students which was in fact treatment that approached approximately equal time, is now assumed to be no longer an entitlement (Hey, Leonard, Daniels, & Smith, 1998). Facts do not necessarily change but concerns do, and thus they enable justification for greater attention to male students. Epstein (1998) perceptively wrote about how there was great interest shown in male students’ underachievement, yet relatively little interest shown in, for example, male students’ racist, sexist or homophobic behaviour. She further points out how violent behaviour can be disconnected from males by using ‘gender neutral’ language like children or students. In a similar vein, focusing on ethnic and cultural differences can reinforce the construction of ‘us’ as different to ‘others’ so that differences are highlighted rather than, for example, racism challenged. Learning difficulties of particular groups of boys have been used as evidence that male students generally are
Chapter 3: Linking social constructs

suffering (P. Gilbert, 1998). This view has often reinforced the idea that ‘boys will be boys’—in other words, boys should embody what has been stereotyped as boys’ characteristics. Essentialist views appear to react to any female achievements by pointing out any male disadvantages so that “as long as any male, anywhere is suffering, women are selfish to mention that they are suffering, too” (Johnson cited in Schacht & Ewing, 1998, p.128). These notions do not take into account the effects on males and females of hegemonic masculinity as a prevalent discourse. Nevertheless, these ideas retain the dichotomous nature and separation of gender and appear difficult to dislodge. Continual references to gender dichotomy can have the effect of reducing choices for males while at the same time reinforcing hegemonic masculine discourses. In a middle class milieu of an all boys’ school there are further implications on reducing choices through the dichotomous association of heterosexuality and homosexuality.

Gilbert (1998, p.9) suggests that: “Boys learn that masculinity is a performance – a performance reliant on physical control, autonomy and independence. And it is the performance of masculinity that boys know is infinitely important to ‘get right’”. I would, however, suggest that femininity is also a performance that females must ‘get right’ (Butler, 1990). But both are performances which are constructed within society. Males and females are socially constructed from birth and throughout their school lives students are continually surrounded and immersed in discourses which reinforce their masculinity or femininity. Although not always acknowledged, there is strong pressure to fit the ‘mould’. English classrooms become particularly important where, especially in a boys’ school, it is easy to just give students ‘boys’ books to read. Furthermore, in an all boys’ school, just the fact that it is an all male school seems to make it acceptable to talk as if everything in society ‘naturally’ relates to males. For example, during a photographic display at one private boys’ school in Perth there was a noticeable absence of any ‘other’ perspective than that of the white male perspective. An explanation of this narrow perspective was given to me with the suggestion that only scenes that interested boys needed to be explored. Thus it is easier to reinforce than to challenge or disrupt hegemonic masculine discourses.

Skelton (1998, p.222) strongly urges the need to “challenge notions of hegemonic masculinity and, therefore, power dynamics”. However, it is crucial that when researching males to not focus on male socialization but rather on male power, since re-focus on males and on their socialization rather than male power could “relegate
girls yet again to the sidelines” (Skelton, 1998, p.223); (see also Connell, 1987; Mac an Ghaill, 1994a). For this reason constant vigilance needs to be kept on research relating to males, with a need to again remind ourselves that any changes affect both females and males. A historical look at reform demonstrates how initially the experiences of white, middle class males were considered to be the ‘norm’. Feminist research (S. Acker, 1994; Butler, 1990; Davies, 1993a; Kenway & Willis, 1993) challenged this ‘norm’ and with the myriad research on females and how females can be active in shaping their own lives brought awareness and had some impact on the issues of equity. However, social injustices continue—where issues become subtler within underlying dominant discourses—so that new challenges need to be continually highlighted. Dominant discourses often retain a layering effect so that old discourses are never completely expunged (Davies, 1996). Skelton (1998, p.217) suggests we need “to ascertain the extent to which recent work by male writers/researchers into masculinities and schooling informs and complements existing feminist agendas”. It is crucial that we begin to understand how power relationships retain and reproduce advantages for certain groups within society so that it is “possible to identify how prerogatives of masculinity, heterosexism or white supremacy can really be challenged” (Skelton, 1998, p.222). I would suggest that challenges of this nature are possible within educational systems, particularly through informed teaching practices. These challenges should also occur within privileged sectors of society such as middle class and private boys’ schools where privileges are strongly maintained.

De Beauvoir’s (1953, p.295) now memorable quote that “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” could be equally applicable to males. Since males are also socially constructed it is important to remain vigilant and critically aware in respect of studies on masculinities. Mills and Lingard (1997, p.277) emphasize that “profeminist men seek to ‘exit’ from those masculinities and related practices which support the existing gender order”. However, we are reminded that ‘profeminist’ research does not always adhere to feminist principles which emphasize a need to highlight and challenge power relationships and oppression (Gough & Peace, 2000) not only of women but also of any groups that are discriminated against. Shepherd (1998, p.174) also admits to the uneasiness that males experience in any feminist role, and stresses that the association between feminism and men could be less problematic if feminism is taken as a “political way of thinking and, like all political thought, its attraction cuts across sex. What is required is for people to have a feminist consciousness”. Through a feminist
perspective I highlight understandings of privilege and inequalities from the position of privileged middle class male students and thus provide understandings of ways to challenge issues of social inequalities and power relationships at this level. However, we are additionally warned that when implementing feminist programs it is not always possible to “avoid perplexing and in some cases frightening students” (Kenway et al., 1996, p.257). Exploration of ways to address male and female students’ fear of feminism is essential. There are now a greater number of men who acknowledge the significance of feminism and the need to address gender inequality (see for example Connell, 1995, 1998; Katz, 2000; Mac an Ghaill, 1994a, 1994b; Mills, 2000b; Mills & Lingard, 1997; Shepherd, 1998).

Koehn (1998, p.5) suggests that since many males “have not had the experience of finding their experiences excluded from philosophical discussions and of having their voice silenced” then they do not have the same motivation to argue for particular claims that imply loss of power. Resistance to change could be related to a loss of power or privilege for particular groups of males as beliefs and lifestyles begin to benefit certain groups of females and other previously disadvantaged groups. It has been argued that patriarchal systems and hegemonic masculinity benefit a greater number of men at the expense of women, thus effectively subordinating women (Connell, 1995). Moreover, it has been suggested that “what we are witnessing is perhaps the decline of one of the longest fables of all—... that of an over-arching meta narrative—one carved in Eden, the superiority of men over women” (M. O’Donnell & Sharpe, 2000, p.89). Challenges to privilege and power posited by feminism and feminist research, however, were quickly counter-challenged by many males recently with an essentialist argument that again reinforces the binary nature of gender. Nevertheless, advantages that men can generally lay claim to, or the ‘patriarchal dividend’, have not been “withering away” (Connell, 1998, pp.226-227) but remain prevalent in society. However, it is important to recognize that advantages are relational and not all men have access to this patriarchal dividend.

Kaufman (1994, p.156) emphasizes the importance of reducing the gap between acceptance of equity ideas and behaviour in social reality. He also emphasizes the importance of understanding that changes in both personal and social lives are necessary and the importance of recognizing that “in practice ... homophobia is a major factor in promoting misogyny and sexism among men”. However, it is when heterosexuality is seen as the only option for ‘real men’ that homosexuality
becomes ‘abnormal’ (Buchbinder, 1994a). Homosexuality has also been erroneously viewed as a ‘failure’ to become a ‘real man’. Such viewing of homosexuality makes it possible to blame mothers for ‘emasculating’ males (R. Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998) – a relatively unexplored mother-son relationship which needs to be further addressed but which is not possible to address in this thesis. Recent studies show that homophobia is still very prevalent at schools but seldom positively addressed (Martino, 1997b, 1999b, 2000b; M. O’Donnell & Sharpe, 2000). In fact, students can be subjected to pressures of heterosexuality from the primary level of schooling (Renold, 2000). Although homosexual experiences may be minimal or non-existent for many male students, “the influence of a homophobic culture is pervasive and powerful” (Head, 1999, p.40) and can often provide a justification for bullying and harassment. My research for this thesis further reveals how homophobia, and more specifically the lack of understanding of sexuality, developed into a major concern for students within a single sex boys’ school environment. Addressing such issues of concern, for example at school level, redresses Kaufman’s anxiety of homophobia’s link with misogyny and sexism among males.

Ethnicity and the ‘naturalization’ and invisibility of ‘whiteness’

In this section I explore issues of ethnicity and whiteness and their significance for students in terms of the fashioning and negotiation of subjectivities. At times, many students are unaware of the effects of such social constructs, thus showing existence of dominant discourses within societies with stereotypes often re-emerging as significant ways of positioning others. However, as Bhabha has suggested, stereotypes are often a false representation:

The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation...

(Bhabha, 1994, p.75)

Stereotypes are often applied to many ethnic groups who are defined as a group with a common cultural heritage. However, people often do not fit into one ethnic group but by not fitting into any one particular group they may end up fitting into none in particular (Ng, 1993). It is possible to belong to more than one ethnic group, although often within society there appears to be a need to choose. Sometimes, it may be possible to move from one ethnic group to another. Jayasuriya (1997, p.12) warns that the “reality of ethnicity” cannot be denied, but it also cannot be used to
reify a “fixed and immutable identity”. However as Bradley (1996, p.119) suggests, “being ‘British’ and white can mean being English, Scots, Welsh or Irish – and also Jewish, Polish, Australian and so on. Thus in a multi-ethnic world ethnic identities are multi-layered, ‘hybrid’ or ‘hyphenated’”. Similar meanings can be extrapolated in Australia where being Australian can mean many different things. In this study I found that many students embraced more than one ethnic identity. Groups occupying some of these positionings can be identified as ‘invisible minorities’ (Nayak, 1999). Ethnic identities are thus often not ‘fixed and immutable’ and through the very action, for example, of emigrating/immigrating cultural identification can shift. This is further complicated by ways in which males negotiate their masculinities which is also implicated in how boys negotiate their ethnicities. In my thesis I explore interweavings of social influences and variables such as gender, social class, sexuality, and ‘race’/ethnicity. Notions of contradictions are evident and I explore how students negotiate with the contradictions to show the intersecting of different social constructs.

In this thesis, I question students about issues of whiteness and examine ways in which whiteness retains a privilege for ‘white’ students. Whiteness is often associated with colourlessness, and “the white culture” is associated with “the hidden norm” (Roman, 1993, p.71). This is historically complicated with political actions defining who is white and struggles by particular groups to establish their whiteness (Hage, 1998). Even when associating with people of colour, the discrimination they experience in their daily lives may not be perceived as being discriminative by those who experience life as part of a dominant group (Cavers-Huff & Kollitz, 1998). Thus it is important to challenge notions that suggest “white people speak for the common good, and people of color speak for self-interest” (Fine, 1997, p.61). Although people of colour experience their ‘race’ and ethnicity as part of their daily experiences, for ‘white’ people, their whiteness can be ignored since dominant discourses accept whiteness as the norm. Experiences of the adolescent male students whom I interviewed reflect such dominant discourses as I show in Chapter 8. In this way, “whiteness becomes something beyond ethnicity, history, privilege or struggle. Something indefinable, something silent” (Arber, 2000, p.51). Images portrayed in films and media can further normalize whiteness for ‘white’ people whilst they can be devastating to people of colour (Dyer, 1997). Whiteness can thus remain unnamed and unmarked and retain a privileged position. In fact, as hooks (1990, p.171) suggests, “to ignore white ethnicity is to redouble its hegemony by naturalizing it”.

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Discussions relating to race and colour can be fraught with emotional and conflicting difficulties and beliefs so that:

The color of one’s skin is part of ourselves. It does not matter. It is precious and yet it should not matter; it is important and yet it must not matter. It is simultaneously our greatest vanity and anxiety.

(Williams, 1997, p.37)

Confusion and contradictions are evident in discussions of the term ‘race’ and, as Frankenberg (1993) suggests, to see racial differences can be racist, but to not see racial differences is ‘racist oversight’. Racial differences compete in contested discursive fields of contextual understandings. Thus colour becomes a paradox within itself and within the theorization of race where it should not matter yet it must not be ignored. This paradox becomes a contradiction and was evident in students’ responses in my research, where the colour of their skin was important to the non-white students yet colour was seldom mentioned, and when it was named it was in relation to Indigenous Australians. Given the Australian context this could be considered as self-evident.

Inherent power issues are significant. At times an inverse effect can occur so that concerns regarding racism against white people take greater significance than warranted. As Troya and Hatcher suggest “Racist attacks (by whites on blacks) are part of a coherent ideology of oppression which is not true when blacks attack whites, or indeed, when there is conflict between members of different ethnic minority groups” (cited in Nayak, 1999, p.189). Foucault (1988) reminds us that the study of ethnology emerged from processes of colonization. The historical significance of discursive positions occupied by white people, often within a colonizer/colonized relationship, enable white people to remain within a powerful ideological position. Blackness and whiteness exist in society in relational terms with:

a dependent hierarchy, with whiteness constraining the social power of blackness by colonizing the definition of what is normal, by institutionalizing a greater allocation of resources for white constituencies, and by maintaining laws that favour Whites.

(McLaren, 1999, p.32)

In this way whiteness is pervasive but remains difficult to identify or to challenge, and thus to separate from our daily lives. Hence ‘race’ plays an important part, although not an explicit part, in boys’ lives at school by—as my research also
reveals—maintaining positions within the binary categories of ‘white’/‘black’; positions which need to be challenged at all educational levels. My thesis explores ways in which ideas associated with whiteness intersects with masculinity in individual boys’ lives at one specific boys’ school.

Cultures are significant in the shaping of subjectivity through invoking not just rational but also unconscious and subconscious emotional dimensions of people. Cultures are, however, also contested sites where “the powerful try to impose their values on others, [but where] the others in turn resist, negotiate, appropriate and re-shape cultural ideas and behaviours within the social constraints that affect their lives” (de Lepervanche, 1994, p.83). Racism, however, may be manifested through exclusion and in the absence of action, and mediated with other power relationships relating to social class and gender such that non-whites may be positioned as the ‘Other’ (Reay, 1995). Representations of a culture produce identities which belong and ‘other’ identities which are excluded. Although pressure is put on all to conform, being excluded does not mean inactivity but the excluded become the ‘other’ as defined against ‘us’. In this way the excluded become ‘indispensable’ (Epstein & Johnson, 1998) and positioned as part of a potentially active ‘other’ or marginalized group. Thus a Torres Strait Islander male student (as described in Chapter 8), although often feeling marginalized, held aspirations for greater autonomy for Torres Strait Islander people and thus positioned himself as a potentially active ‘other’.

Like gender, ‘race’ and ethnicity are also historically, socially and politically constructed, while simultaneously interweaving with other identity categories (Ferber, 1998). As political or social constructs rather than ‘natural categories’, the meanings of and memberships to categories are continually shifting and contested (Gillborn, 1995; Pettman, 1992). Society is often structured through gender and social class inequalities. Ethnic groups are not static, fixed communities, yet cultures are often reified through ethnicity which effectively transfers the “focus from these structural inequalities to cultural difference” (de Lepervanche, 1994, p.84). Referring to a particular group, Sewell (1998, p.111) advises that there are “fluid, multifarious, shifting and hybrid constructions of black masculinities” operating. This idea can be related to many presently homogenized groups. My research exhibits the many differences within gender. Ethnicity, like gender, retains differences within its groups as well as differences with other groups. Sexuality
provides greater differences. It is important to recognize these differences and to recognize that classification is not essential and inevitable:

To cut across boundaries and borderlines is to live aloof the malaise of categories and labels; it is to resist simplistic attempts at classifying, to resist the comfort of belonging to a classification, and of producing classifiable works.

(Homi Bhabha cited in Minh-Ha, 1991, pp.107-8)

Politically constructed categories often become categories relating to identity and interest. However, for those represented and named within these categories there are consequences of material significance. These consequences further disadvantage females and ethnic minority groups. Moreover, racism does not have some static form. As Rizvi (1993, p.129) notes, racism is “continually changing, being challenged, interrupted, and reconstructed, in the actual practices in which people engage”. Although challenges have the potential to reduce racism, the very nature of racism also has the potential for racism to reappear in a different form. In fact, challenges to racism can be like “peeling an onion with infinite layers” (O’Grady, 1999, p.132), so that as each layer is peeled away, new understandings or new insights are exposed. However, care needs to be taken so that class disadvantages are not reconceptualized as racial issues within a racist discourse where white becomes viewed as a victim (Gillborn & Kirton, 2000). Taken together with the recent discursive positionings of boys as being disadvantaged and boys viewed as victims led to white working class males appropriating positions—or being repositioned—as the new racially disadvantaged. It appears that “racism is woven into the fabric of our social world … [with] the threads of racism … difficult to unravel or break” (Gaine, 2000, p.73) thus confirming racism as resilient and stubborn. Indeed, throughout white Australian history, racist policies and practices have discriminated against and disadvantaged Indigenous Australians. For example, government policies have denied Aboriginal Australians basic citizenship and human rights until the 1960s, Indigenous Australian history was rarely acknowledged, and Indigenous Australians were often represented as inferior to non-Indigenous Australians by the media (Craven & Rigney, 1999). Indigenous Australian issues surface in my research and I explore ways in which inaccurate knowledge continues to be learned within schools. Despite reconciliation attempts, racism against Indigenous Australians continues.

‘Race’, like ethnicity, can be defined as a group with common ancestry, cultural heritage, ideas and habits. Unlike ethnicity, however, it contains associated popular
meanings which appeal to the emotions. ‘Race’ is further often associated with particular phenotypes and given a biological basis. Moreover, ‘race’ is frequently subsumed under the category of ethnicity and subsumes other social categories such as social class and gender. Hence, popular and emotional meanings of ‘race’ underlie and interweave with other categories in a complex way so that race:

... blurs and disguises, suppresses and negates its own complex interplay with the very social relations it envelops. It precludes unity within the same gender group but often appears to solidify people of opposing economic classes. Whether race is textually omitted to textually privileged, its totalizing effect in obscuring class and gender remains.

(Higginbotham, 1996, p.186)

Whatever emotional or popular meanings are related to racism, it is still socially constructed and describes a “very real human phenomenon” which cannot be dismissed easily, nor always “demonstrated directly or concretely” (Bowser, 1995, p.xi). For example, popular or vulgar forms of racism are immediately obvious; other forms of racism are more covert, but have no less devastating consequences. Racism is therefore always a form of power, “about constituting and treating others as ‘different’ for the purpose of excluding, exploiting or containing them” (Pettman, 1992, p.58). Whiteness is thus implicated in power whereby privileges are maintained or denied. This is complicated by ways in which whiteness intersects with masculinities in students’ lives. Adding to the complexity of racism is the way racism does not remain static, but is dynamic in nature. One effect of the way meanings historically change is that successes in eliminating racism cannot always be specifically identified, but may instead be undergoing a change in how racism functions. More sophisticated ways of disguising racism are developed, such as political requests for return to specific—but inherently white—family values. So, it is not enough to assume that racism did not exist or had been eliminated just because it cannot be seen.

Despite being politically and socially constructed, ‘race’ and racist discourses nevertheless assume a naturalness at the level of ‘common sense knowledge’ (Morris, 1990) which is reflected through discourses within societies and take on a role with independent power. However, if discourses continue to exist, then it is through us that power is created. As Ball (1993, p.14) wrote: “We do not speak a discourse, it speaks us. We are the subjectivities, the voices, the knowledge, the power relations that a discourse constructs and allows. We do not ‘know’ what we say, we ‘are’ what we say and do” (emphasis in the original). Power is not
exercised from the ‘top down’ but operates through a historically naturalized dominant discourse that pervades beliefs, behaviour and desires.

Omi and Winant (1993, p.5), writing in the United States, suggest that contemporary society sometimes appears to be so completely racialized that “to be without racial identity is to be in danger of having no identity. To be raceless is akin to being genderless”. However, Fields asserts that:

If race lives on today, it can do so only because we continue to create and re-create it in our social life, continue to verify it, and thus continue to need a social vocabulary that will allow us to make sense, not of what our ancestors did then, but of what we choose to do now.

(cited in Omi & Winant, 1993, p.5)

As Ball and Fields both imply, we need to realize that it is through ourselves that meanings and discourses continue to exist and reappear. Thus by implication we also have the power to change or modify meanings and discourses for greater social justice. Schools are ideal sites for such changes or modifications. However, it is initially important to understand, like this thesis aims to help clarify, ways in which social constructs such as gender and whiteness are implicated in students’ lives at one specific single sex boys’ school.

In this complex situation ‘whiteness’ is inherently significant and in the past ‘whiteness’ has often been considered a “transparent racial identity” (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993, p.xxvii), thus often providing ‘white’ people with a dominant position in society. ‘Scientific’ theories relating to ‘race’ enable ideologies of white supremacy to thrive, pervade and justify ways in which many indigenous populations became dominated by ‘Western colonial nations’ (Bradley, 1996; Sturman, 1997). However, by taking whiteness as a social construct into consideration, whiteness as a racial identity also becomes more visible and thereby challengeable. The naturalness and invisibility of whiteness as a taken-for-granted feature can be challenged. Being white is often insignificant to many white people (and my research supports this notion). This insignificance, however, is contextual, and I found that my own children—probably because they have lived much of their lives in countries like Singapore and Indonesia where they were part of a minority—notice their own whiteness. However, when asking young people what it meant to be white and whether they perceived themselves as being more advantaged because they were white, Aveling (1998, p.310) writes how she was “frequently left with the feeling that these were the most stupid questions [she] had ever asked”.
Clark (1999, p.92) takes up this notion of how whiteness remains invisible. She pertinently describes the issues surrounding whiteness as ‘the secret’: She uses the metaphor of a ‘secret’ to capture the complexity, the entrenchment of whiteness, and “for all of the covert ways [she] … was taught about white supremacy by [her] … family and friends”. My own and my children’s experiences emphasize societal influence on such entrenchment of whiteness, but also powerfully show the potential for change. The centrality of education provides a potential site for this change.

Being white, like being male, is associated with privilege. In fact, whiteness can be considered “a metaphor for privilege” (Apple, 1997, p.125). The location of my research—a private boys’ school—links closely to the privileged positions highlighted by the popular rhetoric surrounding the ‘what about the boys?’ debate which continues to favour males who are middle class and white at the expense of other groups of students, such as working class males and females or Indigenous males and females. A societal expectation is that middle class white males will likely be the more successful students. Indeed, whiteness is a privilege that is enjoyed rather than acknowledged, and a reality that remains unknown: notions which emphasize the invisibility of whiteness. Transparency of whiteness as a racial identity further provides white people with a dominant position within society; a positioning which is reflected within classrooms. It appears that whiteness is only visible “with reference to that which is not white—as if only nonwhiteness can give whiteness substance” (Muraleedharan, 1997, p.61). Dominant positionings are often at the expense of non-white students, whereby options available to ‘non-white’ students become restricted either to assimilate and thus become part of the ‘norm’, or to retain at least part of their own culture and be positioned as ‘other’. Frankenberg is further enlightening with her observations in the United States of America—with results of these observations equally pertinent in Australia—that whiteness has at least three dimensions which are associated with privileges enjoyed, with a standpoint, and with a set of cultural practices considered as the norm:

‘White’ is neither a fixed nor a homogeneous label…I came to view whiteness as having at least three dimensions. First, it is a position of structural advantage, associated with ‘privileges’ of the most basic kind, including, for example, higher wages, reduced chances of being impoverished, longer life, better access to health care, better treatment by the legal system, and so on. (Of course, access is influenced by class, sexuality, gender, age, and in fact ‘privilege’ is a misnomer here since this list addresses basic social rights.) Second, whiteness is a ‘standpoint’ or place from which to look at oneself, others and society. Thirdly, it carries with it a set of ways of being in the world,
a set of cultural practices, often not named as ‘white’ by white folks, but looked on instead as ‘American’ or ‘normal’.
(Frankenberg, 1997b, p.211)

Resistance to challenges to hegemonic discourses occurs in the form of ‘oppression privilege’ (Thompson, 1999) whereby males perceive themselves as disadvantaged at schools when females increase their successes. Similar resistance occurs in relation to whiteness, whereby antiracist education and affirmative action lead to white people believing they are racially disadvantaged. This belief is particularly evident in the United States (see for example DeRosa, 1999), but such resistance is equally significant in Australia specifically in relation to Indigenous Australians and the way Indigenous Australians are perceived as receiving significant amounts of government benefits. Whiteness like other social constructs is historically situated, plural in meaning, and dynamic in nature, thus it is also a process that “is seen to be contested and contestable” (Frankenberg, 1997a, p.4). As Aanerud further explains:

Whiteness cannot be understood as a singular entity, existing prior to or apart from other categories of identities. Its formation depends on the changing relations of gender, class, sexuality, and nationality. Thus, the meaning of whiteness, like all racialized identities … is not monolithic. Instead, its construction and interpretation are informed by historical moment, region, political climate, and racial identity.
(Aanerud, 1997, p.37)

Nonetheless, there is little provision of a theoretical language for students which enable reference to whiteness outside of notions of oppression and racism. In other words, highlighting issues of whiteness as a privilege can also make it difficult to be simultaneously perceived as white and as antiracist. As Giroux states:

More theoretical work needs to be done to enable students to critically engage and appropriate the tools necessary for them to politicize whiteness as a racial category without closing down their own sense of identity and political agency.
(Giroux, 1999, p.250)

Giroux’s argument is particularly significant in the Australian context where throughout Australian history, racist policies and practices have discriminated against and disadvantaged Indigenous Australians (Craven & Rigney, 1999). Power, gained through privileges, is also closely linked to gender by most feminists, with masculinity symbolizing power (Segal, 1999). However, not all males are advantaged (Connell, 1987; Segal, 1999). Therefore, it is crucial for whiteness and masculinity to be problematized and for teachers to acquaint students with skills to assist them in critical reflection and in understanding how discourses available to
students affect their own as well as other males’ and females’ lives. Some responsibilities for problematization of related significant issues are in the hands of teachers (McLeod, 1998b).

Through school curricula it is possible to encourage students, as Singh (1997, p.15) suggests, “to critique the fantasy of whiteness, a fantasy which makes whiteness synonymous with goodness, progress and civilisation”. Schools are in a pivotal position where proposals for addressing these issues relating to gender, sexuality, social class and ethnicity inequity can be initiated. Through literacy practices in classrooms, students can engage critically with such issues as sexism and racism as well as with the multiple realities of their own and other people’s lives (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1997). Through critical literacy practices, students can begin to unravel and understand the way they were socially constructed and how language becomes normalized and naturalized within social practices at school. My research focuses on how masculinities intercept with issues of whiteness to provide multiple positionings for adolescent male students at one single sex boys’ school.

Influences of social class

Social class plays a significant part in how males, as indeed in how females, negotiate and fashion their subjectivities. Privileged students do not always acknowledge their own privileged position attained because of their social class. Indeed, discursive ideologies of meritocracy remain prevalent within Australian schools and Australian society. In this section I explore social class issues particularly in the Australian context. In popular discourse, Australia is often portrayed as a classless society. However, it is not necessarily that the structure of inequality has changed within Australia but that Australians do not identify themselves through social class (G. Jordan & Weedon, 1995). Greater possibilities of social mobility, greater accessibility to education and better living standards have led to the belief that inequalities are due to personal effort and choice rather than to social class. Subsequently, many Australians appear to ‘see’ a fluidity in social class movement relating to economic success. The relatively few examples of working-class people who have made good—for example, Paul Hogan and Jimmy Barnes—give a more fluid impression of social class mobility than what occurs in reality. Isolated successes are often taken as representative of all working class experiences and show how it is generally accepted that if one works hard enough then it is possible to succeed. The social context of the school in my research
positions it within a middle class milieu and, indeed, most of the boys in my study identified themselves as middle class. However, a small number of scholarships enable students to enrol in a private school when otherwise they would be financially unable to enrol. This further perpetuates the idea that meritocracy works.

Social class can be associated with economic, social and/or political relationships. Historical measurements do not necessarily reflect present identification of social classes where at least half of all Australians identify themselves as middle class. The term class appears to have become too emotionally ‘loaded’ for many Australians to accept. Through a common omission of the term working class in Australian language, the myth of a classless society is able to be perpetuated. Nevertheless, the myth of a classless society in Australia is continually discredited by research (Eckermann, 1994). In fact, as McGregor suggests,

It is impossible to live in Australia without coming to realise that the different social classes have different sorts of jobs, live in different suburbs, go to different schools, get different incomes, speak in different ways, experience crucial differences in privilege and inequality, indeed, live different lives.

(McGregor, 1997, pp.2-3)

Discussions of social classes become difficult with the “complex and shifting nature of class as a set of lived relationships” as well as the difficulties of defining social class because of the many “different definitions” (Bradley, 1996, p.45), plus different ways of self-identification. However, social class in terms of socio-economic status remains valuable as a research tool in our understanding of and struggle against an unjust and divided society since it provides a way of identifying people who are advantaged or disadvantaged in terms of access to income, health, housing and education. Through the use of economic indicators such as class, Bradley (1996) reveals how inequalities between the social classes are not disappearing but in fact increasing. Statistical measurements, for example using the Henderson poverty line, illustrate that Australia is a ‘lucky’ country for a small proportion of Australians whilst the majority remain disadvantaged (Nieuwenhuysen, 1998). Disguise or denial of social class perceptively demonstrates denial or disguise of increasing inequalities within Australian society. In my research I incorporate effects of the middle class milieu of the private boys’ school on the construction of boys’ masculinities.

Social class or more appropriately socio-economic status can be closely linked to education. In previous research (see Hatchell, 1997, 1998) I found meanings were
often shared by students and teachers from the same school, but were different from
different sites. Anyon’s study in the United States shows how students from
different social classes were ‘rewarded’ for those classroom behaviours that were
deemed associated to their social class. In this way praise was given to “the working
classes for docility and obedience, the managerial classes for initiative and personal
assertiveness” (Anyon, 1980, p.67). Education continues to sustain social class
differences with, as found in Europe, middle class parents making specific choices
of where their children would attend school to ensure that class position is
maintained (Hatcher, 1998). Sewell (1995) supports this idea suggesting that the
majority of students did not have access to the same ‘quality’ of education that
children from more privileged social classes had. Indeed, McLaren (1999) in the
United States suggests that schools serve the interests of capitalism and thus
effectively serve the interests of the rich through reproduction of social class
ideologies and interests. Schools in this sense are a commodity within what could be
named as ‘late capitalism’. In fact, ignoring the effects of social class on education
also denies the chance of emancipatory education (Sharp, 1998) although, as I will
discuss later in this section, the ideology of emancipatory education cannot often be
attained in reality. Research in the United Kingdom (Friedkin & Thomas, 1997;
Kerckhoff, Fogelman, & Manlove, 1997), where social classes appear to be more
distinctive and more publicly acknowledged, continues to support Anyon’s findings,
suggesting that middle class students move along different ‘tracks’ than working
class students. Even in Australia education systems continue to replicate and
reinforce social inequalities (P. Foster, Gomm, & Hammersley, 1996), so that
although “education can be a liberating factor in class construction, a way out of the
class trap” (McGregor, 1997, p.40), studies such as Anyon (1980), Doyle (1992)
and Sharp (1998) repeatedly show that education more often than not reinforces
social classes. Indeed, my research site, a private boys’ school, reinforced a middle
class status for students so that, as indicated earlier, the majority of students
identified themselves as middle class.

Studies also indicate that students from working class backgrounds are more likely
to leave school at the minimum school leaving age. In contrast, students from middle
class backgrounds have a greater chance of continuing to higher education where
they develop “high status social networks to further benefit their careers” (Doyle,
1992, p.98); and most of the students who completed my questionnaire indicated
they would be continuing into tertiary education. Different class values are at work
here where the importance given to education is often an expression of one’s own
class values. Indeed, McLaren (1999, p.12) suggests that socio-economic position remains the dominant determinant of inequalities and that capitalism is “intimately tied to the resurgent racism” which has been witnessed in the United States. My research also reveals glimpses of the ties between social class advantages and racism, specifically in the middle class milieu of the private boys’ school where Indigenous Australians were a significant minority. Thus the category ‘class’, relating to people’s social economic circumstances while simultaneously acknowledging the fluidity within and between the social classes, remains a crucial tool in research.

Recent studies have been carried out which explore some of the specific interweavings of masculinity, social class, and ethnicity (Connell, 1987; Mac an Ghaill, 1994a; Sewell, 1995, 1998; J. Walker, 1988). However, males continue to experience privileged positions as a result of strong societal ideologies, but the private relationship of power within families often remains unexamined (McDowell, 1997) and unchallenged. Until recently, dominant male ideological viewpoints were taken up unproblematically so that, for example, historically, when females spoke it was not in their own right. With the Chartist movement, when females took the speaker’s platform, it related to how their rights would be affected through their fathers’ or husbands’ achievements. Since females were, and still often are, considered as dependents, their societal role became linked to domesticity or, as secondary earners, to cheap labour. The discourse of female dependency on males appears to be so dominant in society that “even unemployed men continue to position themselves within a traditional ‘male breadwinner’ discourse by doing illegal work rather than taking the opportunity to do more childcare or domestic tasks” (Gough & Peace, 2000, p.386). The distribution of ‘care’ in the family thus remains disproportionately apportioned to females, with more disparity between males and females for those who are non-white and comparatively poorer (M. Walker, 1998). During the more recent second wave feminist movement even middle class ‘white’ females “saw their mothers as desperate or depressed in the midst of their relative privilege. Many had been educated like men and had then been expected to become ... men’s wives” (Snitow, 1996, p.532). For these women, their middle class privilege did not always entitle them to achievements in their own right. These underlying issues retain their relevance for both males and females with males taking a bread-winning role and females taking the major part in the bringing up of children; with females still often considered dependents; and with differences in job/career remuneration. In my research, I found dominant male ideological
viewpoints—where care of family was perceived as feminine—retain a discursive stronghold among the adolescent boys who participated in this study.

Deconstruction of the signifier ‘class’ and its meaning is imperative in respect of the way social class relates to different ethnic groups within Australia. Suggestions are that social classes do not ‘naturally’ emerge but form together at times in history when there is a need to struggle together against, for example, productive events (Ng, 1993). Different groups were often formed dependent on contemporary issues and struggles. Migrants are thus grouped together to become part of the Australian working classes but as different factions. Hence, new working classes can be created from different ethnic groups, but concurrently existing with Australian working classes. Sharp (1998) reminds us that the Australian class system is a direct result of its colonialist history so that colonial and postcolonial experiences affect Australians’ ideology and the way social classes have been created. Thus a pertinent focus that emerged in my research was the ways in which an Indigenous Australian who identified himself as working class positioned himself in a white middle class private boys’ school.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have elaborated a theoretical framework concerning the interweaving of social constructs such as gender and masculinities, social class, ‘race’/ethnicity and whiteness. It is important to acknowledge that males are not a homogenous group. Maleness or manliness is not ‘fixed, natural, and unchangeable’ (Jackson, 1998, 88). Through understanding how masculinity and femininity are constructed within the confines of a school culture, attempts can be made to break down bonds which reinforce these beliefs. Mac an Ghaill (1994b, p.185) suggests that “the institutionalized structure of schooling creates the strongest effects on the construction of masculinity”. My experiences in the classroom where I conducted my research would certainly support this notion. I felt that it was important to discuss the ways in which gender is inclusive of males and females, so that even when policies and actions are aimed specifically at one gender the effects influence males and females. It is important not to create binary opposites out of what could be considered differences but to enable multiple truths to emerge.
Since the advent of the ‘what about the boys?’ debate there has been a greater focus on helping boys at school. However, it is important to recognize that not all boys are disadvantaged, and that girls are not necessarily succeeding at the expense of boys (Collins et al., 2000; Kenway, 1995; Yates, 1997). Instead, it is probably more prudent to question which boys and which girls are failing or succeeding (Teese et al., 1995). In establishing that there is not one masculinity, it is important to open up spaces in classrooms for male students to actively take up positions other than hegemonic masculine positions. The contribution of feminist research to the debate on masculinities—where normalized hegemonic masculine discourses may be critiqued and challenged—is significant. In the next chapter I explore how feminist epistemologies are fundamental to my discussions on masculinities. Feminist epistemologies enable alternative ways to investigate how gender is socially constructed and to deconstruct prevailing notions of femininity and masculinity. In other words, we need to “complicate our understanding of ‘gender’ itself in order to attend to the influence of other factors such as socio-economic status, location, ethnicity, Aboriginality” (Collins et al., 2000, p.27). Sadly, as Connell (2001) proffers, massive gender inequalities remain within a global gender order. Importantly, changes for males should not be made at the expense of other males or at the expense of females.
CHAPTER 4
MALES AND MASCULINITIES:
EPISTEMOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Feminism has offered a blueprint for a new boyhood and masculinity based on a passion for justice, a love of equality, and expression of a fuller emotional palette.

(V. Foster, Kimmel, & Skelton, 2001, p.17)

Theorizing masculinities

In this chapter I explore how feminist epistemologies are fundamental to my discussions about the social construction of masculinities and examine the theoretical perspectives underpinning my research in greater depth. Feminisms highlight many inequalities and pose gender as being central to the shaping of subjectivities. This research is positioned within a feminist poststructuralist paradigm which recognizes the complex interaction of meanings, power, gender, sexuality, social class and ethnicities. Indeed, as Weedon (1997, p.170) notes, “the term ‘postmodernism’ is itself complex and contested”. Postmodernist² feminist approaches contain features which are significant to my thesis. These features include the idea that there are many perspectives—multiple ‘truths’—in society; that single and centralized notions of power are decentred; that meaning is contested and that language does not reflect nor express meaning; that metanarratives are questioned and essentializing theories are rejected. Feminist poststructuralism acknowledges the continued struggle and resistance of constantly changing

² Weedon (1997, p.180) notes that, although unhelpful, the conflation of the terms ‘postmodern(ist)’ and ‘poststructuralist’ has “become a fact of contemporary feminist debate”. She adds:

The conflation of poststructuralism with the much broader and contested term ‘postmodernism’ often leads to polarizations in which feminists find themselves defined in terms of a particular world view rather than a set of political objectives. Sexual politics and the transformation of patriarchy in all its forms remain the defining objectives of feminism. Feminist poststructuralism offers useful and important tools in the struggle for change.

(Weedon, 1997, p.180)
discourses, which produce meaning for a culture (Kenway et al., 1994). It is not possible to write history objectively. Feminist poststructuralism offers a position where meaning can be contested. I explore ways in which feminist poststructuralism provides an underlying perspective for my thesis with respect to theorizing masculinities. Significant theoretical issues that emerge are included in this chapter under the headings of multiple truths, dominant discourses, and power relationships. Theoretical issues that emerged are considered in more depth as I explore ways in which adolescent male students negotiate positions within and outside of discourses of hegemonic masculinities in one privileged private boys’ school.

Foster (2001) argues that feminist epistemologies provide alternative ways of theorizing masculinities. Such an epistemological focus on males, and on masculinities, she suggests, could pave the way for positive changes for females as well as for the many males who do not easily fit a hegemonic model of masculinity identity. Epistemology is “a philosophical inquiry into the nature of knowledge, what justifies a belief, and what we mean when we say that a claim is true” (Alcoff, 1998, p.viii). By acknowledging the significant contribution of feminist theories, dominant discourses—such as normalization of hegemonic masculinity—may be critiqued and challenged.

Feminist epistemologies are not anchored; they do not stop changing or stop growing and it is this vitality that Tong (1989) attributes to the liberating quality of feminist thought. The liberating quality has led to the inclusiveness of ethnicity, whiteness, and masculinities in many research studies. I selected a feminist epistemological and methodological stance because gender is placed centrally in all feminist theories, with the notion that females face many inequalities. This leads to a necessity for action to redress these inequalities (S. Acker, 1994; Coats, 1994; Lather, 1988; Measor & Sikes, 1992; Tong, 1989). Not all males, however, are situated in a privileged position. Many males also face many inequalities and this is acknowledged within feminism.

Most feminisms also challenge the “masculine/feminine dichotomy” (Hekman, 1990, p.2) and, hence, the dichotomous nature of gender that has often led to the greater importance of males and male activities and the preference for the male norm. A most significant example of this dichotomy is the distinction between the public and private spheres of life where the public sphere is most often associated with males and considered of greater importance in many ways. Through feminism
it is possible to challenge the binary structure of society, where it is considered inevitable that a person belongs to one of the categories of a binary pair, stemming from the binary pair male/female but convincingly leading to other binary pairs like powerful/powerless (Davies, 1996). Binary pairs play a major part in the construction of individual subjectivity within a society, which suggests that oppositions are often created out of what are ‘elusively’ only differences (G. Greene & Kahn, 1985). Thus the importance of difference is exaggerated and focused upon in such a way as to justify positioning males and females as opposites. Positioning them as opposites creates restrictions for males as well as females. Instead, as Instone (1997) proposes, there is a need to de-stabilize dualisms.

Shepherd (1998) reminds us that research into masculinity is unlikely to have appeared on the agenda if not for feminist influence. Moreover, as Gilbert and Gilbert (1998, p.49) add, “masculinity is diverse, dynamic and changing, and we need to think of multiple masculinities rather than some singular discourse”. Acknowledgement of the diversity of masculinities enables males to take up multiple positions and opportunities. Similarly, the inclusiveness of many cultures enables further multiple possibilities. Through exploring roles of females and examining gender relationships, “feminist thought has inevitably challenged many preconceptions of men about themselves” (Head, 1999, p.58). Gipps (1996) recognizes a change in approach which enables a theoretical understanding of the way girls’ education could be enhanced to shift and focus on any groups of disadvantaged males or females. It is also critical to recognize that gender is “not an inherent presence waiting to be discovered; it is instead an evolving, multiply-determined ‘product and process’” (McLeod, 1998a, p.434), and in this way it is a historically socially constructed category. I find feminist theoretical perspectives provide alternative ways of viewing and reporting empirical research relating to males and alternative ways of theorizing masculinities, which incorporate notions of multiple masculinities.

McLeod (1998a, p.436) suggests that feminism is “a social movement that deliberately and self-consciously seeks to intervene normatively in the ways in which women and men conduct themselves, and to regulate the subject positions made available to them”. For this reason, we need to recognize that practices which seek to make ideological changes are not intrinsically innocent. Instead, these studies are historically situated. The fact that studies are historically situated also
means that dangers are historically situated. With respect to discussions on
discursive practices and power, Foucault (1983b, p.231) provides an important
distinction where his “point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is
dangerous”. Foucault (1983b, p.232) suggests “that the ethico-political choice we
have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger”, so that with
changes, new dangers emerge and new problems are created. Awareness of dangers
relating to projects involved in changing people, even when these are emancipatory
projects, lead however to activism rather than apathy (Foucault, 1983b).

As we investigate the liberatory discourses and objectives of feminism, we also need
to explore and theorize its powerful and regulatory feature which makes feminist
theory ‘complicit in’ and part of the process it desires to interpret and understand. It
is therefore important to recognize, as McLeod (1998a, p.434) suggests, that “we
need to see both feminist reforms and feminist theorizing on subjectivity and gender
as deconstructive but also constructive of gender”. Deconstructive and constructive
elements contribute to my focus on male students at school. Deconstructive
elements enable hidden meanings such as regulatory aspects of hegemonic
masculinities, which are not always explicit, to be grasped, and constructive elements,
particularly in respect of gender, may be perceived through acceptance of multiple
masculinities. In other words, feminist theorizing enables the opening up of spaces
in schools for interrogating hegemonic masculinities while simultaneously
articulating that there are multiple masculinities.

There is, however, no one feminism. For example, Tong identifies eight main
feminisms: liberal feminism; Marxist feminism; radical feminism on reproduction
and mothering; radical feminism on gender and sexuality; psychoanalytic feminism;
socialist feminism; existentialist feminism; and postmodern feminism. Examination
of these feminisms enables identification of “the richness and diversity of feminist
thought” (Crotty, 1998, p.170). Categorizing, however, can be distorting or limiting.
Indeed, it is important to acknowledge the contradictions and blurring among and
within categories. A feminist poststructuralist approach, which posits multiple truths,
proved to be the most useful for my research, and enabled male students’ different
stories to be highlighted. Feminist poststructuralism also enabled the investigation
of what Davies (1994) calls a ‘fictional paradox of truthfulness’ in alternative ways
than was previously thought possible, by being drawn into different worlds through
imagination and through various texts. Poststructuralist influences are part of a
complex and dynamic, rather than a static movement. However, I found that it was, at
times, important to be inclusive of other perspectives such as postcolonial perspectives (Gandhi, 1998; Quayson, 2000) which add more depth of understanding to my research particularly in respect of the ways in which dominant white European discourses thrived within the educational sphere at the expense of Indigenous Australian perspectives.

Clark (1999, p.96) wrote of how “out of some of the most racist historical circumstances, antiracist racist consciousness emerges”. She wrote about her own and others’ experiences, of growing up with ‘black’ servants. Clark showed how in a situation where children often spend more time with their ‘black’ servants than their own families, how these servants were treated and how these servants treated children would affect how these children responded and developed their own consciousness. Similar experiences do not necessarily mean similar consciousness because of the many different factors involved. Male students experienced racism at school, but their responses were not always the same. Trying to sort out and code these different experiences risk producing a simplistic and reductionist analysis and may lead to reinstating modernist versions of ‘truth’ (Popkewitz, 1997) with the idea that there are right and wrong answers. Marshall’s (1999) dilemma and difficulties seemed pertinent as I explored different positions. Her suggestion that feminism is a ‘tricky’ category presents further difficulties relating to whether feminism is just another concrete category that people have to either be in or out of. Was I, like Sawicki (1991, p.4), pursuing “feminist interests in non-feminist ways”? The significance of feminist poststructuralism became important in my own understanding and in my writing about adolescent boys, schooling and masculinities. Feminism poststructuralism provided tools for the deconstruction and interrogation of multiple positioning and dominant discourses such as hegemonic masculinities.

Theories which recognize the complexities and messiness of research within schools are the most useful in assisting and understanding educational research (Kenway et al., 1997). The identified theoretical perspective—feminist poststructuralist—is significant in facilitating the investigation of the messy complexity of discourse in all male classrooms. Feminist poststructuralism provides a discursive framework for discussion of societal political struggles where notions of ‘normality’ can be challenged. At times, the inclusion of Foucauldian theoretical perspectives was also significant to my thesis. Although Foucault resisted any categorization of his position, Sawicki suggests he was politically active as a poststructuralist, with his
writings aimed at influencing interventions linked to oppressed groups at a practical level (Sawicki, 1991). Drawing on philosophers like Foucault at crucial times, I adopt some of his insights to examine discursive practices, regimes of truth, and the significance of power and power relationships. For example, his works on power (Foucault, 1980) provide theoretical tools to analyze the pervasiveness and invisibility of power within education, within a specific classroom. As Gore (1995b, p.183) suggests, “a Foucauldian analysis of power in schooling can complement and extend past analyses, and aid the empirical study of power”. Indeed, Foucault (1981a, p.64) also asserts that “education is a political way of maintaining of modifying the appropriation of discourses, along with the knowledges and powers which they carry”, signifying the importance of research within schools. The theoretical issues of power and power relationships are explored in more depth later in this chapter. Although Foucault’s writing omits females, I recognize that Foucault and feminism do not need to be contradictory. As Sawicki (1991, p.49) points out, “both focus upon sexuality as a key arena of political struggle [and] both expand the domain of the ‘political’ to include forms of social domination associated with the personal sphere”.

Multiple truths

At the beginning of this research a troubling issue that came to the forefront related to my own femaleness and my role as a mother of a son attending a private boys’ school. A question which often troubled me was: ‘Who is able to speak for whom?’ While deciding on whether to pursue research at a private boys’ school I was in a quandary over how to overcome a perceived problem of speaking for others. I found validation for my position as researcher with Spivak who asked:

Can men theorize feminism, can whites theorize racism, can the bourgeois theorize revolution, and so on. It is when only the former groups theorize that the situation is politically intolerable. Therefore it is crucial that members of these groups are kept vigilant about their assigned subject-positions.

(Spivak 1987, p.253 cited in Pettman, 1992, p.141)

Thus if only members of a specific dominant group were allowed to speak on behalf of any other group, then it would become, as Spivak suggests, an intolerable situation. However, my situation appeared reversed, where as a female, I planned my research to be on males, who as a group retain a dominant position in society (Connell, 1998). It was essential that my voice was not negated because as a female I was writing about males. Haw (1995, p.44) provided further validation when she
answered her own question regarding “writing beyond her own positionings”. My speaking voice was complicated by the fact that as well as being a female, and from a non-English speaking background, I was also white. Racism needs to be taken away from the focus of being a problem only for ‘non-whites’ and constructing these ‘non-whites’ as victims and as ‘other’. Racism also needs to be acknowledged as a ‘white’ problem and that a white position is also a racial position (see Frankenberg, 1993, 1997a).

The power of theory enables changes in the way we view our, and other people’s lives, identities and interests. The effects can be either to reinforce or to provide opportunities for political change (Dugger, 1995). Acknowledgement of multiple truths is an important element for my focus of research as I explore this notion in more depth. The notion of multiple truths provides male students with access to multiple masculinities rather than only forms of hegemonic masculinity. It also provides students with access to positions which reflect different ethnicities, sexualities, and social classes. Consequently there is the availability of an alternative position to a dominant culture within education where the white, hegemonic masculine, middle class, Eurocentric position is perceived as the norm. Furthermore, the notion of multiple truths provides male students with an understanding of multiple positionings for females as well. Thus, feminist theories allow new perspectives and political positionings to be defined and provide conceptual tools for the study of masculinities as well as femininities. In this way, the multiple social and political positionings of females and males can be recognized and re-negotiated. Irigaray (1991, p.204) claims that feminism by its very nature is full of inconsistencies, but that “female sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters”. However, it is specific dominant masculine parameters which have also conceptualized males’ sexualities. In short, social and political positionings may be continually conceptualized and re-conceptualized depending on context, situation and time. Social and political positionings may be created and shaped through unrestrictive parameters which are both feminine and masculine inclusive.

Often media and society take the view that “goals of feminism have been attained and that, consequently, there is no longer a need for women to ally themselves with feminism as a movement” (Callaghan, Cranmer, Rowan, Siann, & Wilson, 1999, p.163). Feminism is often treated negatively and many people do not associate with being a feminist unconditionally. Marshall wrote about her own difficulty in whether
to label herself as a feminist when starting a teaching unit in a masters program. She suggests that the word ‘feminist’ is an:

especially tricky label to use or be defined by, and I would avoid it as an introductory self-definition in ... teaching. Feminism is often seen as highly incompatible with management, especially at senior levels. Students, male and female, who think their tutor feminist may well devalue them; or some female students may assume an automatic alignment, which carries its own complications. How to claim and portray feminist perspectives as part of an array of teaching frames, and invite course participants to respect and entertain them and not to be ‘branded’ is agile work. I find this a challenge with many different groups. It is increasingly likely, though, that some group members (women and men) will expect and bring with them more feminist appreciations. If I am overcautious, favouring mainstream theory for fear of causing disturbance or rejection, I may be modelling unnecessarily limited thinking – and may be challenged for this.

(J. Marshall, 1999, p.253)

Through a framework which acknowledges the significance of feminism it has been possible (simultaneously) to engage with and recognize the multiple realities of adolescent boys at school. Otherwise, multiple realities necessitate re-negotiation across borders which separate different groups or, as Anzuldua suggests, result in living in borderlands (cited in Scott, 2000, p.237). Ignoring racial and social class differences when researching issues relating to gender could, as Weiler (1988, pp.50-51) proposes, “distort both the realities of their experience and the possibilities for resistance in each site”. It is through a feminist framework that “such Eurocentric assumptions as its pretentious claim to ‘speak’ for all of mankind [sic]” (Giroux, 1995, p.49) can be rejected, and multiple social positions, including gender and ethnicity, accepted.

At the same time it is important to recognize and acknowledge that education can be a two-way process. In other words, teachers can learn from students whilst students are learning from teachers. It is within classrooms that “the transformation of consciousness ... takes place in the intersection of three agencies – the teacher, the learner and the knowledge they together produce” (Lusted cited in Lather, 1995, p.169). Thus it is through the interaction of teachers and learners that knowledge is produced. Gender, masculinity, whiteness, sexuality, social class and ethnicity are not “mere theoretical categories” (Ng, 1993, p.51) but are grounded in experiences and it is these experiences that are significant in our educational as well as in our social lives.
Discourses often clash with each other. Colonializing discourses with white, middle class male as a norm, clash with feminist and poststructuralist discourses which open up ideas of multiple truths. Such is particularly the case for Indigenous Australians where colonialist discourses may invalidate their own cultural awareness. Nevertheless, discourses and theories may also complement each other and open up new ways of viewing the world. This is particularly significant with poststructuralism and postcolonialism, which have opened up new ways of understanding how ‘others’ view society and are represented in society. For example, for Indigenous Australian groups, poststructuralism enables the disruption of Eurocentric hegemonic discourses whilst postcolonialism enables Indigenous Australians “to present their cultural inheritance as knowledge” (Gandhi, 1998, p.ix). Thus acknowledgement of the significance of postcolonialist theories is important in research which is inclusive of Indigenous Australians and in research conducted in Australia, a colonized country. Indeed, it could be said that “ethnology arose from the process of colonization” (Foucault, 1988, p.162) but viewed from the colonizers’ positions. The central ‘norm’ of colonizing groups penetrates with an ideology through which we learn and teach, so that even when we do not claim membership of a dominant group, we still often view the world from that perspective. It is therefore imperative for counter-discourses to be made available, away from the prevailing ‘colonizing’ discourses and towards a way of viewing the world through many and diverse perspectives and voices. The multinational nature of Australian schools and society yearns for changes to discourses that suggest white middle class hegemonic masculine Eurocentric models are the norm. Male students I interviewed were grappling with counter-hegemonic discourses, but were not given enough opportunities to firmly grasp these alternative discourses. Alternative counter-discourses have been made available through feminist poststructuralist theories. Davies successfully illustrates these ideas when she writes:

It is that ‘centre’ that has provided the discourses through which we do much of our teaching and through which we have done most of our learning. One effect of this is that even when we are positioned in the margins we saw from the point of view of the centre – as women we saw ourselves negatively through men’s eyes, as homosexuals we saw ourselves negatively through heterosexual eyes, and as ‘ethnic’ we saw ourselves negatively through Anglo eyes. Post-structuralism has begun to disrupt that particular violence.  
(Davies, 1996, p.146)
Thus poststructuralism, through deconstruction of hegemonic discourses and meanings, is one means which I use to uncover power relationships in the classroom.

Dominant ideologies have compelled females and marginalized groups to remain invisible. Marginalization has been recognized by feminism and great strides have been made in writing females and marginalized groups back into history. However, being seen is not always enough. As Gunew wrote: “It is not that migrants are invisible in Australian discursive formations, but that their positioning is relegated to certain areas: sociology and oral history” (cited in Ferrier, 1994, p.309). It is also imperative to be heard. Reinharz suggests that it is necessary for people to speak for themselves:

> It has never been as threatening to the powerful when powerless people are seen as when they are heard... In fact, being visible or “looked at” is hardly an achievement for women. Looking at women has been a form of men’s privilege. His gaze undresses her, his rapacious gaze has been institutionalized as art. Being seen is a way of losing, not gaining, one’s voice. For a woman to “accomplish” being seen by men is thus a dubious victory. Being heard is another matter.  
> (Reinharz, 1994, p.184)

Reinharz’s study relating to the ‘concept of voice’ is particularly significant to groups marginalized because of their gender, sexuality, ethnicity or social class. Reinharz suggests that:

> We should study how different groups affect each other with their speech and silence. When does anyone speak? When is anyone heard? When do people listen? What kinds of discourses are available and where? ... We need an ethnography and history of speaking and listening – in other words, an ethnography of voice.  
> (Reinharz, 1994, p.198)

Feminist epistemologies have given voice to what was previously unvoiced, naming what was previously unnamed. This opening of space can significantly benefit not only females but also any group that has been marginalized, such as Indigenous Australians and non-white students, male students I found were still marginalized at school. When spaces are opened up, new meanings are created. An analogy can be made with Hoffman’s (1989, p.272) words when she wrote, “The tiny gap that opened when my sister and I were given new names can never be fully closed up”, where new names represent a new culture, effectively marginalizing an ‘other’ culture. When something is named or re-named, new meanings become apparent
and so too we can never return to a previous historically situated position. Meanings are created from statements but statements are never static. Statements do not necessarily “mirror experience: They create experience and in the process of creation constantly transform and defer that which is being described” (Denzin, 1997, p.5). Discourses that have been deconstructed can be woven back into existence through a power which has been retained in language (Davies, 1996). Language is therefore significant to the understanding of how people position themselves, or are positioned, in schools and in society. Through this research I aimed to include the investigation of the position of language in the construction of subjectivities through social positionings.

Australian educational systems developed from a white, male, Eurocentric perspective. Shank discusses the way our striving for ‘educational rigor’ can blind us to contributions to knowledge from people who are on the margins of privilege. She suggests that hooks, who successfully moved into a privileged world, increased her strength by not forgetting she had been on the periphery:

It is from this position of being on the periphery of the whole that hooks gains her strength. If she had co-opted her voice to the man-of-reason’s rationality, masking the worlds that she transverses, forgetting the home world she left behind, she could not possess her critical perspectives. *Her voice would be silenced, her resistance disciplined, her critical position subdued* (my italics).

(Shank, 2000, p.228)

Shank’s words exhibit particular insightfulness, for if we are to conform to a dominant discourse, and if we expect students to conform, then the richness of multiplicities will be lost. Questions surface relating to how teachers, through language and through school curricula, try to fit students into their own model, and discount ethnic and cultural differences. How students’ ethnic and cultural backgrounds affect their educational performances and opportunities if they are suddenly told something they believe to be correct is not correct is also important to consider. So other questions that came to the forefront related to what extent students challenged or accepted differences of culture which surrounded them, or were students even able to challenge Eurocentric and Anglocentric frameworks. Finally, it was important to question how teachers use their ‘power’ within classroom settings.

To move out of a world of ‘silence’ and into a world with voice through a process which enables experience to be named is important. As Bernard perceptively wrote:
“Before we have a name for something we can hardly see it at all. Once it is named, we see it everywhere” (cited in Gatenby & Humphries, 1999, p.283). Gilligan (1997, p.19) suggests that voices of the racialized, gendered, socially classed and sexualized have become ‘loud’ because of their effect on social relationships. Thus, as “unvoiced, they act like a slow burn. Voiced, they bring conflict into the open, where it can be talked about and seen. … The greatest difficulty is finding a way to speak that does not silence others…”. Although it is imperative that others are not silenced, there are also many ‘truths’. Speaking positions are given and they are creations, but never simply discoveries. Silence often becomes an extreme racist act where by not acknowledging, for example, the colour of someone’s skin is akin to not acknowledging his or her identity. There is, however, a complexity relating to the breaking of silence, which at one and the same time gains and loses power for females, non-whites and other disadvantaged groups. Foucault observed how secrecy and silence provide protection for power, as well as offering opportunities for resistance and tolerance:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are… Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it but it also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. In like manner, silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions, but they also loosen its hold and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance.

(Foucault, 1981b, pp.100-101)

Secrecy also provides a “shadow existence” for issues of sexuality, so that it has become possible to speak of sex “ad infinitum, while exploiting it as the secret” (emphasis in the original) (Foucault, 1981b, p.35). This ‘secrecy’ surrounding issues of sexuality became apparent during my fieldwork in the classroom (see Chapter 7). As gendered, racialized sexualized and socially classed subjects, we act “within differential relations of power” (Carspecken & Apple, 1992, p.510). Apple reminds us that “one of the most fundamental questions we should ask about the schooling process is ‘What knowledge is of most worth?’” and adds:

This is a deceptively simple question, however, since the conflicts over what should be taught are sharp and deep. It is not ‘only’ an educational issue, but also one that is inherently ideological and political. Whether we recognize it or not, curriculum and more general educational issues have always been caught up in the history of class, race, gender, and religious conflicts in the United States and elsewhere.

(Apple, 1990, p.vii)
In this way, education is implicated in the politics of culture, and whose knowledge is considered worthwhile shows who has power in society. However, the “differential power intrudes into the heart of curriculum and teaching” (Apple, 1990, p.xi) to the extent that Apple suggests profit is often considered more important than education. The site of my research was a boys’ school where the students were of different ethnic backgrounds, including an Indigenous Australian. However, the knowledge that appeared most worthwhile there was almost exclusive of Indigenous Australian knowledge, and limited in terms of the inclusion of females and not-heterosexuals as actors in Australian history and literature.

Postmodernism allows for different historically situated ‘truths’ to be heard (Creswell, 1998) and thus to interrogate dominant discourses such as hegemonic masculinities and opening up alternative discourses. Truth is historically situated so that a disparity can emerge between ‘speaking the truth’ and being ‘within the truth’ of dominant discourses. As Foucault writes:

> It is always possible that one might speak the truth in the space of a wild exteriority, but one is ‘in the true’ only by obeying the rules of a discursive ‘policing’ which one has to reactivate in each of one’s discourses.

(Foucault, 1981a, p.61)

Thus there is a need to recognize not only “who tells the ‘truth’, but about the rules on which the truth is based and the conditions in which that truth is told” (Popkewitz, 1997, p.27). This suggests a significant link between knowledge and power. Truth is closely linked to the issue of power in a very specific way so that truth is often historically situated with the more powerful. As Foucault writes:

> We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. This is the case for every society, but I believe that in ours the relationship between power, right and truth is organised in a highly specific fashion.

(Foucault, 1980, p.93)

Foucault (1980; 1983a) also emphasizes how power is always linked to resistance, and states “where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (Foucault, 1981b, p.95). The link between power and resistance is a complex interplay but closely related within the same historic situation. The same event may be read from different perspectives, but in a relational manner. The mechanisms of power which
are brought into operation through a disparity of readings lead to confrontation and domination. Thus dominant discourses become visible and are able to prevail. For example, readings of texts in an English classroom are sites where dominant discourses are able to prevail. Foucault states that:

At every moment the relationship of power may become a confrontation between two adversaries. Equally, the relationship between adversaries in society may, at every moment, give place to the putting into operation of mechanisms of power. The consequence of this instability is the ability to decipher the same events and the same transformations either from inside the history of struggle or from the standpoint of the power relationships. The interpretations which result will not consist of the same elements of meaning or the same links or the same types of intelligibility, although they refer to the same historical fabric and each of the two analyses must have reference to the other. In fact it is precisely the disparities between the two readings which make visible those fundamental phenomena of “domination” which are present in a large number of human societies.

(Foucault, 1983a, p.226)

The body is also a place of resistance (Davies, 1996; Grosz, 1997) thus enabling a challenge to powerful discourses. It is therefore important to “distinguish between theories of power about women—theories which may include the subjugation of women ... and theories of power for women—theories which begin from the experience and point of view of the dominated” (Hartsock, 1990, p.158). Foucault (1979) is further enlightening and argues that the body is the central object of power. He writes:

But the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs.

(Foucault, 1979, p.25)

However, as Eyre (2000, p.297) reminds us, “since power is socially constructed, it can also be reconstructed”. In other words, as a social construct it is possible to reconstruct power to benefit groups who are marginalized or disadvantaged through social class, gender, sexuality, ‘race’ or ethnicity. The distinction made by Hartsock is important when theorizing about females or marginalized groups so that through the recognition of this distinction between writing for and about groups it may be possible to change rather than reinforce power relationships. Males also need to explore their own practices and their efforts toward change (Webb & Singh, 1998). Explorations and efforts toward change need to be made with male and female cooperation and keeping feminist ideology in mind. In other words, keeping in mind
the notion of social justice for all. We are warned that “research is never without interest; all forms of research impose values” (Quantz, 1992, p.471) and that research is often used to maintain the ‘status quo’. Keeping this warning in mind, it was important to challenge dominant discourses of hegemonic masculinity in this single sex boys’ school. It is also credible that studies which explore power relationships amongst adolescent males at school and males’ understandings of female roles can make a significant contribution towards renegotiating and changing existing relationships of power. Ideas can be translated into programs for action if the ideas are publicized widely, used in teacher training and in professional development courses.

**Dominant discourses**

Discourses can be ‘plurivocal’ and ambiguous, places of contention and conflict. As Sawicki (1991, p.1) suggests: “Choice, chance and power govern our relationships to the discourses we employ”. How we choose to accept or reject particular discourses will affect power relationships which touch our lives. Bradley (1996, p.9) questions why some discourses stick while others do not. She highlights the “wealth of feminist writing which has been carried out” not only within academia but also in society generally. Feminist writing has contributed to our understanding of history from various standpoints, yet it has not necessarily changed underlying assumptions of many that it is the ‘male experience’ that is the ‘norm’. ‘Problems’ relating to perceived disadvantaged people or groups are located not just in schools, but are ingrained in society both historically and politically. Through discourses our thoughts are actively constructed within and through the discursive fields in which we are embedded.

However, it is also through discourses that relationships of power are either maintained or changed (Kenway et al., 1994). Historically and politically dominant discourses can thus yield more power to the ‘powerful’. Through our ingrained historical and political background, particularly from what West (1993, p.21) calls the European age, we have inherited a “profoundly racist and sexist heritage ... [which] has bequeathed to us a set of deeply ingrained perceptions about people of color, including, of course, the self-perceptions that people of color bring”. In this case it is ‘white’ people who became the ‘powerful’. This has often led to certain groups being marginalized because of ‘race’ or ethnicity, leaving racial or ethnic division deeply embedded in many communities (Cowlishaw, 1990). Within the
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context of a middle class single sex boys’ school, students retain powerful feminine perceptions of females and at times racist ‘perceptions about people of color’ become visible. Through the interrogation of issues relating to power relationships and how issues of masculinities are implicated in racialized and ethnic power relationships will produce new knowledge in the area of heterosexual masculinities and homophobia.

Discourses are created through shared beliefs and values and exist in schools and in society. In the selected site of my research, shared beliefs and values were discursively constructed, for example, shared beliefs within the context of the school’s middle class values. These students also to some extent shared white Eurocentric values even when their backgrounds suggested they might hold other values as more important. Furthermore ideology appears to be so embodied within our “daily practices as the normal ways of doing things … [that] ideology, including racist and sexist ideology, is taken for granted and normalized” (Ng, 1993, p.57). In later chapters I explore the taken for granted racist, sexist, heterosexist and homophobic ideology which became apparent during interviews with male students. Through the process of distancing ideology from an event or issue it is possible that racism and sexism can continue to exist in disguise (Apple, 1993). Thus, by linking events with other issues such as poverty, important issues such as racism or sexism no longer appear to be racially or sexually based. Linking to new ideas effectively defers the need to challenge events which have transferred racial or sexual elements within them into ‘other’ possibly less-challengeable and less-controversial issues. This deferment of racial elements is particularly evident in Australia with respect to Indigenous Australians whereby issues such as land rights can be highlighted at the expense of disruption of racism.

Dominant discourses—particularly discourses of hegemonic masculinity—within society are often difficult to dislodge and become pervasive for students at school. In her research Schick (2000) reveals how students display strength of resistance to any changes. Resistance, however, is not only related to changes but to any divergence from hegemonic discourses. There appears to be an unconscious desire to adhere to and embrace ‘truths’ which have been normalized. This certainly appears to be what often happened for male students in my research when they perceived, rightly or wrongly, hegemonic masculine positions as the norm.
Despite multiple possibilities, Grumet also suggests that the dualistic nature of sex/gender often negated these multiplicities:

Coming home late one night from work, I came into my 7-year-old daughter’s room to say goodnight before she fell asleep. I was then acting dean of William Smith College, and when she asked me how my day had been, I told her about meeting with architects who were designing a new dining room for the campus, about counselling students, etc. ‘You really do interesting things’, she said. ‘When I have children, I am going to tell them all about all the things you do’. ‘Well, that’s nice’, I said, ‘but you won’t have to tell them about me; you will be doing all those interesting things yourself’, properly articulating the role-modelling mantra of a 1980s feminist. ‘Oh no’, she said, ‘I don’t want to work as hard as you, I like to play tennis, ride my bicycle. I’ll just tell them about you’.

This abstention expresses the richness and complexity of subjectivity, of a child’s desires, still rooted in her body, in play. It reminds us that we do not necessarily choose to be whatever we see before us. The road to role is paved with negation and differentiation as well as with mimesis. It further suggests the great range of possibilities that the world provides, a multiplicity, however, that is reduced when we are limited to the dualism that structures the sex gender system.

(Grumet & Stone, 2000, p.186)

The powerful discourse maintaining that women did not need to work was reflected more generally through the students I interviewed and this theme is explored in Chapter 6.

A powerful example of normalizing practices and of how ideologies are deeply ingrained is provided by Cavers-Huff who, on writing as “a black women [who was originally] from the welfare class” realized she had so often treated people—even friends—who were overweight with ‘intolerable rudeness’. On reflection she recognized that she was acting in a way that objectified and depersonalized herself and others. She found she was:

engaging in a culturally sanctioned practice of depersonalization. People who are somehow outside of the cultural norm—a norm that demands that people be white, thin, literate, English-speaking, with perfectly functioning arms and legs—are objectified. This objectification is apparent in the language that we use... This objectification is so deeply ingrained that we even tend to objectify and depersonalize ourselves.


Again, male students reflected such dominant discourses which suggest that females and males outside the ‘cultural norm’ of the school were objectified. Indeed, a
Torres Strait Islander student revealed how he was treated as outside the ‘norm’ often through elusive, difficult to challenge, moments of racism (see Chapter 8).

All these examples indicate that despite our experiences, dominant discourses tenaciously reappear. However, we may be complicit in their re-making even though their understandings are disadvantageous to us. The discursive constructions of dominant discourses are normalized whilst resisting or repressing alternative readings. These ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault, 1980) are constructed through the creation of ‘truth’ but within the relationship of power and resistance. Dominant discourses—such as the binary nature of gender or the hegemonic masculinity of males—are difficult to dislodge or disrupt and resurface and reappear with little significant change (Davies, 1993b). Thus, it is important to find different methods for disrupting prevalent discourses, and specifically discourses of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity, which disadvantage particular groups of people. Schools, such as single sex boys’ schools, become significant sites where the status quo can be questioned and where discourses of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity can be challenged (Arnot, 2000). This is an important reason for my choice of site.

Competing discourses are often apparent through students’ and teachers’ narratives and I have highlighted some of these competing discourses in later chapters. Which discourses and how students or teachers take on these discourses is significant to ways in which social positionings are available or perceived as available at any given time and situation. Female and male subjectivities are continually shaped from a “complex web” of discourses which are constructed and reconstructed daily (Kenway & Willis, 1993, p.3). Discourses often interweave as females and males create different meanings for and from different situations thus creating multiple possible social positionings. Complex layers are added to our social positioning as we struggle to identify who we are. Discourses may contain ambiguities, silences and gaps. Discourses may also contain spaces for resistance, challenge and innovation. These discourses will vary in strength, embodiment and power (Weedon, 1997). Concern with ‘normality’ often means people accept dominant discourses, particularly relating to the meaning of being female or male. However, conflicting discourses may be accessible at the same time. For example, females can often access a discourse that suggests ‘girls can do anything’ and that ‘the sky’s the limit’. Yet at the same time the reality for these females may be that societal and structural constraints exist (Kenway et al., 1996; Kenway & Willis, 1993). Female teachers can at the same time access a discourse that suggests they are successful
teachers, as well as access a discourse that sexualizes them as objects of sexual desire. For male students expectations to conform to hegemonic masculinities and expectations to follow particular paths at school which discourage taking perceived feminine subjects restricts their choices in reality. Males’ ideas relating to females can similarly fluctuate between discourses, with for example new discourses relating to gender equity coexisting with old discourses that housework is still a feminine job (for example see Chapter 6).

There is fluidity and blurring of competing discourses as they struggle for ascendancy or as they co-exist peacefully, as they become dominant or subordinate. Indeed, as Foucault (1981a, p.67) suggests “Discourses must be treated as discontinuous practices, which cross each other, are sometimes juxtaposed with one another, but can just as well exclude or be unaware of each other”. School students thus become discursively situated to challenge or to engage in this struggle over various meanings (Haw, 1995). Discourses continue to relate to power relationships (see for example Foucault, 1981b) and power is often retained within hegemonic discourses. Power relationships and masculinity cannot be discussed in isolation but can only be understood relationally. When masculinity is discussed as something unrelated to femininity it again takes on an implied unquestioned importance within the power relationship over femininity. Thus masculinity can never be completely understood unless examined temporally and historically as a relational power, not only between males and males, but also between males and females (R. Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Kenway, 1995). The power of hegemonic masculinity reflects relationships between male students as well as between male students and female teachers. More active, conscious choices relating to social and political positionings can be made with greater awareness of the existence of often-conflicting discourses. Thus through the concept of agency, students are not just discursively positioned but are able to also position themselves (Davies, 1993b; Weedon, 1997).

Theorizing issues of gender is essential to help understand why females, and many males, were and are so often “complicit in their own oppression” (Weedon, 1997, p.171). For example, my interview data provide strong evidence of how male students comply with hegemonic masculinity and Anglocentric discourses at the expense of multiple masculinities and multiple ethnicities. Understanding feminist theories, as well as poststructuralist theories and postcolonial theories enables us to “move away from the automatic privileging of dominant colonizing discourses and to move towards multiple races, multiple perspectives, multiple ways of seeing the
world” (Davies, 1996, p.145). Multiple ways of viewing allow the existence of notions that there is not necessarily one right answer, although there often are moral dilemmas to resolve in respect of what is perceived as right. However, what is settled on or agreed to by a majority does not also mean it is right (M. Walker, 1998). Acceptance of notions of multiple truths opens up significant spaces for negotiations or renegotiations. Understandings gained from thinking about social reality in terms of multiple positionings are significant for understanding how particular groups of males are also ‘complicit in their own oppression’. Thus, as I explore in later chapters, males easily accept, indeed may strive for, positionings within discourses of hegemonic masculinity. These understandings help explain why both males and females continue to accept and embody ‘normalities’ which frequently place them in ‘subordinate’ positions. Although awareness itself will not bring about social change, awareness is a step towards understanding how practical changes may be made within society.

Drawing on the works of theorists such as Foucault and his discussions of power and language, it is further possible to re-read history and thus expose events through new understandings which enable the uncovering and reorganization of facts (Rheding-Jones, 1995). As males have been able to deploy feminist theories, so females and feminist theories are able to contribute and inform research on issues of masculinities (Skelton, 1998). There has been an increasing acknowledgment of feminist theoretical contributions to the debate on masculinities (Coltrane, 1994; Conway-Long, 1994; Edley & Wetherell, 1996; Kaufman, 1994, 1999; Lingard & Douglas, 1999). Through new understandings, new truths are revealed through perspectives of females and other historically disadvantaged groups. It is however imperative to continually consider power relationships of males and females, as well as to question male privilege and male power (Brod, 1994) since male power could be unintentionally reinforced through writing about males and masculinities.

**Power relationships**

Issues of power persistently and frequently resurface throughout my research analysis chapters. For this reason, the notion of power in its many manifestations is discussed in greater depth. Power and knowledge are strongly connected. Knowledge is integral to and dependent on power, while power is integral to knowledge without which power cannot be exercised. As Foucault argues:
Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power... It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power.

(Foucault, 1980, p.52)

Furthermore, Paechter (1996) suggests that specific types of knowledge are perceived to be particularly powerful simultaneously because of and when they are perceived as created independent of power relations. Such knowledge exists within educational systems and it is difficult to talk or write about educational issues without also talking or writing about power. Central to any feminist study is the challenge of power relationships. There is, however, still a strong resistance to feminist knowledge, a 'particular prejudice' which often merely dismisses feminist knowledge. Silencing any oppositional discourse is a message of power. Whose voices are legitimated is also a message of power. Providing a voice for discourses that have been silenced enables acts of change to take place (Coate, 1999). The challenge to power is essential for change to ensue but as Pritchard Hughes (1997) highlights, particular groups are unused to seeing themselves in power, as indeed others are unused to seeing particular groups like females in power. Historically, masculinity has held a privileged position within society and can be closely linked to power by virtue of its name. Successful reconstruction and adaptation of masculinity has enabled specific groups of males to retain the idea of masculinity and the power linked to it (Arnot, David, & Weiner, 1999).

Issues of power can be strongly linked to social constructs such as gender, sexuality, masculinities, social class, and ethnicity. Foucault demonstrates how power relationships permeate all levels of society and how power exists everywhere and 'embraces everything', and states:

The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere.

(Foucault, 1981b, p.93)

Power appears to be a central issue in the relationship of different groups within society thus enabling the creation of many binary opposite categories like powerful/powerless relating to the categories such as 'white'/ 'black'. Power seems to be a fundamental issue when relating to cultural and social life. Apple (1993)
suggests that power continues to relate to property since through property ownership, prerogatives continue to be expanded in all social institutions including education. Apple’s idea links directly with the material based concept of social class where higher social classes are namely those that have ownership of property and money. Social classes are, however, constructed within a ‘white’ patriarchal system and do not take into account ideologies of any ethnic/racial group that historically may not consider property or money ownership as a social determinant of social positions or positions relating to authority or power—for example, Australian Aboriginal peoples\(^3\). Nevertheless, in Australian society, gender, sexuality, social class and ethnicity remain a primary determinant for access to power. An unequal relationship of power continues to exist, advantaging and retaining the aspirations of ‘white’ and often middle class males. But not all males fall into these categories. Indeed, as McLean (1997, p.62) notes, “one of the central paradoxes of masculinity is that while men, as a group, clearly hold the reins of power, the majority of men experience themselves as powerless”. Thus a specific group of white middle class males can be seen to ‘hold the reins of power’. That males can generally “feel under siege” (Kenway, 1995, p.64) and that dominant males can still claim to be victims has been identified as an aspect of recuperative masculinity politics in the face of backlash against feminism (Lingard & Douglas, 1999).

Through the power of constructed norms—with norms that nonetheless conceal power—domination can effectively continue. Asymmetrical power relationship can remain hidden and unchallenged. History shows that defining power “as an organ of repression” (Foucault, 1980, p.90) is virtually automatic. Since power is intrinsic in all social relations it becomes more significant to investigate its properties at specific but divergent manifestations. Power does not remain static but circulates and creates power relationships. As Foucault states:

> Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its thread; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other worlds, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application.

(Foucault, 1980, p.98)

\(^3\) I use the term ‘peoples’ rather than ‘people’ to signify the diversity within what can often be perceived as a homogenous group (Craven & Rigney, 1999; Newlin & Moran, 1999).
Focus on the everyday feature of power relationships is what Foucault describes as "a microphysics rather than a macrophysics of power" (McNay, 1994, p.3). This aspect of power is particularly significant to my research at the micro-level of the classroom. Gore (1995a) suggests Foucault's insights are important in understanding the pedagogical micro-level operation of power and how power relationships within classrooms are not always 'all embracing' but may be escaped at times. However, it is also important to acknowledge that power can mean something different in a different situation (Gillborn, 1996), so that a white male may have power in one situation, but as a gay person he may experience less power than a heterosexual male. During classroom observations, students exhibited understandings of the decreased power of a gay person through classroom role-plays. The complexity of power relationships suggests that relationships are neither consistent nor permanent. Within any educational institution, and between educational institutions, there will be myriad interrelationships which will affect power relationships. As Foucault further enlightens:

Take for example an educational institution: the disposal of its space, the meticulous regulations which govern its internal life, the different activities which are organized there, the diverse persons who live there or meet one another, each with his [sic] own function, his [sic] well-defined character—all these things constitute a block of capacity-communication-power. The activity which ensures apprenticeship and the acquisition of aptitudes or types of behavior is developed there by means of a whole ensemble of regulated communications (lessons, questions and answers, orders, exhortations, coded signs of obedience, differentiation marks of the 'value' of each person and of the levels of knowledge) and by the means of a whole series of power processes (enclosure, surveillance, reward and punishment, the pyramidal hierarchy).

(Foucault, 1983a, pp.218-219)

In the complex interplay of power within different social constructs I felt it was important to explore how issues of power were being played out in the classroom in one specific site.

Through politics, knowledge and power contribute to the shaping of experience and identity. The power/knowledge nexus contributed by the writings of Foucault (1980) whereby power and knowledge are inseparable and where power "cannot but evolve, organize and put into circulation a knowledge, or rather apparatuses of knowledge, which are not ideological constructs" (Foucault, 1980, p.102). However,
it is through multiple discourses that knowledge and power are linked. As Foucault writes:

Indeed, it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive element that can come into play in various strategies... Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it... Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.

(Foucault, 1981b, p.100)

Intellectual power generated by owning knowledge gives the perception that those with knowledge are in the best position to speak. But as Walker (1998, p.54) notes, “reproducing uncritically one’s specific position as the norm is an exercise of one’s privilege that at the same time reinforces it”. When addressing the subject of the balance of power, Foucault maintains that two questions—who are the powerful and how do they become powerful—need to be resolved simultaneously, otherwise “we will still not really know why and how the decision was made, how it came to be accepted by everybody, and how it is that it hurts a particular category of person...” (Foucault cited in Minh-Ha, 1991, p.19). These are particularly important questions for those who belong to less powerful groups—less powerful because of sexuality, social class or ethnicity or by not conforming to hegemonic forms of masculinity—since the questions imply that we continually make decisions that are detrimental to ourselves.

Issues, such as racism, continue to exist by the way ‘victims’ can be led to believe that somehow it was their own fault that things are that way, and thus they often accept the blame (Yamato, 1990). The power/knowledge nexus remains unequal as symbolic and material power as well as political knowledge remains with hegemonic societies while previously colonized people retain their ‘other-ness’. Experiences of the few who transverse worlds are valorized at the expense of many who remain in oppressed worlds. However, power operates in more complex and multifarious ways and is not found in a central location. As Foucault writes:

It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations,
transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly as the strategies in which they take effect, which general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law in the various social hegemonies.

Power’s condition of possibility ... must not be sought in the primary existence of a central point, in a unique source of sovereignty... Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is in the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.

(Foucault, 1981b, pp.92-93)

Foucault’s notion (1979) that power is not just repressive but also productive reveals the ways in which discursive social practices encourage us to take an active role in positioning ourselves within socially constructed categories, even when these positions do not easily fit. However, as noted earlier, power is not a centralized notion, and struggles against power are not against a specific institution or group but against what Foucault calls a ‘technique’ or ‘a form of power’ which creates subjects through domination, exploitation and subjection:

This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him [sic]. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. These are two meanings of the word subject: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his [sic] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to. Generally, it can be said that there are three types of struggles: either against forms of domination (ethnic, social, and religious); against forms of exploitation which separate individuals from what they produce; or against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way (struggles against subjection, against forms of subjectivity and submission).

(Foucault, 1983a, p.212)

The ways in which males create their subjectivities through access to different discourses operating within different and relational forms of power is explored in my study. My research focus on masculinities and adolescent boys at school enables challenges to ‘norms’, such as the perceived norm of hegemonic masculinity or the perceived notion that boys are naturally better at certain academic or sporting activities at school. Feminist poststructuralism is one route through which to start re-reading history as well as re-reading the present. Poststructuralism
questions how individuals are constructed through ideology and language (Denzin, 1992). In other words, poststructuralism enables “us to see afresh that which we had defined as natural” (Davies, 1998, p.288). Feminist poststructuralism provides us with essential tools that not only help deconstruct messages and meanings, but also help us understand how males and females make choices.

Through re-reading and re-writing history and the present, not only meanings but also dominant power relationships may be challenged and understood which makes new theorization possible. In turn, new ways of ‘seeing’ and understanding social reality enable political and social change to take place. hooks, however, questions the lack of presence of ‘race’/ethnicity in poststructuralist writings. She reveals how this absence:

    compels a black reader, particularly a black female reader, to interrogate her interest in a subject where those who discuss and write about it seem not to know black women exist or even to consider the possibility that we might be somewhere writing something that should be listened to … with intellectual seriousness.

    (hooks, 1990, p.24)

Lack of attention, highlighted by bell hooks, to ‘race’/ethnicity in many theoretical writings, characterizes and stereotypes groups of people in specific ways within a ‘white’ framework. With hegemonic masculinity also constructed within a whiteness framework, difficulties were perceived by non-white students who did not easily fit into a hegemonic masculine model. An absence of ‘black’ voices effectively negates the non-dominant voices and leads to invisibility or lack of serious acceptance for related groups.

**Conclusions**

In this chapter I explored the epistemology underlying my research. Feminist poststructuralism (Weedon, 1997) informed my theoretical approach, which enabled an exploration of gender issues in depth. Feminist poststructuralist contributions are particularly significant to theorize my emerging research on masculinities and adolescent boys at school. Of particular relevance are theoretical issues such as multiple truths, dominant discourses, and power relationships. The nature of these theoretical issues also provides a discursive framework for discussions of societal political struggles where notions of normality of hegemonic masculinity can be challenged. Research can often ‘reconfirm’ that males and females are different, thus reaffirming the binary nature of gender (discussed in Chapter 3). Advances in
feminist theories suggest that a more fruitful avenue to explore is how classroom discourses lead to particular creations of social constructs such as masculinity and femininity and how power operates on a micro-level of classrooms (see also Gore, 1995b). Therefore, there is a need to problematize gender and the notion of 'hegemonic masculinity', as well as to problematize issues such as whiteness. Issues of power relationships, and the link to knowledge and truth, become evident when problematizing notions of hegemonic masculinity and whiteness.

In this chapter I explored ways in which feminist poststructuralism provides an appropriate foundation for empirical research which requires in-depth analysis of issues such as masculinity, sexuality, ethnicity, and whiteness that are dynamic, historically situated, and interact in complex ways. As contradictory discourses were evident in my research, feminist poststructuralism provided an ideal platform from which to explore negotiations with contradictions to show intersections of different social constructs. I also examined issues of power and power relationship to show the need to interrogate normalization practices and the pervasiveness of power. Where appropriate, Foucault’s writing provides a complementary theoretical frame for this interrogation. A micro-level Foucauldian approach is useful for the understanding of the operation of power in a specific site and thus also has the potential for change. In the next chapter I examine my methodological approach and explore how and why a qualitative approach, informed by feminist poststructuralist theories, provides an ideal framework for my research questions and my empirical research.
CHAPTER 5  
RESEARCHING MASCULINITIES:  
METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND RESEARCH METHODS

Methodology is of particular importance in research about human beings ... Educational research is always on/for/with other people – and getting knowledge on/for/with other people is a complex matter. It is complex for three main reasons: human agency; social relation, especially the effects of power; and ethics. The terms ‘agency’, ‘power’ and ‘ethics’ indicate that these questions are particularly significant for educational research for social justice, which ... is directly concerned with power, empowerment and the good of communities and individuals.

(Griffiths, 1998, pp.35-36)

Qualitative research and feminist poststructuralism

In this thesis my central research questions pertain to the ways in which adolescent male students negotiate discursive ideologies relating to hegemonic heterosexual masculinities and to the normality of ‘whiteness’ specifically in a single sex school context. These questions are examined specifically within a private boys’ school and within a racialized social structure that is greatly influenced by a white Eurocentric middle class model. The approach taken is informed by a critical and poststructuralist feminist analysis within qualitative research (see Lather, 1991; Weedon, 1997).

In this chapter I initially examine my methodological approach and explore how and why a qualitative approach, informed by feminist poststructuralist theories (Weedon, 1997), provided an ideal framework for my research questions. I contextualize my study with a discussion on the selection of the site and gaining access to and providing details of my research participants. In light of my methodological approach my research methods are then explored in depth. These research methods

4 My special thanks to Professor William Tierney (University of Southern California, Fulbright Scholar at Murdoch University, May 2001) for his valuable feedback on this chapter.
include classroom observations, questionnaires, interviews with students, interviews with teachers, and an examination of texts used in the English classroom.

Specific issues emerged during my research which I feel need to be analyzed to explore their significance. These issues are methodological ones, subjectivity, reflexivity, ethical issues, truth and validity, generalizability, reciprocity and relationships. Although these issues emerged during the course of my fieldwork as well as in the analyzing and writing stages, a more coherent report of my research is possible through the discussion of research methods followed by a discussion of issues that emerged during the research. Finally, I provide details of issues relating to my data analysis and interpretation, which include an examination of discourse analysis.

A qualitative approach informed by feminist theorizing provided me with tools essential for examining the complexities in respect of ‘human agency’, ‘social relations’, and ‘ethics’, to which Griffiths (above) alludes. However, there is no one feminist qualitative research style (Olesen, 1994; Reinharz, 1992; Tong, 1989). A feminist poststructuralist framework initially provides an appropriate platform from which to begin a qualitative study since it enables a focus on issues relating to gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and social class, and foregrounds the construction of ‘truths’ as enmeshed in situationally, socio-culturally and historically specific power relations. In this sense, a conceptual framework is deployed which lends itself to interrogating the social construction and negotiation of masculinities in adolescent boys’ lives in one particular institutional site and location.

This enables attention to be drawn to how issues of whiteness and other factors intersect with gender to impact on boys’ lives at school in significant but salient ways (see Mac an Ghaill, 1994a; Sewell, 1998). In light of deploying this theoretical framework, some of my initial questions were: What is happening in this school? How are deeply ingrained discourses being challenged? How can ‘norms’ be effectively challenged and possibly changed? What sort of difference can a female teacher make? What possible use is research on classrooms full of males to females generally? These identified research questions suggest using an inductive rather than a deductive analysis within a qualitative framework (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1987) However, it is also important to remember that preconceived ideas, prejudices, assumptions and even quick interpretations may “keep us from learning that something new is possible in any particular context” (Brown, 1996, p.57).
My research questions focus on masculinity and whiteness as significant issues affecting the subjectivities of these male, mostly white, students within a middle to upper-class setting. Thus it is crucial to frame my research within a methodology that allows me to address the complex intersections of gendered and racialized subject positions. Crotty (1998) suggests there are four elements that inform one another: epistemology and broad assumptions; theoretical perspective or philosophical stance; methodological approach; and methods used including specific techniques and procedures. The four elements are intrinsically linked. Initially it is important to recognize that my epistemological stance assumes a “particular subjective position [as] a starting point” (Griffiths, 1995, p.59). How I value experiences and my interpretation of experiences inform how I will value and interpret others’ experiences. The need to value experience and relate it within an historical context is critical to my research.

Fine (1994, p.76) proposes that: “As researchers we need to position ourselves as no longer transparent, but as classed, gendered, raced, and sexual subjects who construct our own locations, narrate these locations, and negotiate our stances with relations of domination”. Thus qualitative research can be a very messy way of doing research. Stephen Ball vividly described this at a workshop in Perth in 1999 at a time when I was immersed in my fieldwork, and I can easily relate to the ‘mess’ that he described. Oakley (1981) also recognizes the messiness and complexity of qualitative research. Yet, somehow, from that ‘mess’ a coherent research thesis emerges. Chenail (1997) suggests that the phenomenon of feeling messy and muddled is usual as part of the process in qualitative research. Despite the amorphous quality of the process of qualitative research, I needed to make sense of my data by organizing a framework from within which to ask questions. At the same time I needed to remain open to any unexpected information and to keep critical questions in mind. Troyna warns of the dangers of “ill-conceived and poorly formulated studies” (cited in Drew & Demack, 1998, p.167), which could perpetuate notions as ‘truths’ such as “black underachievement as a given rather than a problematic that requires sensitive interrogation” (Troyna cited in Drew & Demack, 1998, p.167).

Situating my research within a qualitative framework, I used tools, such as interviewing and classroom observations. In addition, I used open-ended questionnaires and explored students’ own texts. Thus I used triangulation (see Patton, 1990; Stake, 1995) or ‘multiple methods research’ (Reinharz, 1992) to
gather information about masculinity. Interviewing participants was an integral part of my research and it was through their everyday talking and discussions that I was able to produce knowledge about masculinities in their lives. The interviews were richer and more complex than students’ questionnaire responses (although I found the questionnaires useful in their own way, as discussed later). As Barthes observes: “Speech is fresh, innocent, immediately theatrical, always tactical… When we speak we ‘expose’ our thoughts as they are put into words… We express aloud the inflections of our search” (cited in Denzin, 1997, p.42). Interviews were therefore an intrinsic element in my research and provided rich, in-depth insights. Participants’ narratives would merge with my—as the researcher—story creating new ‘collaborative stories’ (Sparkes, 1998). However, the new stories told also carried with them “traces of autoethnography, the personal memoir, and the confessional” (Denzin, 1997, p.201), (see also Paechter, 1996). Foucault (1981b, p.59) suggests it is these confessions which have become “one of the West’s most highly valued techniques for producing truth”. However, as discussed in Chapter 4, it is more precise to acknowledge that there are ‘multiple truths’ rather than unproblematic ‘truths’. By recognizing a problem, researching it, and by finding new links, new meanings and giving new interpretations, I could find new ways of making an identified phenomenon understandable to others. As a researcher I aimed at being “the agent of new interpretation, new knowledge, but also new illusion” (Stake, 1995, p.99).

Selection of site and gaining access

I selected a private boys’ school in the Perth metropolitan area in which to conduct my research. I had decided not to journey along a path which was inclusive of male and female students and where it would be easy to fall into an all-too-easy path of comparison by sex or gender. I felt that a good reason for not comparing males and females, and thus legitimately choosing a private boys’ school, was that males and females are often homogenized as two separate groups with similarities between males and females often being overlooked in preference to differences (see Collins et al., 2000). In fact, gender differences were often highlighted at the expense of any similarities. I chose a secondary school due to my interest in focusing on adolescent boys and being a mother of an adolescent son (Bhatti, 1995). The selected school was very receptive and supportive of my research from the beginning. I agreed with Greene’s (1995, p.269) suggestion that “the English classroom is a natural site for the discussion of issues such as race, class, and gender”. After meeting Marilyn, an
English teacher, (initially by chance) at a conference followed by an arranged meeting over coffee, negotiations were conducted with the Deputy Head and the Head of English prior to my entering the classroom. It is important to note that my final choice of school was because of this chance meeting with the teacher at a conference where we instantly found our interests and beliefs relating to boys at schools were in harmony. At the same time I had an invitation to do my research at another private boys’ school. As previously experienced, I found it was important to have alternative possibilities at hand in case access to my first preference was later denied (Hatchell, 1997); (see also Delamont, 1992). There was a need to be flexible, but prepared. I feel it is important to acknowledge that cooperation and interest from the participating teacher, together with the fact that she had enough flexibility to introduce specifically selected texts to students, was crucial.

I conducted my fieldwork at this particular school during the four terms of the 1999 school year. At the beginning of the school year the Head of English sent a letter to all the parents of the selected class which demonstrated the school’s support and explained my research and my reasons for sitting in on English lessons (see Appendix I). This assistance gave me easier access to the classroom and helped me gain permission from parents to interview their children. Pole, Mizen and Bolton (1999) note in their research that one focus of research may be students, but gaining access is often negotiated initially with parents and teachers thus denying some agency for these students. Thus, I was conscious of the issue of students’ on-going consent throughout conducting my research. With this redirection of agency in mind, I continually made it clear to students that they had a choice in whether they participated in interviews, in questionnaires, in classroom discussions, and in giving me access to their written texts. Ethical issues are discussed in depth later in this chapter.

**Research participants**

As my research group I selected one of the English classes taught by the teacher I had earlier met. This English class consisted of 33 Year 10 male students of mixed ethnic but mainly of—self-identified—middle class backgrounds. Although many of these students (62%) revealed that their family income was above average, they identified themselves as middle class rather than upper middle class. Two students revealed that their family income was below average but one identified as middle class and one as working class. One student revealed that his family income was
average yet considered himself as upper middle class. Overall, two students identified themselves as upper middle class and two students as working class and the rest as middle class. When taking parents’ education into account, a much more complex picture emerged. For example, one student revealed that neither parent was educated beyond secondary school level and revealed that his family income was average, yet still identified as middle class. Similarly, one student who revealed his family income as average and where one parent was educated beyond school considered himself as upper middle class. Such examples reveal that perceptions of social class are complex and do not necessarily consider parents’ education and family income (see Appendix II). The choice of school, a fairly elite private boys’ school with high tuition fees, and students’ limited understanding of the concept of social class could explain why most of these boys were, or perceived they were, middle class. In other words, students could not ‘objectively’ see their social class. Their understanding of the term middle class took a literal meaning, which they interpreted as meaning average, as linked to a family’s financial situation, and can be epitomized with the following comments:

Jason: Middle class in Australia means the people who are not rich but are not poor, basically the people who earn an average amount of money.

Simon: My understanding of middle class is that they are people who are not poor, and who are not rich. These people in the middle are middle class.

Students were either fourteen or fifteen years of age at the beginning of the school year when questionnaires were sent out and the interviews conducted. Students were turning fifteen sometime in that school year. Students in this class were of diverse cultural backgrounds, although most identified themselves as Australian. Cultural backgrounds in addition to Australian, British, and Italian, included an Indigenous Australian who was on a scholarship, a Singaporean, a South African, and an Indian, (see Appendix III). Many of these boys identified themselves as belonging to more than one ethnic group. When including parents’ background, a much more diverse ethnic picture emerges (see Appendix IV). Twenty-six of the students completed their questionnaires. Twenty-one out of the twenty-six students (81%) were born in Australia. Out of the other students, three were born in South Africa, one in the United Kingdom and one in Singapore. However, only thirteen of those born in Australia (50%) chose their nationalities as Australian. The rest included Italian, Torres Strait Islander, English, or a mix of nationalities. Looking more closely at students’ ethnic origins, I found that both parents of only six students (23%) were
also born in Australia. This meant that 77% of the students in this group had at least one parent who had migrated. Six students (23%) had mothers and not fathers who were born in Australia, and two of the students (8%) had fathers and not mothers who were born in Australia. Five of the students (19%) were recent migrants, whose parents were also not Australian-born. The most common language spoken at home was English, although the Italian language was also spoken in families with Italian backgrounds and the Indigenous student also retained the language of the Torres Strait Islanders (see Appendix V).

I selected this particular class because of students’ mixed ethnic backgrounds, and also because it was a class where Marilyn, the English teacher, could introduce material of her own choice and not be totally restricted by curriculum specifications. Although a major focus was on students, teachers were also central to my study. There was, therefore, a need to incorporate teachers’ ideas and experiences into my research. Unfortunately, at the end of the second school term circumstances evolved where Marilyn moved to another position within the same school to replace a teacher who had left. Consequently, another female teacher, Christina, replaced Marilyn in the English classroom I was researching. This change reminded me that participation was not guaranteed even when a participant was very willing and supportive (Maina, 1999). The school continued to be very supportive, but the change meant renegotiations with the replacement teacher. The change, however, gave me additional opportunities within my research to investigate different approaches by two white female teachers in the same all male classroom. Raphael Reed (1999) recognized the need for greater exploration and theorization of the gendered nature of classroom interactions through a feminist perspective. There is also a need to research in greater depth the interactions between students and teachers, where masculinities and identities play a significant role. As Raphael Reed wrote:

What we need now ... are more feminist accounts of the production of sexualised identities in and through education for teachers and pupils, in particular looking at the relationship between adult and child processes across the masculine/feminine divide and including the complexities of the unconscious.

(Raphael Reed, 1999, p.104)
Classroom observations

After initial contact with the school, I entered the classroom as an observer. There was a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom, as well as within the school, where I was welcomed with many warm smiles. At times I just sat in on the English class. Other times I interacted with the students. The opportunity for interactions was often deliberately organized by Marilyn during group activities to allow me to interact with students and ask them questions during lessons. Reorganization included moving desks from their normally singular positions in rows into groups of four to six to facilitate small group discussions. During these times, students were always very communicative and seemed happy to discuss any issues that surfaced. Thus my role in the classroom appeared to change as participants and I got to know each other and as they became comfortable with my observation within the classroom. Continued classroom observations proved to be an advantage when I found a growing acceptance of my presence. This was particularly significant when interviewing an Indigenous Australian student, where it was important to be flexible and wait until he was ‘ready’ to talk (see also Corrie & Maloney, 1998; Craven, 1999) and where arranged meetings did not always take place if the student was doing something else.

Over time I became an accepted part of the classroom décor. The classroom itself was unpretentious with light blue walls and ceiling fans. The fans were very desirable during the earlier classroom observation periods when the weather was still very hot outside. The heat made it necessary for windows to remain open thus providing many distractions for students from outside, such as the noise of crows. However, the distractions were, like my presence appeared to be, accepted by students as ‘natural’. The walls were adorned with pictures created by students and these I was able to get copies of to add to my data. Although entering the site as a researcher, students also recognized and acknowledged me as a qualified teacher, with the result that they could discuss issues relating to schoolwork with me, as well as discuss issues relevant to my research. They also recognized, acknowledged, and related to the fact that I had a son of a similar age that enabled them to perceive me as someone who was knowledgeable and understanding of this year group, particularly when they also saw me at inter-school soccer matches. Hence over time I became more than just an observer, but was allowed to partly immerse myself in the field (Roman & Apple, 1990), and thus take a participatory observation role. I also found more students happy to be interviewed later rather than earlier in the year.


Questionnaires

Questionnaires (see Appendix VI) with consent letters (see Appendix VII) were sent home with all students in the class, and were returned slowly but consistently. The cautious way that consent letters and questionnaires were initially returned confirmed that a quiet entry was an advantage. Students’ completed questionnaires were used to provide some basic information such as social class, ethnicity and family birthplace and migrant status of the participants plus some of their initial thoughts. Thus through the questionnaires I was able to introduce specific ideas relating to gender, ethnicity and social class to students. I questioned how they felt they had been or had not been given educational opportunities because of their social class, gender or ethnicity. My questions included: How has being a male privileged you in your educational opportunities? How do you feel your social class has given you educational opportunities which you may otherwise not have been given? How do you feel your ethnic background has affected your relationships at school and provided you with educational opportunities? I introduced such questions into the questionnaire to give participants time before I interviewed them to consider the roles played by gender, social class and ethnicity.

Initial questionnaires additionally provided an introduction to my research to help parents understand my area of research. Since some of the information asked for in the questionnaire could be considered of a sensitive nature, I stressed that all information given to me would remain confidential and anonymous. Marilyn, the English teacher, played a central role in reminding students to return completed forms, especially when some continually ‘forgot’. I found that one student did not explicitly want to complete the questionnaire, although six others continually ‘forgot’ to bring their questionnaires back. Some students did not complete all the questions in the questionnaires. Both teachers cooperated with the study and were interested in students’ answers.

During the year I gave the students follow-up questions (see Appendix VIII) relating specifically to issues that arose through texts covered in the English class, as well as issues or events that occurred in the classroom. These were in the form of simple questions given to students to complete at the beginning of specific classes. These supplementary questions emerged after classroom observations and student interviews. For example, students talked about the phrase ‘just like a girl’ during
interviews, and so I was curious to see what their peers in their English class understood by the same term. Pertinent questions were carefully worded so that students could answer them within ten to fifteen minutes.

**Interviews with students**

At the beginning of my entering the field, ethics approval took longer than I had anticipated and this set my timetable back a little. The delay meant that interviews began in the second rather than first term of that year. In respect of interviews I believed it was particularly important that as researchers we “listen to and acknowledge the real and multiple interests and subject positions of differing boys rather than importing a political identity (politically correct or otherwise) and placing it upon them” (Raphael Reed, 1999, p.106). I agreed with Stake (1995, p.64) who observed that “the interview is the main road to multiple realities”. I felt that each participant had “unique experiences [and] special stories to tell” (Stake, 1995, p.65). Unstructured interviews allowed for the telling of participants’ stories and contributed to the conversational style of interviews (Ackroyd & Hughes, 1992; Berg, 1998).

Many of the interviews with students were initially arranged during the school lunch break. However, lunch breaks were sometimes difficult for students as they suddenly found they had to participate in other activities. Or sometimes they simply forgot to turn up. Often I would come into the classroom after a lunch break when a student had forgotten to turn up and the teacher suggested I take them out during the English class. This arrangement seemed more suitable for many boys. After a few initially missed interviews, I scheduled all interviews during English classes where the teacher felt little would be missed. In fact Marilyn suggested that students benefited from the one-to-one interview discussions with me on issues that arose or were introduced in class and in their work. The new arrangement was acceptable to the school, to the teacher, to students, and to me. I felt that, since many of the issues discussed related directly to texts used in class, students could develop their own critical thinking in relation to particular issues through more in-depth discussions at interviews. Issues, such as racism, gender, and friendship, were particularly relevant to the way the first teacher approached her teaching.

All interviews were conducted in a room in the school library. The room was very conducive to interviewing because it was glassed off from the rest of the library and
with the door closed it also provided confidentiality. Library staff, as well as other staff, were very helpful and friendly. At the beginning of each interview I again explained to students what my research was concerned with, and also gave them some details of my background, which included telling them about my son who was in the same year and attended a similar school to theirs. Many boys found it easy to communicate and were keen to talk, and we often found we did not have enough time in one interview. Soon after starting the first interviews, I realized that second interviews would be needed and asked for their permission at the end of the first interviews. Second interviews with selected students were conducted in the second half of the school year. Follow-up interviews allowed some events and ideas to be discussed and recorded over a period of time.

I interviewed students using open-ended questions. The open-endedness of questions allowed the addition of depth, detail and meaning at participants’ personal levels of experiences. While I had a number of focus topics (see Appendix IX), I was careful to remain flexible to allow for information to be extended during interviews. Initial questions were often an extension to questionnaires, as I offered them a space to explain their own comments and then introduce issues that were relevant to them. Initial classroom observations also generated further questions. I felt it was important to allow flexibility in questions to facilitate the emergence of unexpected issues that were important to participants or that required further exploration of meanings (Aveling, 1996; C. Marshall & Rossmann, 1989).

I tape-recorded all interviews, with permission, and transcribed them as soon as possible after the event. Additional journal notes were made following interviews. Recordings allowed me to listen carefully to what students were saying and to try to understand their meaning as much as possible. Although Robert Stake suggests that exact words are usually unimportant, I disagreed in this instance. Instead I felt that to have their exact words would mean I could ‘re-live’ the interviews by going back to students’ words—as well as my own notes—and thus also be able to create a greater depth of meaning. By recording I was able to avoid writing “furiously” during interviews, and was able “to listen”, and “to ask for clarification” (Stake, 1995, p.66) on many issues that were discussed. In this way I was able to also enjoy the interview process, as well as focus on what the interviewee was saying. My own notes would be a ‘summary’ of what they said, but writing these down, sometimes hours later because of unavoidable delays and events, could mean a lot was missed out. Sometimes subtle things can be suddenly picked up again when re-listening to
interviews or reading transcripts. I found this happened in previous research (Hatchell, 1997), and again on this occasion. Recording was particularly important since interviews were up to an hour long, with some delay after, and memory did not always allow me to clearly remember all topics and issues covered. Sometimes an unexpected link or a significant comment was made where participants found connections that were not immediately apparent to me, and links could be picked up through re-listening to interviews.

Popular rhetoric often suggests that adolescent males are more difficult to talk to than adolescent females. I am not sure I would like to make a ‘truth’ out of this since I had not found such a marked distinction. Stephen Ball (workshop, Perth, 1999) expressed how, in his experience, he found that boys opened up as they became more used to—or comfortable with—a person, and he felt that they had opened up to him more with each successive interview. As a direct result of attending this workshop, I felt it might be an advantage to choose my ‘critical’ students—students who I believed could offer more insights on the basis of how they responded in the first interview—and interview them again. However, it was preferable to have second interviews at the end of the school year, as I also felt that too many interviews could lead to an overuse of interviews for students. Instead I used participatory observation in class where students were able to become more comfortable with my presence and to feel they could open up to me more. This was confirmed by Marilyn, and also by some students themselves at their second interviews.

Interviews with teachers

I interviewed both teachers, Marilyn and Christina, in fairly informal settings. I found that teachers were often significantly absent from research in schools (see also Raphael Reed, 1999), with many studies focusing on students. When teachers were the ‘main characters’, they were often portrayed in a ‘critical’ way. These studies also highlight teachers, particularly white teachers, as responsible for generating conflict, reproducing stereotypes, and reinforcing inequalities (Gillborn, 1998). However, by bringing teachers into the foreground, I wanted to discuss their understandings of the way students learned. In my research, unstructured interviews were conducted with both female teachers at their choice of location. Similar to students’ interviews, this location ended up being in the school library.
I interviewed the two teachers of the selected classroom to explore how they believed their understanding and teaching strategies affected the shaping of students’ subjectivities. Through the interviews I was also able to question the two teachers on how they modified their teaching as a result of my presence in the classroom. The teachers felt they were not significantly influenced by my presence although Marilyn also acknowledged that particular issues, such as racism or gender, were highlighted specifically, and proffered that classroom group work was initiated so that I could move freely around the classroom and talk with students. I conducted two interviews with Marilyn: an initial interview at the start of classroom observations and a follow-up interview at the end of the second term. I conducted one interview with Christina in the second semester. The interviews were conducted informally through in-depth unstructured questions relating to teachers’ backgrounds, but also within a framework of their teaching strategies as well as their beliefs relating to, and images of, female and male students from different ethnic groups and social classes.

**Texts used in the English classroom**

Texts used in classrooms are significant when investigating issues of equity, as texts are often central in “the production of patriarchal relations and in the construction of femininity” (Weiner, 1994a, p.78) and importantly, I would add, in the construction of masculinity. During times of ‘political change’, struggles have emerged regarding control over educational texts. As Grundy (1994, p.328) points out, “policy documents are intended to exercise a specific authorial and textual authority … [and that] … policy authors do make concerted efforts to assert such control” suggesting that power is often constructed through texts. It is also policies, as Ball (1993, p.13) wrote, which “typically posit a restructuring, redistribution and disruption of power relations”. In this way “policy as discourse may have the effect of redistributing ‘voice’ … so that … only certain voices can be heard as meaningful or authoritative” (Ball, 1993, p.15). Hence, the discursive construction of power is a central issue in literature and by being “excluded from a literature that claims to define one’s identity is to experience a peculiar form of powerlessness” (Fetterley, 1978, p.xiii). In my research it was imperative that different groups were ‘heard’ and that feelings of power and powerlessness could be discussed and deconstructed. Weiner cites Apple and Christian who point out that:

School texts are conceived by people with interests, and published within the political and economic constraints of markets, resources
and power. They present particular perspectives of reality, and of selecting and organising knowledge, and so contribute to our commonsense understandings of the ‘reality’ of culture and knowledge.

(cited in Weiner, 1994a, p.77)

Educational texts often highlight the views of particular groups within society (Thomas, 1991). Heilbrun (1997) suggests that educational texts are often experienced through a masculine persona, but more often through a specific dominant masculine persona. In fact, it could be said that “all texts are normative, shaping, and constructing” (Luke, 1995, p.19). It was therefore crucial that selected texts could challenge some of the issues in question in my research. Reading educational texts has a potential to open up “disseminative power and multiple meanings” (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p.127) to students. Issues I was investigating were of a difficult nature—deeply ingrained and complex issues—hence more than just simply asking questions and students giving answers and certain texts were selected to help me investigate these issues. At the beginning of the school year specific texts (see Appendix X), which lent themselves to deconstructing normative masculinities and to deconstructing ‘whiteness’ as a racial issue, were introduced by Marilyn into the classroom. Marilyn chose the final texts during our initial discussions before the school year had started. I believed that the selected texts could be used to create spaces for students to question dominant discourses and ‘norms’ but through a less personal, therefore less threatening way (see for example Martino, 1995).

The chosen texts, which included The Inner Circle (Crew, 1999), The Club (Williamson, 1978), and Peter Weir’s film, Gallipoli (1981), provided ‘critical learning dialogues’ and focus points for further interview questions. The Inner Circle was selected for the many issues such as racism and prejudice that it raised relating to an Aboriginal boy from the country and a white Australian boy from a divorced family. Neither boy in the text felt they ‘fitted in’. They both felt like ‘misfits’ in society for their different reasons, yet found they could connect with each other. The Club was selected for the issues it presented relating to masculinities and for its portrayal of the ‘ocker’ male image, plus for the group-power struggle that went with an all male group. Finally, Gallipoli, a film directed by Peter Weir, was chosen for the ways Australian males were portrayed, and for the significance of Australian ‘mateship’. This film was also selected for the issues relating to war, particularly the futility of war. Gallipoli additionally showed the strong ties that still
existed with England, while at the same time representing Australia as still a young country in the process of finding its separate, national identity.

I also collected students’ written texts from classroom activities. These texts enabled me to gain a better understanding of how different educational and literary texts informed students’ understandings of specific issues. For example, their responses revealed understandings of masculinity through their thoughts on The Club. They also showed how students used these as specific texts to help shape their own identities, thus providing me with glimpses of processes that influenced them. Through their texts, students help make sense of their lives. School, together with meanings that students bring with them from their lives, introduces other differences in meanings into play so that “there is a context of meanings which they engage with through the process of learning and a conflict of meanings between the experiential, the pedagogic and the cultural codes transmitted through the curriculum” (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p.139). Students’ texts were mainly, though not exclusively, from classroom activities with Marilyn, the first teacher, where issues, such as gender, masculinity, ‘race’/ethnicity, were incorporated into activities. Although many of these issues were made explicit within class, I felt this was acceptable and did not detract from my research because, as Marilyn indicated, these issues were part of the curriculum. I felt this was a valid approach because my research was not on whether or to what extent issues are consciously ‘taught’ by teachers, but how texts were read and understood by students.

Methodological issues

We are in a moment of discovery and rediscovery as new ways of looking, interpreting, arguing, and writing are debated and discussed. The qualitative research act can no longer be viewed from within a neutral or objective positivist perspective. Class, race, gender, and ethnicity shape the process of inquiry, thereby making research a multicultural process.

(Denzin, 1997, p.19)

As Denzin indicates, qualitative research can be a voyage of discovery, where research can no longer ignore factors such as ethnicity, social class, gender and sexuality. Denzin’s notions were particularly significant for me as I aimed not only to be inclusive of the issues he highlights but also to explore the significance and roles played by dominant discourses that are continually associated with these issues. So often it is found that “white respondents say they don’t think much about race; [whereas] most people of color wish they weren’t reminded of their race
— via harassment, discrimination, and on-the-street stares — quite so often” (Fine & Weis, 1998, p.18). Thus race, particularly among white students, is often significantly embodied within research but not always acknowledged. Some recent educational studies (for example see Gillborn, 1998) have positioned ‘race’/ethnicity as central to research. I incorporated ideas surrounding whiteness within my theoretical framework to invert notions of this often-ignored or negated social construct. Through my research I explored how subjectivities were shaped with particular reference to ways in which whiteness is normalized. It was crucial to expose how gender, social class and ethnicity worked “their way into the concrete lives of interacting individuals” (Denzin, 1997, p.10) and how meanings of different experiences were understood by participants within the site of my research. My exploration here was more specific to spaces created in class for discussion of these issues.

Although it has been suggested that some control over research data is lost by empowering and allowing participants to describe realities in their own way (Bhatti, 1995), I felt that this was in no way disadvantageous. Assuming some loss of control through empowering participants is possibly giving the wrong idea, since allowing participants to describe their own ‘truths’ enables their stories to be heard. At the same time it is worth noting that although interviews were informal, the development of participants’ narratives was also in response to conversational and explanatory questions I asked during the interviews. It has also been suggested that females find it easier to talk with female researchers (Fonow & Cook, 1991) so ethical issues relating to how much was revealed in any interview with my female participants needed to be seriously considered. Specific issues relating to empowerment and ethics emerged as significant to my research journey. These issues included subjectivity, reflexivity, ethical issues, truth and validity, generalizability, reciprocity and relationships. These issues are now discussed in greater depth.

Subjectivity

What a researcher learns, how information is interpreted, and how new knowledge is learned is all rooted in subjectivity, in ‘personal’ histories. ‘Personal’ histories are a composition of complex personal attitudes, values, beliefs and interests which affect research approaches and journeys. Maintaining a position of neutrality is often only a façade (Berg, 1998). I felt, therefore, that it was equally important to recognize that
I was part of the social setting as well as assuming the role of the researcher. Thus exposing what Roman and Apple (1990, p.50) cite as the “phenomenon of the missing researcher”. In this way, as the researcher, I was no longer situated as “an absent presence, a removed authorial voice, but rather as an historically situated social subject” (Roman, 1992, p.586). Simultaneously, I aimed at clear accounts and clear interpretations which, through “more trustworthy interpretations” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.147), would aid my thesis. Humberstone (1997, p.199) suggests that reflexivity is “a form of intellectual autobiography” so it is by including these reflexive narratives that readers are able to interpret my research in a more knowledgeable manner. Through greater visibility of me as the researcher, readers also have greater access to understanding power relationships.

Any research is likely to be subjective (Brown, 1996; Lather, 1991) although it is continually recommended that research should reflect a search for knowledge rather than be political, and that any political goals should be subordinate to the creation of knowledge (see for example Hammersley, 1995). However, it is also now generally acknowledged that “all research is political” (Oakley, 1981, p.54). I believed it was essential to continually be alert to and explicit of my own bias, my own subjectivity, while giving a clear account of interview narratives and questionnaires. Since any research is likely to be subjective (by definition) and “ways of knowing are inherently culture bound and perspectival” (Lather, 1991, p.2), my aim was to be aware of my prejudices. It was particularly significant to recognize and avoid the potential of strengthening or defending specific ideologies of stereotypes through qualitative research methods. There was therefore a need to recognize the “reflexive character” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p.14) of qualitative research (discussed later), and to include the description of all participants—including me as the researcher—and participants’ views to ensure validity (Tripp, 1992). Through qualitative research, such as in-depth interviewing, it is possible to:

promote empathy and give the researcher an empirical basis for describing the perspectives of others while also legitimately reporting his or her own feelings, perceptions, experiences, and insights as part of the data.

(Patton, 1990, p.58)

Griffiths (1995) questions how far we can trust our reasoning and our feelings since we ourselves have been constructed within a male dominated society. Continual challenge is warranted because of the apparent ‘naturalness’ of issues under investigation. As Alton-Lee, Densem and Nuthall (1990, p.4) write: “Perhaps the
best evidence of the long-term impact of sexist curricula is the teachers’ lack of awareness of bias. We are all products of this kind of curriculum’. So it is important to question how much choice we really have and, even though we may often feel we have many choices, to also question the extent to which we are shaped and actively constructed by dominant discourses.

**Reflexivity**

Reflexivity played a significant role in my research. Reflexivity refers to my awareness of the interconnectedness of the social world researched and the research itself (P. Foster et al., 1996). I needed to bring to the forefront the ‘plethora of baggage’ I carried with me, but not to use reflexivity to justify or excuse my research. Being reflexive also meant an acknowledgement that I as the researcher helped shape the data that was created—and in the same vein it meant the data was created rather than ‘found’ (Morawski, 1997; Smyth & Shacklock, 1998). Greater depth of reflexivity was obtained through incorporating participants’ viewpoints and acting collaboratively as far as possible. Reflexivity enabled me to realize “that knowledge is perspectival and [to be aware of] the possibility that there may be a complete change of mind in the middle” (Griffiths, 1998, p.141).

I was aware of the possibilities of multiple realities existing simultaneously within any social world. I was also aware that I as the researcher embody multiple subjectivities, with an acknowledgement that “no individual belongs to one, single, socially constructed category” (Troya, 1998, p.108). Discoveries for a researcher during any research could also mean discoveries about oneself. Being immersed in the culture under investigation and researching a particular phenomenon, a researcher can examine “the way in which their developing understanding changes them and their relation, not only to both the phenomenal world they are observing and their knowledge of it, but also to how they are observing and understanding the phenomenal world” (Tripp, 1998, p.39). As Tripp (1998, p.39) so aptly quotes: “The typical Eskimo family consists of a mother, a father, two children and an anthropologist. When the anthropologist enters the igloo he [sic] learns a lot about himself...”. In this case ‘Eskimo family’ can be substituted with classroom participants. Furthermore, I acknowledge that knowledge produced in this thesis is limited by my own history and parameters within which I work on the research (Quantz, 1992, 471). There may be a variety of communication, responses, and transmission of knowledge and meaning so that I, as the researcher, and my
participants will at times be constructing meaning together, but at other times one may be resisting the other:

Some of what occurs in an interview is verbal. Some is non-verbal. Some occurs only within the mind of each participant (interviewer or interviewee), but it may affect the entire interview. Sometimes the participants are jointly constructing meaning, but at other times one of them may be resisting joint constructions. Sometimes the interviewee cannot find the right words to express herself/himself and, therefore, will compromise her/his meaning for the sake of expediency.

(Scheurich, 1997, p.67)

Meanings I construct are linked not only to issues of subjectivity and reflexivity but also significantly to my background which plays a crucial role in how, why, and what decisions are made throughout my research.

**Ethical issues**

I gained approval from Murdoch University Ethics Committee for this research. Ethics could be said to be “a reflective and normative study of morality” (M. Walker, 1998, p.1) and needs to take into account what is ‘right’ and the validity of these judgements. Ethical issues that were of concern here included ensuring that consent was given; that there was no deception nor secrecy; that participants retained the right to withdraw from the research at any time without prejudice; protection to confidentiality was continued; while always retaining participants’ rights to anonymity (Australian Association for Research in Education, 1993; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Early on in the research, pseudonyms were chosen for all participants. I felt it was particularly important to respect their need for privacy. Confidentiality and anonymity are also essential so I excluded any identifying information. These issues became particularly pertinent when reporting my research and my discussion with an ethics committee member confirmed that it would not be possible to provide further information, such as religious affiliation, about the school.

Ethical principles necessitated gaining informed consent (Howe & Moses, 1999). Consent was relatively straightforward with the teachers. For students, however, who were fourteen or fifteen years of age, it was necessary to ensure that not only were they informed, but also that their parents and their school were well-informed of what my research entailed. I believed and still believe honesty and openness to be key issues. Punch (1994, p.94) warns us that meanings of benefits and harm are not
always clear and suggests that “there is no consensus or unanimity on ... what constitutes harm, and what the benefits of knowledge are”, so continuous awareness of possible harm needed to be considered. As Soltis (1990, p.250) clearly acknowledges, these are “real people who deserve respect as persons and who require me to recognize their claims for ethical treatment”.

Generally, therefore, it was necessary to protect participants from any inappropriate disclosures or from any harm (Simons, 1989), while still allowing information to be collected and distributed. Koehn proposes that care, empathy and trust are central tenets relating to ethical issues. Through these proposed tenets it is possible to listen to many different perspectives. However, she also warns that adherence to these tenets does not guarantee respect and non-manipulative action. Koehn further suggests that principles and public spaces are required to reach some mutual truth, and wrote:

If we are to honor the distinctive perspectives of individuals, we need principles that enable us to thoughtfully entertain the possible truth in another's claims without requiring that we endorse every statement or self-justifying assertion this person makes. We need a public space in which persons are maximally free to contest each other's descriptions of practical problems of mutual concern and to do so with a view of jointly progressing toward the truth regarding the best description of the problem and the best response to it.

(Koehn, 1998, p.163)

Providing a space to hear participants’ voices in this research thesis, through presentation of excerpts of their interview transcripts, was a move towards understanding different and mutual truths.

Feminist research has highlighted how it is often easier for female participants to respond to female researchers and with this ease came ethical responsibility of, for example, not including information that otherwise might not have been disclosed, even if this information may have some significance to the research thesis. Because of the ease of the female teachers talking with another female, the ‘gray zones’, a phrase used by Card (1999), had to be avoided. This meant being aware of the possible complicity as a researcher in disadvantaging others from similar situations or groups, for example, as a female condoning oppressive acts on other females. In other words, it was important to acknowledge their vulnerable position through their participation in my research. It is also crucial that female teachers continue to be protected from any disadvantages that they could be placed in through such
research. It was more important to me to have my female participants’ consent and retain their cooperation.

I felt it was also important to address identified ‘grey areas’ of ‘invisibility’ within my research (Burgess, 1989) which entailed being visible and open during observations. Clear and explicit intentions were also achieved through sending letters to students and their parents (both from the school and from me), which gave details of my research (see Appendix I and Appendix VII). It was crucial to pay particular attention to all aspects of ethical research because “as Ruth Frankenberg has so brilliantly shown it is in the ability to avoid ethics and responsibility that power and privilege are made and reproduced” (Skeggs, 1999, p.44). I felt it was important to recognize that education was a powerful stage that ultimately involved people, so attention to ethics and responsibility was essential:

Education is ultimately about the formation of persons. It is about developing and contributing to the good life of individuals and society. Even though we may disagree about the specifics of what constitutes the educated person and the good life, it is toward these high moral ends that human enterprise of education in a democratic society is negotiated and directed. We lose our moral direction when this ultimate aim is forgotten in the pursuit of more immediate and pressing ends, or hidden by the façade of value-free research, or overlooked through a lack of attention to the ethical dimension of what we are about.

(Soltis, 1990, p.248)

Ethical issues were consequently a high priority and I felt it was crucial that I could answer ‘yes’ to an overarching question posed by Delamont (1992, p.67): “Will it be possible to gather data with a clear conscience, and write it up, and later publish it?” Ethical issues needed to be considered at all stages of my research. I had to consider not only who was to have a voice but also to consider what ‘right’ I had to speak on behalf of my participants. Alternatively if I was to keep silent and not speak on behalf of my participants was this also a sign that I was ‘abandoning my political responsibility’. Alcoff also voiced this dilemma when she wrote:

If I don’t speak for those less privileged than myself, am I abandoning my political responsibility to speak out against oppression, a responsibility incurred by the very fact of my privilege? If I should not speak for others, should I restrict myself to following their lead uncritically? Is my greatest contribution to move over and get out of the way? And if so, what is the best way to do this—to keep silent or to deconstruct my discourse?

(Alcoff, 1991, p.8)
There is a general acceptance that "research by its very nature is inherently political: [but also] it is about the nature of power as well as access to power" (Mirza, 1998, p.80). During the period of research and writing, it was therefore important to recognize the power that I retained as the researcher. I, as the researcher, set the agenda, edited, analyzed and reported the material (Frankenberg, 1993; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

**Truth and validity**

Recognizing the power I had, I also had to acknowledge the additional responsibilities to interpret the classroom context as close to reality as possible (Meloy, 1994). Since anything spoken or written by participants could be included when reporting, there was a responsibility that narratives were interpreted as close to participants’ reality as possible. At subsequent interviews, participants were able to reiterate and reinforce previous discussion topics. At the same time it was crucial to create space for participants, who in this context were less powerful, to have a voice (Humberstone, 1997). Inclusion of participants’ rich narratives with my interpretations enables readers to experience the validity and verifiability of my analysis. My approach to data analysis is discussed later in this chapter.

I agree with Griffiths (1998) that as an educational researcher it is difficult to be a complete outsider or a complete insider. However, it also seems that earlier classroom observations tended to be, as Delamont (1992, p.99) found, “the best time to ‘see’ situations as an outsider” or, more specifically, as a relative outsider. I was able to make greater “naturalistic observations” (Patton, 1990, p.203) through classroom observation, where I achieved greater understanding through immersion in the setting. Through this immersion, opportunities to discover inductively became available, particularly through observing pedagogical exchanges and classroom activities possibly so routine that they were not always mentioned during interviews. As Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggest, observation in classrooms thus allowed some understanding of the setting, positionings of participants, and participant behaviour.

The use of a number of methods—and specifically participatory observation over a significant length of time, in addition to interviewing students and teachers—allowed for strong triangulation (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Delamont, 1992; Goetz & Le Compte, 1984; Reinharz, 1992; Yin, 1994). Triangulation also provided a “rationale
for using multiple sources of evidence” (Yin, 1994, p.91). At times, triangulation provided validation for the ‘understanding’ of events from different perspectives. However, because of the methodological approach and methods used, which aimed for in-depth and ‘thick’ descriptive narratives (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984), triangulation within my methods was not always at the forefront of my investigation needs. Indeed, many issues discussed did not warrant triangulation in the data source sense, since I was investigating individual ideas, interpretations, and understandings. Instead it is important to note that in my writing I reported as accurately as possible and attempted to provide informed interpretations. A specific kind of validity was achieved through listening carefully to participants, writing as accurately as possible in the thesis, letting readers ‘see’ for themselves through inclusion of participants’ narratives, reporting fully and accurately, while simultaneously being truthful and also seeking feedback where possible (Wolcott, 1990). Depth and thickness through narratives of participants provides strength to my thesis. Powdermaker (1966, p.285) suggests that participatory observation is “forged in the study of small homogenous societies...” and through participatory observation I hoped to experience ways in which this group was non-homogenous. Thus to a certain extent I had a small homogenous ‘society’ with an all-male classroom and then focused on differences and ways they were not homogenous.

Through the act of interviewing, I raised particular issues that they may not have otherwise considered. The dilemma of raising participants’ consciousness while researching has been highlighted by feminist research. However, I felt it was crucial to recognize that “reality is constructed and reconstructed in the process of talking and thinking about it … [so that] the process of research becomes part of the process of change” (J. Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1991, p.147). It was therefore important for participants to give their ideas through their own words, so that their re-telling was part of my research process, and thus part of the process of change. Significantly, it was their retelling and therefore part of their reality being reconstructed by themselves.

The process of constructing reality through talking at interviews involved a further step with the return of transcribed interview scripts to the two teachers, Marilyn and Christina. As both teachers had been very supportive as well as very interested in my research, I felt that by allowing them to review their interview scripts was one way I enabled them to retain some power over their own narratives. Returning transcribed interviews to teachers also enabled establishment of veridicality and thus increased
validity (Scheurich, 1997). Returning interview transcripts allowed Marilyn and Christina to make further comments or to ask that certain information be kept out of the final thesis. I respected their choice to have certain information excluded. On reflection of the minor changes made by teachers, I felt it was generally unnecessary to distinguish between what had been originally said and what had been changed or added. After all, it was together with participants that meanings were constructed, with these meanings becoming the data to be interpreted at a later stage (Olesen, 1994). At this stage I felt that changes themselves needed no deconstruction. I believed it was easy to make slip-ups and say something during conversation that comes out ‘not quite right’, so I took my participants’ clarifications as meaning just that. Feedback shows that Christina was “really happy” with what she said but perceptively recognized “hidden agendas”, as her reply to me shows:

Dear Helen,
I’m sorry it’s taken so long to get this back. I’m really happy with what I said. I say ‘gorgeous’ a lot don’t I? I feel that there are a lot of hidden agendas with what people say—I understand that my bias is towards the boys—this protecting notion is evident with not only the boys I teach but also with anyone who I come into contact with. I protect and rescue people – something I learnt from my own mother. I have to shift this by giving other people and the boys their own responsibility! I thought this protecting thing works both ways i.e. boys protecting me, my husband protecting me etc. Anyway, I’m happy – if you want to discuss any more things, feel free to contact me.
Love Christina

Marilyn additionally asked that some of her personal details be kept out of my writing. Since I did not intend to include any identifying details, this request was easily followed. I believed anonymity and confidentiality were imperative.

Since research is about finding, plus “rethinking the meaning and the implications of the advent of its own unfolding” (Lather, 1994, p.55), changes made to original scripts by teachers did not affect the original meaning. By giving participants a chance to comment on interpretations returned some ‘power’ to participants. However, it was also important to recognize that the greater power was still preserved by me as the researcher, through retaining the choice of when I left the research site, and more importantly, through recognizing that I was the final writer of any thesis. Effectively I had the final voice. As the researcher, it was I who orchestrated the research and maintained much of the control (Arber, 2000).

Through the action of returning transcribed interviews to teachers, I was able to pursue differences that emerged through further research where more than one truth
or reading could surface. Although this did not necessarily alter my interpretations, I was able to include participants’ comments in my thesis.

Generalizability

A power seemed to be associated with qualitative data which gave greater understanding of personal and unique experiences and enabled a place, an issue or a situation to become more memorable and vivid (Eisner & Peshkin, 1990). There are, however, dangers of generalization associated with research, whereby too many generalizations of categories end up reinforcing stereotypical or ‘natural’ ideas and truths. Qualitative research takes particularization as more significant than generalization through an emphasis on understanding of the case (Stake, 1995). Through in-depth analysis a more complex picture of multiple realities is created and specifically preserved, even when views are contradictory. Although pictures may sometimes initially appear disjointed and separate, they still become very pertinent to create, through recognizing the “particular social processes and practices and the specific sets of causal relations that exist within them … [so that] such research can be relevant to a much wider audience without succumbing to the misconceived need to generalize” (Connolly, 1998, p.123). Cumulative knowledge of how complex social processes and practices operate within schools is relevant to other schools and other researchers within an ever-expanding resource of knowledge. Generalizing claims are not necessarily significant in qualitative research. Although sometimes the researched may feel that, because of this non-generalizing claim, their ideas are also insignificant. As one of my participants responded:

Tom: But like I don’t know, people have different views on that as well, so I’m not really the person to tell you.

Yet it was important to recognize that individuals’ views were part of a complex picture and so my response was that yes, people did have different views but Tom’s view was equally important to my research. At other times I also felt it was important to say something like ‘Thanks’ or ‘That’s great’ when students who participated in my research themselves seemed to feel or suggest that what they were saying was not particularly relevant or significant.

I found notions of poststructuralism significant within my research since it allowed many truths to co-exist and where it was useful to debunk or weaken stereotypes.
Through qualitative research, people’s stories are told in all their “complexity, context, originality and passion” (Janesick, 1994, p.218). It is important that as researchers we understand, make sense and interpret the multiple ‘truths’ of participants’ lives, thus “we have to remember that what we hear is their story” (Coles cited in Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.1). Therefore, any text needs to be ‘anchored’ in participants’ experiences. Significantly, as a researcher, it was necessary to understand how participants viewed their own world as well as to value that understanding. Importantly, again as researchers, we can bring a variety of cultures alive and allow differences of cultures to be experienced and celebrated by readers. Qualitative research allows a design with this kind of ‘elastic’ quality where many interpretations can be made. I recognize that my interpretation is only one rendering of the evidence provided by participants’ narrative and where my interpretation is “one of many possible slices or images of reality selected by the scribe. Its naturalness is a masquerade” (Denzin, 1997, p.42). The masquerade of naturalness where my interpretations appear ‘natural’ at times is balanced with the inclusion of participants’ narratives to enable alternative interpretations to be made by other readers.

Through her desire to write differently Rhedding-Jones (1997) reminds us that research writing is changing constantly corresponding to changes in language and in society. Use and power of language appear as significant elements in my present research. Thus discourse analysis is important in the interpretation of data (and discussed later in this chapter). Australian society and schools have been built within a white, male Eurocentric framework which does not always allow for differences outside this framework to be developed within schools, particularly where power remains with teachers. This view needs to be challenged since there is more than one ‘truth’. Similarly, research needs to challenge not only assumptions but also prevalent discourses, such as the hegemonic nature of masculinity. As Rhedding-Jones (1995, p.497) proposes: “One of the main functions of research is its suspension of taken-for-granted assumptions. A function of poststructuralist research is to challenge single-minded values and authoritarianisms”. Many assumptions relating to values and ideas are continually reinforced through hegemonic discourses. It is dominant discourses, such as ‘transparency’ of whiteness within racial identity, which need to be continuously challenged.
Reciprocity and relationships

Regarding reciprocity and some exchange for interviews and classroom observation, I felt it was important that participants could benefit in some way. Some students did ask for assistance and used opportunities created through a conversational-style interview situation to bring up and discuss issues that were significant to them at that particular time. For example, one student asked for advice about writing an application letter. Another student said he felt he could talk to me very comfortably and discussed issues relating to going out with his girlfriend. This kind of therapeutic feature of interviews has been acknowledged as a specific contribution of feminist epistemology (Fonow & Cook, 1991). Other students asked advice about what subjects they would need to follow particular careers or what careers they could follow with subjects they enjoyed and in which they were doing well. In each case, I tried to be as open and honest as possible, while allowing them opportunities of making their own decisions. Some students directed personal questions to me. Participants’ own history was an integral part to my research and as a consequence some participants were particularly interested in my history. I was happy to discuss my personal details and again I was honest and open.

Although the general rapport was great, there did appear to be some initial resistance by some boys to be interviewed. This resistance was overcome over time and my rapport with them developed very positively to where they seemed happy to talk about anything, from schoolwork to personal issues that related to the way they thought and felt. I tried to enter the classroom as unobtrusively as possible, although I do not believe I was ever as uninteresting as wallpaper (Stake, 1995, 59). But students became used to my being around and then to my asking questions, particularly during group activities. As mentioned before, Marilyn, the teacher, at times structured her lessons so that I was able to talk with students in group activities. Marilyn was also very encouraging, happy and amicable about my talking with students. Since a lot of my issues related also to texts these students were studying and how they related themselves to the text I thought it was an advantage for students to think of different issues through my discussions with them. Marilyn confirmed that she had similar thoughts. In this way my role developed to where I was not just an observer, but my being in the classroom affected students’ ideas and classroom dynamics as well as having some impact on how and what the teacher taught, for example, in the finally chosen texts.
There was, however, a need for flexibility in my research plans. With the move for Marilyn to another position, further plans in the third and fourth school terms—relating to more deconstruction of issues such as gender, ethnicity and social class through texts introduced at the beginning of the school year—were not possible. However, data gathered in Christina’s class provided opportunities to observe the same classroom operating within a different pedagogical style, but in both cases interactions between a female teacher and male students. The culture of the classroom and interactions between teachers and students were particularly important (Raphael Reed, 1999).

Obligations relating to reciprocity also existed in the form of needing to complete my written thesis as well as finding ways of publishing (J. Acker et al., 1991). Papers were therefore presented at conferences and submitted for publication during the writing stage of this research. These presentations and publications are acknowledged whenever appropriate in the form of footnotes. The teachers involved in my research were very interested in my results and I arranged to provide copies of any final papers and of my thesis to them. At our final classroom meeting Marilyn proffered that I had developed a very good relationship with the boys and that they were responding really positively.

Teachers are often experts in their own field. However, teachers may not always have time to research their own teaching environment or methods of teaching. Educational research can become “a collaborative and humane enterprise to assist the fulfilment of the creative potential of people and of societies” (Grace, 1998, p.202). Thus through working closely with teachers, reciprocating with knowledge gained through research—but not with intentions of finding fault with teachers’ teaching—it is possible to extend knowledge and wisdom of both researcher and teachers. As a final consideration relating to reciprocity, Davies’ metaphoric story relating to an orchestral conductor springs to mind. She describes the conductor’s response when, during an interview, he was asked what conductors do with their bodies when they are conducting an orchestra:

He described himself, as conductor, having a detailed image of the music in his mind that he wanted the orchestra to produce. By various gesticulations, facial expressions and body movements, the conductor manages to communicate this to the orchestra and thus to lead them to produce in actuality the imagined sound he has in his mind. But, he said, this changes when he is conducting a top orchestra such as the London Symphony Orchestra. Then he knows that the image of the music in their minds may well be better than the
image in his mind. The challenge then is to have sufficient humility so that he can learn from them to imagine what they can imagine, and to thus extend what he is capable of imagining. He must do this while still remaining in the position of conductor — which is what the orchestra expects. It is the capacity to respect and learn from the knowledge of the players which enables this conductor to produce music with the orchestra, more beautiful than that which he could previously imagine.

(Davies, 1996, pp.238-239)

As a researcher I became a 'conductor' and through a "creative exchange of knowledges" (Davies, 1996, p.239) with teachers who were also experts in their field, there was the possibility of creating more knowledge. By exchanging our ideas and observations of the classroom, we all gained greater understanding of the research issues.

Data analysis

Ted Hughes’ poem (cited in Stake, 1995, p.73) (see Appendix XI)—which describes the magical process of a blank page becoming filled with writing—came to mind as I considered the “mystical side of analysis and interpretation”. I had spent one year in the ‘field’ and now was about to focus on the analysis and interpretation of my research. However, analysis and interpretation was also something that I had been working on while concentrating on other activities. Stake captured my own thoughts with the following:

Where thoughts come from, whence meaning, remains a mystery. The page does not write itself, but by finding, for analysis, the right ambiance, the right moment, by reading and rereading the accounts, by deep thinking, then understanding creeps forward and your page is printed.

(Stake, 1995, p.73)

It was over a period of time that my ideas were able to develop. However, there was a period of ‘crisis’ at the time when I needed to start writing. All the pieces were there but it was a new story that needed to be carefully and lovingly created. It seemed that:

I was meant to know the plot but all I knew was what I saw: Flash pictures in variable sequence, images with no ‘meaning’ beyond their temporary arrangement, not a movie but a cutting room experience.

(Didion cited in Denzin, 1997, pp.140-141)
I agreed with the suggestion that each retelling was "a new event in the history of the event being recounted" (Denzin, 1997, p.43). However, the holistic perspective assumed a synergistic effect, where the whole, as part of a complex system, had a greater total effect than the effects of individual parts. I knew my social understanding affected my overall understanding of observations. However, as in the film Gallipoli—where it was Peter Weir's powerful interpretations that had brought this story to an award-winning creation—it was crucial that in reporting this research it was my new creation that was heard. Simultaneously it was necessary to recognize the importance of participants' meanings and to allow their meanings to be seen and experienced as much as possible.

Stake (1995, p.71) suggests that "there is no particular moment when data analysis begins. Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations". Stake's observation rang true for me. I found I was 'doing' many methodological processes at any one time so that there were moments of data analysis and interpretation very early on in 1999 while I was still in the field and observing in the classroom or interviewing students and teachers. Early analysis often took shape from specific incidents such as a student's introduction of a gay character in role-playing, an incident which provided substantial data (see Chapter 7), or from repetition of specific issues such as how educational texts were perceived in relation to students' realities (see Chapter 6). Nevertheless, a major part of data analysis and interpretation was generated in the year that followed my fieldwork. Discourse analysis (discussed in more depth later) was particularly significant and enabled me to examine ways in which discourses affected ways of thinking and seeing in the specific private boys' school location, and to explore how students' subjectivities were thus affected. A process of continual analysis while still in the field helped me decide the paths to follow. My flexibility allowed me to take paths I had not initially considered, particularly in the case of interviewing where my interview questions and emphasis changed over time. For example, students viewed Gallipoli and then I interviewed them about issues relating to this film in the first two terms of the school year. However, at the time of viewing or interviewing I could not possibly have imagined that a situation would develop later that year—in the form of Australians entering East Timor as United Nations peace keepers—a situation to which students could relate and discuss during later interviews.
After transcribing I double-checked the correctness of transcripts just prior to entering data into the Nud*ist (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theory-building) program, a computer program to aid qualitative research analysis. I found this activity very worthwhile as it allowed me to ‘re-live’ interviews themselves and I found myself able to add categories I had initially not thought of. Categories were therefore identified while still out in the field, during transcribing of interviews and during data analysis stage. Bracketing (Patton, 1990) was used to explore specific incidents and to reveal the essence of an emerging phenomenon. Some meanings emerged through repetition of a phenomenon. Other times just a single event was needed to find a critical meaning. During this stage I carried out some very minor editing to translate some of the utterances into ‘prose’, something our ear performs in an automatic and instantaneous way while we are listening. As Malcolm suggests, “only the most uncharitable (or inept) journalist will hold the subject to his [sic] literal utterances” (cited in Denzin, 1997, p.155).

Using Nud*ist, I pulled threads out through identifiable key words or strings of words. This process enabled me to pull out segments of texts relating, for example, to a specific critical incident that occurred in the classroom relating to the issues of homosexuality. Similarly I could pull out sections of texts relating to when participants talked of the significance of ‘whiteness’ or to issues relating to Indigenous Australians. Nud*ist tree diagrams aided further with analysis through being able to link different sections of data, for example, texts relating to ‘homosexual’ and texts relating to ‘gay’. Using Nud*ist I was able to instantly pull out texts through themes and take the arduous work out of searching through large amounts of data. However, even at this initial stage it was I, as the researcher, who had to make sense of all the data.

Computer programs have their limitations and are only tools which become as efficient and as useful as utilized by researchers. Importantly, it was my connections and my interpretations that were critical. It seemed potentially too easy for qualitative research to become quantified when using such programs. I felt it was crucial to continually keep the whole picture in mind, to be careful not to decontextualize and to avoid what I saw as a danger with quantitative research where:

The physical, non-verbal aspects of communication disappear. The variations in tone, intensity, and rhythm disappear. Even the pauses often disappear… The lines of the text are numbered…

(Schurich, 1997, p.62)
As I was tidying up the interviews to enter them into Nud*ist, I listened through interview tapes again while reading the transcripts. This was very useful for adding categories or for making additional notes, especially to add things like ‘painful and difficult’ to the interview scripts. One particular ‘difficult’ interview was with Barry. He seemed scared to say too much and he seemed scared to reveal too much about himself, yet seemed to have some ideas which were other than ‘macho’ ideas. I effectively ‘relived’ interviews and thoughts I had during interviews—thoughts I did not have the opportunity to write down—returned to me through re-listening to the tapes.

I kept journals which became important reference points. I kept one set of journals on classroom observations and my additional notes relating to interviews, and another set of journals on any other general thoughts and ideas. My journal entries enabled me to reflect on what had occurred in classrooms and how they related to issues that emerged through interviews. My research included interviewing students from different cultures which brought other complexities into the foreground and where it became important to be aware of such things as different meanings of gestures in different cultures. It was important not to misinterpret subtle differences in communications between different cultures (Corrie & Maloney, 1998; Nicholls, 1996). Glesne and Peshkin (1992, p.45) examined how new gestures may be encountered or familiar gestures may take on different meanings; for example, a “whispered ‘pssst’ in the Caribbean can be a friendly ‘hello’”. Or for example, when an Aboriginal child does not want to make eye contact, it does not mean they are insubordinate or unreliable; their own culture may signify they are insubordinate or unreliable if they do make eye contact. The method of research could also affect responses received from students of different cultures (Matsumoto, 1994). In this respect, my journal, where such gestures or non-verbal cues were recorded, proved to be an invaluable document in the analyzing and reporting stages of my research.

**Interpretation**

Acknowledgement of ‘multiple realities’ is significant to my research. However, it is also important to be explicit in whose ‘eyes’ narratives are reported, thus avoiding ‘over-identifying’ with any specific group. Narrative analysis allows the use of stories to make sense of the self (Britton & Baxter, 1999, p.182). Excerpts of life histories of participants are included in my writing whenever possible, which allow subjective parts of life to be taken seriously. Life histories also allow for recognition
of complexities of life and recognition for relationship of “ambiguities, nuances, changes and richness of lived experiences” (Banyon cited in Rakhit, 1998, p.58). Greater understanding relating to gender discourse, particularly in respect of pedagogical issues and gender interactions between male students and female teachers in this study are particularly significant.

Discourse analysis enables me to examine the ways in which students interpret their world and how they think about and see their world. As Foucault (1981a, p.73) writes, “discourse analysis … does not reveal the universality of a meaning, but brings to light the action of imposed scarcity, with a fundamental power of affirmative”. In the specific private boys’ school location, therefore, I am able to explore ways in which specific discourses may govern students’ subjectivities. Subjectivities are neither fixed nor unified and as Weedon (1997, p.2) states, poststructuralism enables subjectivities to be theorized as sites of “disunity and conflict, central to the processes of political change and to preserving the status quo”. Subjectivities are situated within discourses, but discourses themselves are part of unequal power relationships, such as those within discursive fields of the family and of education. Foucault (1972) uses the term ‘discourse’ to indicate the nexus between situation, knowledge and power. Discourses are strongly implicated in power and knowledge relationships. It is sets of discourses, or discursive fields and practices that compete to give meaning to students’ worlds and, as Weedon (1997, p.34) writes, “offer the individual a range of modes of subjectivity”.

Discourse is not a timeless model possessing any history but includes only a “limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined” (Foucault, 1972, p.117), thus discourse is temporal. Within discourses, however, relationships of power are either maintained or changed (Kenway et al., 1994), so access to dominant discourses can be used in classrooms as a source of power. For example, access to, affiliation or identification with hegemonic masculinity maintains a power relationship with femininity or with other forms of masculinity. Ways in which subjectivities are gendered and ways in which struggles over masculinity in opposition to femininity are played out begin at birth and provide momentum for emerging discourses. Males and females actively participate in these discourses, transforming and reproducing the power and practice that underpin the discourses. Indeed, as Weedon (1997, p.87) suggests, “the power of all forms of subjectivity relies on the marginalization and repression of historically
specific alternatives”. Policing of subjectivities that challenge dominant discourses thus occurs and necessitates analysis.

Discourse analysis needs to incorporate language because language does not exist in an abstract way with transparent meanings. Language is historically and socially situated within discourses and acts as an agency of political interests, thus competing for power and status. Language is powerful in that it can provide new ways of ‘seeing’ the world. However, because of its power it can also weave back into existence the same discourses that have been deconstructed (Davies, 1996). In classrooms, language is significant since the signified or the meaning of a word, can mean different things to different people. Thus meaning is not reflected by language but produced through or with it, suggesting that ‘individual signs’ have no innate meaning but are acquired through language and in relation to other signs. This implies that language is centrally active in political and social struggles. Furthermore, it is not permanently anchored but is continually being deferred, constantly in the process of change through new readings and new interpretations (Weedon, 1997). As Foucault wrote:

Instead of being something said once and for all — and lost in the past like the result of a battle, a geological catastrophe, or the death of a king — the statement, as it emerges in its materiality, appears with a status, enters various networks and various fields of use, is subjected to transferences or modification, is integrated into operations and strategies in which its identity is maintained or effaced. Thus the statement circulates, is used, disappears, allows or prevents the realization of a desire, serves or resists various interests, participates in challenge and struggle, and becomes a theme of appropriation or rivalry.

(Foucault, 1972, p.105)

Language thus becomes a ‘terrain’ where different and advantaged discourses continually confront and displace one another (Lather, 1991). Students’ and teachers’ language is affected by discourse, with discourses themselves struggling for power. A process of discourse analysis itself, however, involves power and knowledge whereby concerns that emerge are historically situated within a specific site. The specific site here is a private boys’ school as observed in 1999.

Glesne and Peshkin (1992, p.153) propose that: “A currently popular way to speak of the qualitative researcher is as a translator of culture. The researcher works to understand the others’ world and then to translate the text of loved actions into a meaningful account”. This way of ‘seeing’ qualitative research appears to give
credibility to researchers' own subjectivities. Hence I, as a researcher, am not just expected to report my findings 'objectively', but need to use my knowledge and experiences to report my understanding of participants' realities. In this way, researchers become 'meaning-makers', bringing meaning to knowledge created through the interaction of participants and themselves. Inclusion of participants' texts in my thesis offers a 'new world' visible to readers through my interpretations (Barone, 1990). Thus a new truth can be "created" by readers through being "drawn into the structures of verisimilitude that defined the text and story" (Denzin, 1997, p.165). As Derrida observes, meaning is constructed by audiences as well as by authors (cited in Turkle, 1995).

Skeggs (1999, p.34), however, warns us that "observation, interpretation and representation were the means by which others could be recognised and kept in their place". In a similar vein, Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1991) warn us of the 'objectification' possibilities relating to interviewing, interpreting, and contextualizing other people's lives and ideologies. Imposing categories rather than letting categories evolve themselves could have the effect of keeping 'others' and the marginalized in their place, without necessarily offering them a voice. I therefore felt it was important to make use of categories that evolved by participants themselves through interviews and questionnaires. Concepts are used to aid understanding of the data although concepts also emerge out of my interpretations and my concerns. It is important for participants to be given the opportunity to provide a name to their personal experiences so that any experience of reality is not obliterated for participants through different, alternative naming by others (Reinharz, 1994). In these ways, categories can be named through participants' own experiences relative to their perceived educational opportunities, discriminations, and how they believe they position themselves or are positioned in their classroom and their school.

History has often played a secondary or minor role in educational research. However, since knowledge is created through construction of history, researchers through their own actions are implicated in that history. It is, however, important to continually remember that this research thesis represents one group of participants, at one particular moment in history. As Guba and Lincoln wrote, participants often "had to masquerade as a whole when in fact they are but a part – a slice of life" (cited in Merriam, 1988, p.33). Understanding and interpretation of experiences is determined by access to specific discourses and language. Writers, however, can push to "reveal the multiple truths that lurked behind the so-called facts that defined
any situation, [where] these writers locate reality not in facts or events but in the experience of the text” (Denzin, 1997, p.165). In this way, interpretation of participants’ narratives is crucial. By including participants’ voices, my own interpretations have been made more transparent. At the same time, other interpretations remain available to readers.

Reflections

In this chapter I examined the approach taken in this qualitative research. Importantly, feminist epistemology and a feminist theoretical perspective informed the methods used in this research. I contextualized my research with a discussion on the selection of site and gaining access and provided details of my research participants. Then to provide some order and coherence to my writing, an analysis of a number of specific methodological issues that emerged during my research followed. Finally in this chapter, I provided details of issues relating to my data analysis and interpretation.

Reflecting back on my research I discover that with the gathering of data, it is possible to become “overwhelmed with the sheer volume ... that has accumulated” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.131). As I reached the end of my fieldwork I found it was possible to gather more data than was needed. While acknowledging that the ideal time to stop producing data was when I reached ‘theoretical saturation’ (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), this point was not too clear at the time. However, the situation of my research was such that the end of the school year proved to be an ideal time to stop gathering data. After that time, and in the new school year, my participants were moved into a variety of different classes and thus generated possible different situations and different directions for any further research.

There are, however, no clear boundaries with research. As Glesne and Peshkin (1992, p.130) wrote, “Social interaction does not occur in neat, isolated units”. Although it was important to be flexible, it was also important to have some ideas of where the research was leading and not to just gather data on infinite and indefinite themes. Some structure was needed to be in place from the beginning even with the possibility that data would lead to unexpected journeys. The following quotation seemed apt from the start of my research:
Unlike a squirrel hoarding acorns for the winter, you should not keep collecting data for devouring later. Rather, examine your data periodically to insure that your acorns represent the variety or varieties desired, and that they are meaty nuggets, worthy of your effort.

(Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.130)

With this metaphor in mind, I explore how male students who participated in my research negotiate their way within as well as outside of discourses of hegemonic masculinities. I examine subject positionings, taking into account how feminist postmodernist research has informed research within similar areas. I also examine ‘whiteness’ as a social construct, and explore ways in which understanding the meaning of ‘whiteness’ relates to male students’ subjectivities and their construction of masculinity. As a final but significant consideration I explore the gendered relationships and roles played by female teachers and by male students in the selected site. In the next three chapters these explorations are developed and theorized from data created during my fieldwork in an English classroom at a private boys’ school in Perth, Australia.
CHAPTER 6

MASCULINITIES IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM:
INTERROGATING TEXTUAL REPRESENTATIONS AND BOYS’ SELF-
PERCEPTIONS OF BEING MALE

The main demand on boys from within their peer culture (but also,
sometimes, from teachers) … is to appear to do little or no work, to
be heavily competitive (but at sports and heterosex, not at school
work), to be rough, tough and dangerous to know.

(Epstein, 1998, p.106)

Making sense of textual representations

In this chapter I discuss the ways in which the adolescent males in my study
interrogate hegemonic forms of masculinities in their classroom. Like Walker
(1988, p.xiii), I found a great desire by some of the male students to “have their
problems and feelings publicised, understood and respected”. So through the
students’ narratives, I explore how they envisaged themselves and pictured their role
and place in present day society. Martino (2000b) suggests that teachers should
continue to encourage boys to interrogate masculinities at school. In this chapter I
incorporate ways in which the female teachers were able to open up spaces for their
students to interrogate hegemonic forms of masculinities through the use of
particular texts. I also examine the possibilities of using specific texts to disrupt
deeply ingrained discourses such as perceived gender dichotomies together with
perceived gender roles. In other words, I explore these adolescent males’ self-

5 The first sections of this chapter formed the basis of a paper ‘Masculinities, self-representation
and whiteness in adolescent males’ lives at schools: Exploring pedagogical possibilities’ that I
presented at an international interdisciplinary masculinities conference “Posting the Male:
Representations of Masculinities in the Twentieth Century” at the Research Centre of Literature
and Cultural History, Liverpool John Moores University, United Kingdom, in August 2000.

A revised version of the above paper entitled ‘Masculinities and self-representation in adolescent
males’ lives at school: Exploring pedagogical possibilities’ is published in the AARE refereed
book (CDrom version) (see Hatchell, 2001) and was presented at the Australian Association for
Chapter 6: Interrogating textual representations and boys’ self perceptions of being male

representations and how they construct their understanding of their own and of female subjectivities.

In this chapter I initially provide an overview of the boys’ readings of these texts. I introduce three of the texts that were provided by the teacher and read by students, and I examine relationships between the readings of these texts to students’ construction of masculinity. Male students’ engagement with literacy and reading practices in the English classroom is complicated by cultural and social factors (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997b; R. Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998). Through students’ narratives I interrogate the process of normalization in the regime of hegemonic masculinist practices. Notions of contradictions are particularly evident in this chapter as students examine meanings of texts in relation to their own experiences. First, I introduce The Inner Circle (Crew, 1999) and highlight the ways in which hegemonic masculinities are recreated through readings of the text, and show how conflicting discourses become apparent. I explore ways in which stereotypes are often reinforced in school, as well as through the reading of the text, and discuss how students take these stereotypes on board. Second, I introduce The Club (Williamson, 1978) and examine how students, through their readings of this text, construct images of femininity and masculinity. A strong link between masculinity and mateship is apparent and this link is carried over to the third text, Gallipoli. Third, I examine students’ self-representations through the film Gallipoli (1981) with connections to violence and war. Finally, I explore pedagogical possibilities and limitations on issues of masculinities and on challenges to hegemonic masculinity.

Students’ self-representations are investigated through the ways males, as young readers, construct meanings in response to issues of masculinity as they are represented in different texts. I also examine the narratives of the two English teachers, Marilyn and Christina, for their contributions to masculinist representations and their attempts to deconstruct specific versions of hegemonic masculinity and deconstruct perceived gender dichotomies. I specifically identify gaps between adolescent males’ readings and pedagogical approaches executed to interrogate hegemonic masculinities as they are represented in texts.

The understanding of varied representations of masculinities in film and literature is crucial in the field of education. However, equally crucial is the need to explore how readers make sense and make use of perceived literary representations in the creation of their own identities. I incorporate the premise that “masculinity shapes education, as well as education forming masculinity” (Connell, 2000, p.142); (see
also Mac an Ghaill, 1994a). Furthermore, I examine not only the ways in which texts at school are used in order to meet curriculum requirements, but I also examine to what extent students are able to value experiences and knowledge gained through reading specific texts. Although texts proffer many different readings depending on readers’ prior knowledges and experiences, these readings are not necessarily legitimized. As Kuzmic (2000) maintains, although texts may appear inclusive and representative, the construction of knowledge in school curricula continues to define masculinities within hegemonic discourses that support patriarchal ideologies.

After initial discussions at the beginning of the school year in 1999, Marilyn, the English teacher, introduced these three texts into the English classroom. They were selected to help deconstruct normative masculinities and in recognition of ‘whiteness’ as a racial issue. The texts chosen were then used to create spaces for students to question hegemonic discourses and ‘norms’ without necessarily posing a threat to students on a ‘personal’ level (see for example Martino, 1995). I highlight specific issues that emerged in the classroom and during interviews: gender, masculinity, ethnicity and emotions emerge during discussions of The Inner Circle; the masculinist nature of sports with The Club; and mateship, war and violence with Gallipoli. However, all these emerging issues relate to specific versions of hegemonic masculinity. Within this context, I explore how adolescent boys in this classroom were given opportunities to interrogate gender issues as well as hegemonic forms of masculinities. I found Marilyn, the English teacher, opening up spaces for students to consider different positions of masculinities through readings of selected texts. Initial analysis of data shows that these texts provided these students a means to represent and understand themselves as particular kinds of gendered subjects. However, the introduction of such texts is not sufficient to fashion any permanent changes. Through classroom participation, I observed how masculinities were played out at this particular site. I analyze and use data to explore links between masculinities and issues of self-representation. I focus primarily on ways in which available discourses affected students’ understandings and self-representations of masculinities.

The issues of this chapter are examined predominantly through narratives from students and teachers. Both teachers were female and white—one was from England and the other Australian. As mentioned in Chapter 5, students self-identified as coming from varied cultural backgrounds including Indigenous Australian, British, Singaporean, South African, Indian, Italian, as well as identifying as Australian.
However, students identifying as Australian became part of the problem, since this identification needed no other marker and thus was often considered the ‘norm’. Many of the boys identified themselves as belonging to more than one ethnic group. Students’ voices are heard to exhibit their self-representations and how they have been able to take up specific ‘masculine’ positions within the English classroom. It appears that stereotypes continue to be reinforced and that ways in which masculinities are recreated is relational to femininities, with a tendency to reject the feminine. Indeed, a power relationship becomes evident through ways in which different forms of masculinity are (re)constructed.

A certain promise of power appears to be associated with the category ‘male’ (Segal, 1999). But, more significantly, power resides in particular types of males and not all males. A power issue was evident in the classroom and through male students’ narratives. Feminist theory and research has shown how students learn to associate themselves with their gender through books, family life, schooling and society (Barnes, 1990; Cohen, 1998; Davies, 1989b, 1993a, 1994; Gabriel, 1990; P. Gilbert & Rowe, 1989; Weedon, 1997). Using this rich resource of knowledge it is possible to identify ways in which particular versions of masculinity remain the norm and are difficult to resist.

**Hegemonic masculinities recreated**

*The Inner Circle* is a text that Marilyn used to provide opportunities for deconstruction of issues relating to gender, masculinity, and ethnicity, as well as friendship and emotions. It is a story of two teenage boys struggling for personal identities, and narratives are presented alternatively through the eyes of both boys. The story raises issues such as prejudice relating to Joe, an Aboriginal boy from the ‘bush’, and indifference of the world for Tony, a white Australian boy from a divorced family. Neither one of the boys believes he ‘fits in’ society. Both feel like misfits, but for different reasons. The protagonists in the story find themselves connected and are able to provide solace for each other through sharing stories.

One of my participants, Kevin, an Indigenous Australian, was acutely aware that males and females were treated differently from birth. During one of the interviews, while discussing *The Inner Circle* and possibilities for male students to act differently from societal expectations and to show emotions, Kevin replied that influences to act ‘in a certain way’ and ‘like a boy’ affected the way males respond
from the day they were born. These influences were often a way of dividing males
from females; and while these influences prevailed it was difficult for him or his
friends to respond as males in any way that could be associated with being female.
The division between males and females continued to be normalized, as the
following excerpt indicates:

H.H.: Where do you think that comes from [some boys
stopping others from acting the way they want]?

Kevin: I’m not really too sure. We just sort of pick up and
associate with doing that in sort of real life. Certainly we
develop that from our peers and mainly from our
parents, through other family members, older brothers
and sisters.

H.H.: So the influences are everywhere, home as well as at
school?

Kevin: Yes, I mean from the day you’re born you’re either
dressed in blue or pink. From the age of five you’ve got
dolls or you’ve got toy guns or whatever. And there’s
already that sort of, sort of, being sort of, what is it
[struggling for words to describe what he means].

H.H.: Division, opposites?

Kevin: Yes, division of the two from the day you’re born.

H.H.: Encouraged to be one or the other?

Kevin: Yes, and as you get up to Year 10s it’s different things,
like the sports you play, like the type of music you listen
to, the television programs, what leisure activities that
you do. There’s all that division going on all the way
through from when you’re a child: for a boy, blue, and
for a girl, pink, that kind of thing. And I think it just sort
of grows on you. And then there are other influences
that come in from your peers and along the way from
family members, older brothers and sisters, and just
acquaintances and other people.

H.H.: Do you think that people are aware of this, or do you
think they just accept it as normal?

Kevin: I don’t think people think about what sex you happen to
be, you just sort of accept it and that’s what you sort of
think of as ‘normal’. I mean for a boy to have blue or
for a girl pink, or just different sports. You just sort of
think that’s normal for one sex to do this, and the
opposite sex to do the other thing.
Kevin was perceptive about the way males and females were treated differently from birth. Ideas reflecting his understanding are highlighted in feminist theories and feminist empirical research (Weedon, 1997), where it is shown that the dualistic nature of male/female is continually reinforced and difficult to dislodge. Davies (1989a) further shows how ways of thinking in binaries reinforces the dualistic nature of male/female. Such a dichotomization suggests that females are a homogenous group and that males are a homogenous group, with the two groups inherently and essentially different to each other. Gender difference is often read in society and in schools to mean opposite. Feminist writers such as hooks (1992; 1994a) highlight how females are not a homogenous group, and that many differences exist among females and particularly when taking issues such as ethnicity and social class into consideration. Many differences also exist for males (see for example Connell, 1995, 2000; Mac an Ghaill, 1994a, 1999b). Recent rhetorical claims that ‘boys are now the disadvantaged’ ignore much of the theoretical understanding gained by knowledges created within feminist epistemology. To define females as ‘woman’ is a simplified definition which still conceptualizes gender relationships “in terms of polarity and opposition, and this would be to remain caught in ‘phallocentric’, ‘logocentric’ discourse” (Assiter, 1996, p.31). Correspondingly, to define males with a simple definition of ‘man’ would similarly reduce males to a homogenous group remaining within a hegemonic masculine discourse.

At school, males and females are not just becoming male or female, they are also becoming particular kinds of males or females. Moreover, males are becoming specific kinds of males and often not given an opportunity to resist hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, as Connell (2000) suggests, many males may live at a distance from or in conflict with the hegemonic masculinity of their community. Ideas relating to gender formation can be explored through Kevin’s (previous) narrative. Kevin, during interviews, explained how his own experiences as an Indigenous Australian were very different to a perceived male and female opposite. He recognized that males were treated as specific kinds of males, and as essentially different to females and through discussion showed how essentializing of differences was contradictory to his own lifestyle. However, it was also noticeable that discourses available to him, and thus providing positions of self-representation, were also through a lens that positions whiteness as the norm, whereby, as Kevin explained, certain things ‘just sort of grow on you’ and are accepted as ‘normal’. In fact, as bell hooks (1990) reminds us, since what it means to be white is seldom
made explicit, whiteness is able to significantly increase its hegemony. Discourses of white hegemonic masculinity functioned to erase or hide Kevin’s own experiences. His self-representations—which were inclusive of types of music listened to and of types of leisure activities participated in—became embedded within a white hegemonic masculine Australian image. In other words, Kevin assimilated in terms of appropriating certain norms of hegemonic masculinity.

Conflicting discourses

Discourses that reflect gender power differences remain very powerful, yet students in the English class were also often aware of new discourses that suggest equity for males and females. Conflicting discourses were apparent through contradictory ideas expressed by students. Discourses of equity ideologies are introduced into students’ lives, yet do not appear to be strong enough to completely erase other masculinist and masculinizing ideas. The growing number of ‘profeminist’ males shows how males have slowly taken up ideas of equity. But, as Kaufman wrote, these ideas of equity still lag behind actions:

Although there are ever-increasing sympathies among men to the ideas of women’s equality, and although some institutions have been forced to adopt measures promoting women’s equality, there is still a lag between ideas accepted by men and their actual behavior.

(Kaufman, 1994, p.156)

The lag between accepted ideas by males and their behaviour remains visible in schools in Australia. During interviews, students sometimes seemed unaware of their own contradictory positions. This was particularly evident with Tom, an Italian-Australian, when I asked him about females’ roles in Australia.

H.H.: What sort of role do you think females have in Australia?

Tom: I see that there is no equality between the males and the females. But I also see that it’s not a matter of old fashions, where the female stays home and does the cooking and does this and the male goes out and makes the money. I see the female is very, I can’t say fragile but has her own way sort of thing. And I’d like to keep it like that. See when I get married I would see my wife as say, if she wants to have a job she can go and have a job. Also when I have a job and I come home after work I mean you can’t say that doing the washing or doing the ironing is a feminine thing. I mean, everybody does it. Like if when that happens, I would like to tend more towards the female side of things and let her have a
break. Because ... just look at the female society around these days. Everyone’s giving them pressures about doing the ironing. Like not pressures, but it’s so common to see the female doing the ironing sort of like. Expect them to do it sort of thing. But with me I sort of like say, go sit down; I’ll make a cup of tea. And I’ll do it because I know she’s been at work all day. She’s sort of the same as me, because I would have been at work all day and she would have been at work all day. And so the last thing that she wants to do is start doing the ironing or the washing or doing the cooking. So to give her a bit of a break I’d see myself as helping out and doing it sort of for her or you know helping sort of thing.

Tom’s ideas vacillated between new discourses, which stress equity, and old discourses, which stress an essentialist ideology where males and females are basically different. Nevertheless, at the same time, he also admitted that there is ‘no equality’ for males and females. Furthermore, Tom mentioned that ironing was not a feminine role, and that everyone needed to be involved in this type of work. However, at the same time, he understood his involvement as ‘helping out’ females. The notion of ‘helping out’ is associated with a different discourse than one which accepts females as equal partners in relationships and where ‘household’ duties are no longer a distinctively feminine domain. Literary texts like The Inner Circle enabled Tom to identify with one of the characters, a white Australian boy, and to identify with the boy’s independence in the story. But Tom’s challenging attitude was revealed during interviews when he said he would help other people who were his equals, but was defiant of ‘higher authority’:

Tom: I wouldn’t really do things for people that tell me off, well not tell me off but have a higher authority over me. I mean like I’d do it, I help other people if they are equal to me, but if someone was like oh do this, do that, it’s like they’re bossing you around. So I’d be like, yes, get off your butt and do it yourself sort of thing, because I don’t really take a load of crap from people who push me about, if you know what I mean. So I’d tell them to go do it themselves. Like, go make me some tea – no, I’ll be all right, go buy it, that’s what I’d say, go buy it.

As the interview continued and ideas relating to male and female roles were developed, Tom moved further away from representing himself as Italian only and from stereotypes that related to ways in which Italian males are represented or stereotyped as treating their partners. At the same time he represented himself within a discourse of whiteness which set him apart from non-whites, and more specifically as different to Indian or Asian males. Tom placed himself in a contradictory position
to an earlier interview where he discussed how Italian males were dominant over their partners, in the same way as he now talked about Asian or Indian males being dominant.

H.H.: Do you think that [helping out in the home] happens a lot here in Australia?

Tom: It depends on what sort of, whereabouts you come from and what views you have. See, for some people it’s in their culture to let the female do all the cooking and ironing and washing and household sort of things and looking after the family. Sometimes it’s a culture, sort of like if you’re Indian or if you’re Asian or something and come from those sort of backgrounds then I think they’re more dominant in making the ladies well not making them but sort of you know… It’s sort of the female sort of thing; see that more as the female and only the female does that because she doesn’t have to work. Because they [males] are working to bring the money in and she’s staying home looking after the kids. It’s a bit of a cultural thing.

As our conversation continued, Tom’s ideas reflected hegemonic heterosexual discourses, and challenges to the often prevalent rhetoric that gender equity exists in private and public spheres of society. Ideas reflected in the interview also display notions that masculinities for male students remain restricted. Although The Inner Circle provided a platform from which to discuss gender equity issues and private domains within society, challenges to enable male students to embrace multiple versions of masculinities were not forthcoming. Tom’s notions about gender relationships remain within a dominant framework (Davies, 1989b, 1989c; P. Gilbert, 1997) where it is females—and in Tom’s case his grandmother, because his mother went out to work—who stay at home and look after the children. Ideologies surrounding gender equity are partially fractured with Tom’s attempts at being different, incorporating gender equity discourses into his conversation, particularly in respect of his own future married life. However, stereotypical descriptions infused his narrative even when he was denying they applied to him and to his family. For example, he suggested that Italian women were ‘really large because they like tasting their food’; that Italians have large families; and that Italian women stayed at home to look after the family, but that his family and future family would be different. Similarly, Tom understood that females do not have to work if they are at home.

H.H.: So what do you think Italians are like?

Tom: I’m tending towards because the Italians are sort of getting on my nerves if you know what I mean, because
they make it a bit disrespectful on the female’s side. Because through generations and generations I mean, you’ve seen the movies, Italian movies, where the female always stays at home? You know most of them are really large because they like tasting their food and all that. And they make everything and they stay and look after the family. They have a big family. That’s why they stay home and look after the family. But I mean when I was brought up, my dad went out to work my mum went out to work and they took, like I was at one of my nanny’s [grandmother’s] house. You know one nanny would take care of me, my brother and all that and my sister and all most of our other family like our cousins and stuff. They would just like dump all of us children at the nanny’s house and they’ll take care of us if you know what I mean. But I’m trying, in my life now, what I’m trying to build up to is sort of a different sort of way of thinking if you know what I mean. Like more towards a new way, sort of thing. I’d like to be a person with newer things you know, like newer ideas, different ideas, different views because you know, everyone’s individual. And if I feel that I want to have a new view of doing something then I think I have every right to make one… So you don’t really have to stay within the guidelines of cultural ways of being Italian where you have to have the female do this and you have to go out to work. So I want to break away from that because I saw my mum and dad were sort of like doing that sort of thing. [So I’d say] oh why are you doing this for, why are you cooking, why don’t you just sit down and relax, let dad do that or I’ll do that or you do that.

Tom suggested that he was trying to think differently than what was considered the cultural norm, and suggested that his family was different. Tom recognized that despite prevalent rhetoric suggesting the existence of gender equity and choices for males, equity and choices were not necessarily available in reality. Thus it was important to him to ‘break away’ from such norms and to have ‘newer’ ideas and views. Tom was challenging dominant discourses that position females in a central role in the home. His views and ideas were that females had a hard time just being females, therefore Tom would do whatever he could to make things easier for females. He linked his argument to ideas of the dominance of males and introduced a notion of violence within homes relating to male dominance. However, underlying his argument were essentialist notions that females were weak and ‘innocent’ and needed to be taken care of by males. Tom was also accessing discourses suggesting that males needed to take greater responsibilities within the home. In a sense, therefore, Tom was not rejecting his masculinity but was recreating his masculinity (Arnot et al., 1999) so that as a male he could help within the home:
H.H.: Where do you think you get your views?

Tom: Well it’s hard. Probably just seeing things in everyday life, sort of things see. I wouldn’t say oh I could say that media, and I see the way, how, you know, you see on TV that or you’ve had a domestic dispute and you know the man’s bashed the lady or something like this. That makes me really disgusted. Who in their right mind in the male society would do something to a female who is totally innocent? It is just like so cruel to do something like that. And it’s just unbelievable you know. It’s too, it’s like wow! It’s too unbelievable! So I like to make things right if you know what I mean, right to me and right to other people so I like to make it so it’s easy for other people to see if you know what I mean. It’s easy for other people like me doing more work so that it’s easier like they have things, like the female has an easier life, not life but I don’t know, so she doesn’t have to do as much you know. I’d like to make it easier on her because I think I feel that being a female’s a hell of a hard thing to be. I mean I’m no female but I know that females go through a lot of things and I feel you can’t add on more things as in doing things with the family. You can’t add on more pressures and more things that a female has to, has to handle and cope. So I know the pressures that they go through so now I’d like to make it easier so that you know that they don’t have so many pressures.

The Inner Circle highlighted feminine and masculine roles at home, but discussions of such issues were left unexamined in the English classroom. However, for students like Tom, these issues were pertinent and thus explored in depth during interviews. The idea that males needed to take more responsibility at home led to questions of whether females had as many educational choices as males. Although Tom suggested that females’ educational choices were good, his main answer related to females selecting curriculum subjects, such as cooking and sewing, which he perceived as feminine. Tom was insightful when he recognized that girls were still encouraged to do subjects which were considered feminine subjects whereas males were generally not encouraged in these subjects. However, his ideas still wavered between discourses that suggest males should take more responsibilities in homes, and, but simultaneously subsumed under, ideas that home responsibilities largely remain with females. Although home economics was an area in which Tom felt both males and females should participate, he emphasized the need for all-boys’ and all-girls’ schools which thus highlighted his perceived notions of essentialized gender differences:
H.H.: Do you think females have as many educational choices as you do?

Tom: They’ve got a reasonable amount of educational choice. I feel, at my old school we did. That was a coeducational school and you know with boys and girls, and I feel that it was all right. But you know, because I feel that it should more tend towards boys’ school, all-boys’ school and all-girls’ school if you know what I mean. Because the boys can concentrate sort of like on their thing and they don’t have to worry. Because my girlfriend goes to [a private girls school] right and she’s doing, like they do things like home economics and stuff. I’m not saying it’s a girl’s subject but I’m sort of saying that you know the girls’ school is influencing this more because they obviously have olden day views. They think that the female is going to stay home, and do the cooking and do this. So they teach them how to cook and they teach them how to sew and they teach them how to do this. But then again I feel that if they have to do it then I think that maybe we should have to do it, you know what I mean. Because if we live alone right, say there’s about a thousand, two thousand people in this school. Then say about five hundred people, five hundred boys, they go out, and they have their own families, right. They find their girlfriends before like in the days now when they’re seventeen, sixteen, and they go out and they just hope to get married. That’s all right because then they’ve got a female who’s been taught how to cook, and who’s been taught how to sew, like they’ve got to fall back on her. But the rest of the one thousand five hundred boys don’t know how to cook they don’t know how to sew, they don’t know how to do anything, so really they’re relying on the female. Relying more on the female and how they see things if you know what I mean. So I think wow. That’s still my view again but I suppose other boys might have different opinions and might think that the girl should stay at home, or the girl should do this. But I think they should have a right to do what they like. Because I know it can get boring staying home and doing the looking after the kids, putting them to sleep and all that kind of stuff. I know that can get boring so if they want to have a bit of fun, go out to work or whatever. If they see work as fun then they can do that.

Despite suggesting that males should take more responsibilities within homes, Tom’s suggestions are grounded less in equity discourses than in discursive expectations that all males will not necessarily marry and therefore, as unmarried, will not be able to rely on females. Heterosexism also informs Tom’s logic about relationships, with an assumption that everyone is heterosexual, despite an emerging sophisticated understanding of homophobia and homosexuality (see Chapter 7);
(see also Epstein, 1997; Epstein & Johnson, 1998). Again the English classroom, with the introduction of specific literary texts, became an ideal site from which to challenge hegemonic discourses which stubbornly retain their dominance (see Alloway & Gilbert, 1997b; Martino & Cook, 1998).

Other boys were also accessing new discourses suggesting that females now are less likely to stay at home. For example, William discussed how he felt there was no real difference between male and female chances of securing jobs, unless, of course, an employer was sexist and thus discriminated against women. However, these new discourses do not necessarily reflect contemporary life chances for females (see for example Aveling, 2002; O’Brien & Howard, 1998):

H.H.: What about against females, do you think you’ve got an advantage over females?

William: Apart from sexism no I don’t think so. If you got a boss that, you know, he’s sexist and you know he doesn’t think women can do the job properly then surely you’ve got a better chance. But in general no, I don’t think there’s much controversy between men and women.

H.H.: If you were female -?

William: I’d have just as much of a chance of getting a job than someone else, if my education was the same as theirs.

With the school text used as an introductory platform or threshold (see for example Martino, 1998a), students were able to identify with issues that surfaced and hence discuss their ideas relating to male and female roles at home. Although some students felt that it was unfair to expect Tony, in The Inner Circle, to do the housework and cooking, Kevin’s home situation made additional discourses available to him. Coming from a single parent family, where his mother went out to work, Kevin was already helping out around the home. Although he admitted that jokes were ‘cracked’ at school suggesting that work in the home was female work, Kevin believed that home workloads should be shared. Kevin was coming to terms with a contradictory situation where specific normalizing assumptions operated in the construction of particular forms of masculinity (Francis, 2000; R. Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Martino & Meyenn, 2002, 2001; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2000; Skelton, 2001) contradicted his personal experience. Kevin shared his family’s story with me and particularly his mother’s experiences when she, as a female and with other female members of her family, was responsible for all work in the home,
but revealed that he and his siblings had been brought up to share workloads in the home:

H.H.: What about the housework and cooking, like in *The Inner Circle*, Tony had to do all the housework and cooking and things like that for his father, how do you think you’d feel if you had to do that?

Kevin: Well I sometimes actually have to do that. I think since I was in Year 4 I sort of learned how to cook and to clean and sort of iron my own clothes, and wash my own clothes sometimes, because my mum had to work. And of course being a single parent she’d work late, I think just since Year 4 I’ve been sometimes cooking for myself or for me and my younger brother or washing our clothes because my mum’s had to go to work or whatever. Our family, the only time we’re together is when we’re sleeping. Because I think my mum’s working late she comes in late, sometimes I come home late from training or school, and my brother comes in at different times. My family’s spread out all over, I’ve got a sister in Sydney, two sisters in Sydney, a relative that just sort of comes and goes. And so it’s just really me my mum and my brother at home and I’m sort of looking after me and my brother and we actually had my sister’s little baby staying with us. So I’d sort of take on some of the workload and help out, and yes, I think my mum sort of expects me to help out a bit, I really don’t mind doing that.

H.H.: Do you feel there’s any difference between what a female should be doing at home with what a male should be doing?

Kevin: Oh well, I don’t, well no, not really. If I were to have a wife I wouldn’t like her to just stay at home and do the cooking and cleaning and do whatever. We crack jokes at school. But yes, I don’t really think a woman should be confined to just do cooking and cleaning and do housework unless that’s her choice. But I think you know if I was to have a wife I would like her to follow whatever dream she had and not to get caught up in just doing housework. But I think the workload should be shared. I think coming from a family, a big family like mine we sort of shared the workload and it’s not really the girls doing everything and the boys not doing anything. And I think my mum was grown up like that where she was the females or daughters had to, they had to do all the housework. And what they do when they were eating dinner the girls wouldn’t eat until after the boys finished eating and even if the boys ate everything and there was only little bit of scraps or nothing left, well that’s what the girls would have to make do with. Like we haven’t been brought up like that but I think the workload in the household should be shared, and even if
it's the other way round where the man stays home and
does all the work. But I don't think a woman should or a
female should have to stay at home and do all the work.
It wouldn't be healthy because I think you'd have to get
out and socialize and by having a job, through having a
job you can socialize and meet new people. But yes, the
workload should be shared. Women shouldn't just do
all the work in the house.

Overall, however, despite accessing notions that females should have similar choices
as males in respect of housework and paid work, students continued to essentialize
differences between males and females. While simultaneously understanding that
girls can achieve in the same ways as males, an underlying premise is that females
who do the same things as males are still seen within a discursive notion of
'tomboy'. Thus there is a subtle expectation of different roles for females and
males. Indeed, these differences appear to be reinforced within school with Tom's
idea that females are 'softer' and more 'emotional' than males, ideas which Tom
has 'learned at school'. Insightfully, Tom recognized ways in which 'gender'
overlapped with biological sexualized categories to limit choices for females. Thus,
through further analysis, he also effectively reduces choices for males.

Tom: I mean females might be more softer or have more of an
emotional side or see things more nurturing than we. I
learned that at school. I see it that way but it doesn't
mean they can't do the same things as males. I mean
sure they can't do some of the same things physically
that males can, but they can if they really wanted to you
know. I don't think that they should be bagged for that.
I don't think that they should just because they're
females that anyone should bag them for doing
something like a male. Like, you know, you can see
tomboy girls and stuff being boys or trying to do the
same. But I think they [girls] are just trying to make a
statement in the society saying well they're male why
can't I do what they do, what makes me different from
them apart from the gender side of things – nothing
really.

Tom recognizes the inequalities for females and elaborates on issues in terms of
females achieving and doing the same things as males. The extensions of male
positionings are less accessible. Discourses that reinforce prevalent ideologies are
difficult to dislodge and the introduction of literary texts that provide different
positionings for male students provide weak alternatives. For example, although in
The Inner Circle we caught glimpses of a male cooking and looking after the house,
it is in a situation out of necessity where the female has left the family and
consequently males are left to reluctantly look after themselves. The chores remain
in essence a feminine activity. The contradictory discourses do not necessarily provide alternative masculinist positionings. There is still an essentializing of girls as ‘soft’ and ‘emotional’ where, for Tom, girls are essentially ‘nurturing’. This essentialist notion of gender permeates Tom’s discourse.

As a feminist pedagogy, what was needed was the provision of tools for deconstruction of prevalent gender ideologies. In many ways, students in this study were still very much thinking of masculinities within an “ordering of institutional practices” (Hearn & Collinson, 1994, p.104). Practices which meant “becoming a man was about having a suitable occupation, income and social position, able to support a dependent wife and accompanying household” (Heward cited in Hearn & Collinson, 1994, p.104). Being male, therefore, was akin to hegemonic heterosexual masculinity (Frank, 1987) and retaining, through the act of marriage, what Connell (1995) calls the ‘patriarchal dividend’ which confers a form of power over someone else. Effectively, males in this study continue to see themselves as ‘breadwinners’, retaining a power which allows them to sit at home and let females take responsibility for what is perceived as the ‘less-important’ private domain, although at the same time it was seen that females could enter the public sphere if they desired. In other words, females could be like males, but they also remained female and with that kept the perceived female roles. As such, a discourse endorsing the notion that males support females remains a prevalent discourse.

Power, however, remains with males within regimes of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity. Notions of specific female responsibilities become a restriction of sexuality roles within the context of the ‘normal’ nuclear family (Foucault, 1981b) and inherently result in a power relationship with power unproblematically bestowed on males.

Christina, as their English teacher, reaffirmed my impression that male students perceived male and female roles as different, and that they perceived gender relationships within hegemonic heterosexual discourses (Frank, 1987). For example, during our interview, Christina suggested that students perceived her as female before seeing her as a teacher, thus effectively sexualizing her. Pedagogical practices in single-sex classes often operate differently than in mixed classes (Martino, 1998b; Martino & Meyenn, 2002). However, there is a danger that a teacher’s pedagogy may become modified to such an extent that the feminine/masculine relationship is ignored and dominant views on female roles and male/female
relationships are reinforced. Through such practices it is possible to become unaware of the potential for sexual harassment and the associated power relationship (Robinson, 2000). Christina discussed how she felt that male students treated her as a female rather than teacher, and how she felt that students believed their role at times was to protect her despite Christina being their teacher:

Christina: I don’t expect them to respect me straightaway either but it’s interesting because when I first came they did. They do have this automatic, this almost automatic respect because I’m a female.

H.H.: Because you’re a female rather than because you’re a teacher?

Christina: Yes, because little things. I can’t even pinpoint it. But little things like ‘shush, she’s trying to talk’ or ‘move out of the way’. And maybe it is because I’m a teacher or maybe, maybe I’m in that role. But I just get the feeling sometimes that they really see me as female and see me as if I sometimes might need protection. I know that sounds bizarre but I sometimes get that feeling, particularly Tom or some of the boys.

Students’ narratives suggest that they see differences between masculine and feminine roles and relationships, and support Christina’s suggestions that male students in this classroom perceive her as female first and teacher second. Christina’s pedagogical practices were such that they reinforced male and female differences.

‘You’re just like a girl’: Stereotypes being reinforced

At school, discourses of hegemonic masculinity predominate and males appear to police each other within the school environment by, for example, saying ‘you’re like a girl’ if a male acted in what students considered a stereotypical female way. In this way, stereotypes continue to be reinforced. Ways in which males police each other is explored by writers such as Martino (2000a). However, despite attention given to such policing, and despite male students acknowledging that this kind of policing prevails in school environments, these acts persist. During one of the interviews, Kevin mentioned how he believed some things such as drama and playing the violin were considered male and others female. On further questioning, Kevin discussed ways in which male students effectively policed each other and were expected to be like other males, but at the same time not like a female. The following excerpt shows
his insightfulness on the policing of hegemonic heterosexual masculinities at school:

H.H.: Do you think it still comes out, here in the boys’ school, that it’s more female or male to do something?

Kevin: Yes, there are people who do like, who are like in the choir or whatever, they do cop a bit of criticism from other boys and stuff. And you know, we still say like there’s things where we compare them to a girl. I think you know, even if our mates do something stupid like the way he acts or talks, we’ll say, oh you’re like a girl, or whatever. I’m not really too sure why we say it’s like that. But I think our friends expect us to act in a certain way and when we start acting different to what they expect, they get a bit, I’m not sure, but they might get a bit scared or confused. And they sort of say, you’re acting like a girl you know.

The majority of students confirmed that boys would be said to be ‘just like a girl’ if they acted in ways that were perceived feminine. Kevin initially introduced the phrase ‘just like a girl’ when discussing *The Inner Circle*, and linked the phrase to the way boys acted at school. Bringing this phrase back into the English classroom, I questioned the students during one of their classes on their understanding of what it meant to be ‘just like a girl’. When used to describe other boys, the phrase ‘just like a girl’ was generally meant to have certain perceived feminine characteristics, to be weaker and to be more emotional than the perceived image of males, as some of the following comments by students suggest:

Andrew: Girls are stereotyped into being weak, and not being able to do and handle some of the stuff that boys can. Whenever we see a boy not being strong enough to do something that most other boys of the same age could do we generally think that they are ‘just like a girl’.

Larry: That a boy is ‘just like a girl’ means he can’t play sport, he’s weak, he doesn’t like rough things and acts like a girl by gossiping and talking about different things.

Nick: To be ‘like a girl’ is to do something that a girl would usually do. Or in sport, to kick a ball ‘just like a girl’, they are saying that the person kicks like a girl would if she had a try.

Adam: This means that girls typically are weaker and built less stronger than boys therefore when a boy acts weak, he is usually called by other boys to be ‘like a girl’.
Chapter 6: Interrogating textual representations and boys' self perceptions of being male

Jacob: ‘Just like a girl’ means acting or doing certain things that girls do. This means someone might say just like a girl if a boy is blow-drying his hair.

Barry: This is a stereotype saying if a boy was too afraid to do something, then another boy would say ‘just like a girl’ because usually a lot of girls wouldn’t do something like that.

Henry: Boys in my experience are more likely to use this term than girls. Boys use it to knock another boy and by saying it, imply that the person they are saying it to is doing something of the female nature.

Whether females were weaker or more emotional was left unchallenged by students. Instead, the term remained in use in a derogative way to females generally and to specific males to which the term was directed. The phrase ‘just like a girl’ or ‘like a woman’ reoccurred in students’ narratives, and was never acknowledged as detrimental to either males or females, yet the continued use of such phrases encouraged hegemonic masculine discourses to prevail. Knowledge of how such terms are left unchallenged would provide teachers with understanding of ways in which students can be provided with strategies for challenge. Victor (who described himself as a Singaporean Chinese) suggested that the phrase ‘just like a girl’ was used to describe a weak male because women are perceived to be weak and defenseless, although he did not believe women were necessarily weak and defenseless. Victor explains:

Victor: Men believe that women are weak and defenseless, which they aren’t. And so they use this phrase to describe a weak person. For example, he cries just like a girl.

Kevin was able to effectively articulate his thoughts on such gender issues. When I asked him if he felt there were any possibilities for challenging the way males were effectively policed into acting in perceived masculine ways, he replied:

Kevin: I think if you just sort of, get more encouragement from a school. I mean not just here in an all boys’ school, I mean at a college school, more involvement between the boys and girls of that, more interaction, get involved in stuff that the girls like and the girls get involved in the stuff that the boys like. You know ... not making the division between the two of you. They [girls] can experience the same sort of things. You learn what the other experiences, experience what the male can experience, and the male experiences what the female experiences. Then you don’t sort of get things like sexism and stuff like that.
Kevin revealed how males continued to act according to the norms of acceptable hegemonic masculinity through acts of gender policing. Thus a further discourse thrived, whereby males could not express themselves nor express their emotions. Kevin also believed that within schools, and not just in an all boys’ school, more encouragement and experience was needed in respect of issues relating to gender relationships to challenge, for example, sexism.

In a similar vein, Anthony, an Anglo-Australian, debated the way it was a lot harder for males to discuss emotions, believing it was more difficult for him than it was for females to discuss such issues. Reference to differences again reinforced a dualistic perception of male/female qualities. If males discuss such issues, then they become categorized as ‘a person that has those sorts of problems’ and thus are stereotyped. Consequently, male students, unable to ‘open up’ because of reinforced stereotypes, become ‘boxed in’ and then just ‘get used to it’, so that even when they are given opportunities to discuss things like emotions they ‘don’t really want to’. However, Anthony felt that significant issues could be effectively discussed through different texts at school and in this instance related to how much better one of the protagonists of The Inner Circle felt after he was able to talk about his problems. Anthony was able to relate issues presented through the story to reality. During an interview session, when discussing emotions, I asked if more opportunity could be given for ‘opening up’:

H.H.: Could boys be given the opportunity to talk about emotions so that they don’t feel that they can’t talk?

Anthony: Yes, probably to a certain extent because it’s a lot harder for boys to be able to talk to their mates about something that’s happened. Because it’s sort of like, you say that and even though because they’re your mates and they won’t turn around and go oh yes well done and all this sort of stuff. They won’t make a big fuss over it but still, you’re known as that sort of person. You are that sort of person that has those sorts of problems, and you’re stereotyped as to what that sort of person is like. And I think girls don’t really care about what they sort of say. I don’t know why that is but they just don’t really care about whether they get stereotyped or something. Because they really feel that, on a day-to-day basis, I suppose it’s the person that they are, rather than not. A person gets an image from years and years working at it, like telling people they like sorts of stuff. Girls don’t really care about that sort of thing. I think, not as much [as boys]. But yes, I think that ... boys probably need to let their emotions out. Like, even in that book [The Inner
that we read, the guy [Tony] felt a lot better after he could talk about his problems remember. But yes, I think boys need to be a little bit more open because they just get boxed up and when somebody offers to talk to you about those sorts of things, you don’t really want to anyway, because you sort of just get used to it.

Students’ ideas had been shaped through prevalent discourses that were available to them. Discourses have a way of shaping identity while constraining and enabling individual actions and thoughts to locate within a ‘complex web’ of available discourses (Weedon, 1997). It is clear that introducing texts alone is often insufficient in deconstructing hegemonic discourses. As Buchbinder (1994a, p.75) wrote: “Even where a text consciously sets out to interrogate the naturalisation of a set of assumptions, there may still remain a residue of gender ideology which is itself not interrogated”. Indeed, there is a need to read against the grain. Informal codes and underlying dominant discourses do not necessarily challenge explicit hegemonic discourses. For example, in reading The Inner Circle where the two protagonists are shown to reveal their emotions to each other does not necessarily mean students will take explicit ideas on board themselves. As Anthony (in the previous narrative) declared, males get used to not talking about their emotions so when they are offered opportunities to talk they do not really want to. The discursive illusion that males are not emotional remains prevalent.

Images of masculinities and femininities and The Club

The second text used in my research, where I interrogate normalizing processes of construction and reconstruction of hegemonic masculinities, is The Club. The introduction of The Club opened up discussions relating to masculinities within sport, and further highlighted issues relating to sexuality and female roles within Australian sport. The Club looks at the power held by ‘big men’ of the sporting world. The book is about a Melbourne football club, introducing modern football as entertainment. The Club is also about money and massive transfer fees, about loyalty and big business, pride in craftsmanship and ethics, about financial gain and social ability, and about winning and losing and hangers-on. Issues of masculinities are inherently displayed, with the ‘ocker’ male image explicitly portrayed. Marilyn included the book because of its satirical look at Australian males and its pedagogical possibilities of deconstructing such images, and suggested:

Marilyn: I think you’ll find The Club very interesting because it is a satire of the Australian male in the seventies, sort of
ocke. And also really looks at the sport obsession and
course the boys find that really interesting too.

The contradictions and group power struggles that occur within such organizations become apparent through students’ narratives. Derrida (1994) suggests that representations progress from translations and language and I found that students were able to represent themselves through their own translations and understandings of texts. Hegemonic Australian male culture provided a framework within which students were able to access translations of specific events and characters described in texts. The game of football provides opportunities of inclusiveness of many features of hegemonic masculinity such as discipline, self-reliance, control, adventure, physical strength, and competitiveness (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997). Despite their self-identified varied ethnic backgrounds, I found that all but three students were able to identify with the main characters portrayed in *The Club*, through characteristics such as being tough, in control, brave, loyal or identify with the playing football or being Australian. My research findings parallel a British study which shows that football cuts “across ethnic boundaries and that many boys become deeply invested in these activities as the primary signifiers of masculinity” (Epstein, Kehily, Mac an Ghaill, & Redman, 2001, p.159). My research also shows that middle class adolescent males play football despite the perceived close connection of football with a macho working class masculinity (Martino, 2000b; Willis, 1977). When asked which characters from *The Club* students could identify with, students answered with some of the following examples:

**Barry:** I would think Jock because he has got a typical Australian sense of humour – he’s what someone would think an Australian would look like.

**Tom:** I suppose I can relate mostly to Ted where I am dedicated to everything and like to be in control and I give leeway to people who have good ideas. I try to put forward my ideas and pay for them at my own expense.

**Richard:** Danny because he sticks up for Laurie and helps everyone out. He wouldn’t go on strike unless Laurie told them to. I also admire his bravery by getting up and letting out his thoughts to the committee.

**Simon:** Laurie is the character that I can relate to the most because he is honest, willing, loyal and supportive. My personality embodies some (at least) of these traits.

**Harry:** I mainly identify with Danny. This is because I am willing to give something a go and also other people a go. I am also loyal to my sporting team.
Ken: Jock because he is the typical stereotype of an Australian. He drinks, swears and smokes. This reminds me of a typical Australian. He also does not care how he speaks to anyone, not even authority.

Kevin: Jock because he uses football language, has a high regard for football, talks like an ‘Aussie’, and seems a realistic Aussie or footy fan.

However, students were able to begin to challenge some of the stereotypes inherent in characters portrayed in The Club. For example, William, who identified as Australian, was able to consider football players in light of their businesses and not just as football players:

H.H.: What about sports and stereotypes in sports, what do you think of those?

William: Well, to people who don’t know the game you know, it used to be considered that big bulky dopey players play football. But nowadays, it’s becoming Australia wide, you know everyone loves the game, Australia loves the game you know, players of football are considered quite highly you know. You’re considered great people you know, you notice the Eagles players, a lot of them have businesses on the side. They’re managers of different businesses you know... You know if you don’t play much soccer, you don’t play football, whatever, everyone’s kind of considered big and dopey and that, so I’m guessing that was started off with people that were just, I don’t know, jealous of people who made it and they call them big and dopey. And just haven’t caught on. But people like in America or like Scotland, wherever they play soccer, you wouldn’t dare call someone dopey who played soccer you know.

Representations of males, and thus masculinities, are exhibited in different texts. In fact, cultures are filled with different representatives of males. However, as Buchbinder (1998) notes, these representations are often taken as reality rather than as representations within cultures, and represent a hegemonic viewpoint within a discursive ideological structure that reproduces hegemonic forms of masculinities. For example, although The Club opened up discussions on sports, male contact sports were adamantly considered as necessarily excluding females. There remained a distinction between male and female sports as well as male and female roles in sport. From the platform created by reading The Club, I asked students about the roles females play in sports. Students suggested that sports for males and females were necessarily different. Additionally, although students were accessing equity
discourses where they believed females should be allowed to play perceived male sports, other reasons—such as medical reasons—were cited for females not playing these same perceived male sports.

William explained his ideas in more depth when I asked about female roles in sport. His ideas included notions that it would be great for females to play sports such as football if there was no danger, but he simultaneously believed that females could get breast cancer if they were hit. Thus William’s ideas recreated notions which highlight nineteenth century ideas when it was considered ‘scientific fact’ that females should not play sports for health reasons and because it was particularly “detrimental to the female’s ability to bear children at a later time” (Mrozek, 1987, p.288), (see also Hargreaves, 1994; Vertinsky, 1987). These ideas subscribe to an ideology whereby what a female cannot or can do with her physicality is dictated by gendered values and roles (Greendorfer, 1993). Interestingly, William also talks about males getting hit in the genitals and this also causing cancer, but this is not used to delegitimate males’ participation in the same sport:

H.H.: What about females in sport, what sort of role do you think they play?

William: Oh well, it depends in what kind of sports. Women are forbidden to play AFL football. Actually I found this out when I was a little kid. I remember sitting next to my coach and he was having a conversation with a woman who wanted her daughter to play football. And he was just talking to her saying, oh well we’ve got no problem with your daughter trying out and everything. But you’re going to have to talk to, I don’t know, your doctor or something and see whether it’s OK because you know they get breast cancer – if you get hit in the breast and all that. And for some reason it’s just, but yet they still play rugby by themselves. I reckon it’s great yes I reckon it’s great, but if they weren’t in any danger or anything, then they should be playing football. But you see in the world’s best gymnasts, the world’s best swimmers, you know, and runner, they’re all female.

H.H.: And this coach that was saying this about this girl, how long ago was this?

William: It would have been about, eight years ago I suppose, seven, eight, oh no not quite seven I think, yes, about seven. See he’s a good bloke. I’m still good mates with him. And his son I’ve known since I was about a month old so we’re best mates you know. But, yes he has no problem with women playing sport. In fact, I think he used to actually coach for a girl’s football team. But he just, he said to her you know, I have no problem with
getting a girl on the side and everything but, [William was whispering now] because he didn’t want to be sued. [Voice back to normal] He said oh I’d like you to go and see your doctor, and ask him if there’s any potential danger, if any. Because it’d be a real shame if you’ve been playing football you know for a while, then you get breast cancer. When you’re older I think, like I’m fairly sure it was. I’ve heard a lot about it, I think it’s scientifically proven isn’t it?

H.H.: What is?

William: Men get hit in the genitals they’d get cancer there as well I think. And the same with women if they get hit in the breasts then I’m fairly sure they’d get cancer. It’s not definite but if you got hit there often then your chances of getting cancer are greater. Yes so I firmly believe that... Anyway, so, well I suppose that’s why in most sports men wear boxers.

Other reasons that were given by students for not having mixed teams included that it was not allowed, an idea accepted unproblematically, where William suggests ‘there really is large lines separating them (males and females) both’. Possibilities of ‘border crossing’ as suggested by Giroux (cited in King, 2000), whereby students were able to choose what it would mean for them to be ‘male’ outside hegemonic masculine discourses were inaccessible. Accepted ideas, which effectively incorporated notions that males and females were essentially different, were thus taken on board by students, and left undeconstructed and unexamined to any depth. Pedagogy that is inclusive of investigatory and deconstructive techniques is important in such situations. However, the questions posed by the teacher did not at this time challenge students to deconstruct issues relating to the essentialized notions of males and females.

H.H.: What about in men’s games, what roles do females play or should play there?

William: Well for numerous reasons men and women don’t play a sport together usually, unless it is swimming or polo or whatever. But usually any physical contact sport you know, they don’t usually play together, which is reasonable. And so in women sport, men have, they have no physical interaction in the sport apart from coaching you know. But you know men and female both coach sports and, females I don’t think have any physical relationship in men’s sports because they’re so you know, there really is large lines separating them both. It’s not allowed.

H.H.: Do you think that’s right?
William: Well, I don’t know the reasons for it so I can’t really say whether that’s right or not you know. If the reasons were simply because you know some guy doesn’t believe that women should be able to play football in a men’s team then I’d think surely it’s not right. But if it’s for health reasons, then yes I suppose it’d be all right.

H.H.: Do you get women coaches for men’s teams?

William: Yes, yes, my mates. I’ve often had a woman coach me for basketball or rowing whatever.

H.H.: And you’re quite happy with that?

William: Oh yes it’s fine. I mean, I think that women are the best in a lot of sports, you know women’s hockey, women’s tennis. Just because they’re separated doesn’t mean either one’s better.

Although students admitted that there were female teams in what they perceived as male sports, students remained adamant that male sports were too rough for females. For Richard, who identified as an Australian and New Zealander, there were definite distinctions between perceived male and perceived female sports, and that male sports were too rough for females. Almost as an afterthought, Richard also agrees that females can play male sports like football and rugby, but this idea remains subsumed under a more prevalent idea that sports like football and rugby are too rough for females and, therefore, they remain predominantly male sports. Richard thus remained caught up in an ideology that suggested some sports were ‘unfeminine’ (McCrone, 1987):

H.H.: What about in sports, what do you think is the female role there and how do you think females fit into these different sports?

Richard: Well, with some sports they do and some sports they don’t. Like netball is a girls’ sport. They fit into that. You wouldn’t see a guy running around playing netball. And footy kind of because I hear girls play footy and all that. But it’s kind of more of a man’s sport because it’s rough and all that. Like rugby, that’s a man’s sport because it’s rough and girls wouldn’t be into that kind of thing. Like swimming is a neutral sport. Anyone could do that. Just certain sports that girls are not supposed to be in I reckon. And oh, you can have like girl and boy teams, like volleyball, beach volleyball something like that. But just you’re not supposed to, like the rough ones are not for ladies and stuff. Yes it’s just like I reckon that’s too rough for them. They’ll get hurt
and that and then they’ll think oh I don’t want to play that anymore. But I’ve heard quite a lot of people, a lot of girls are playing football, give it a go, I think that’s all right.

H.H.: So what’s the difference say between football and rugby?

Richard: I’ve heard a debate about this before and rugby is much rougher than footy. Like with footy you’ve got all different positions it could be rough like on the hip and shoulder there. And you might, I don’t know, twist an ankle or break an ankle or something. But in rugby you can actually like kill someone if you actually wanted to or if you tried it or something like that. I can just pick you up and drop you and you could just break your spine. It’s a pretty rough game, rugby. But actually there is a women’s rugby league team and it’s just all associated with women, no men, you know what I mean. Yes but I don’t reckon there should be like mixed teams or anything with women.

Relating to The Club, Kevin was able to discuss how emphasis in the book had been on males and their relationship to sport, with little emphasis on women playing sport. Insightfully, Kevin was able to suggest that a lack of emphasis on females could relate to ‘anything really, be in the workforce, or something else’. Active emphasis within texts used at school remains on males. Marilyn used The Club in particular to introduce issues of masculinities or, as in Marilyn’s words, ‘a boy’s club’. Students’ interview quotes reflect classroom discussions where although it was acknowledged that females played sport and there were women’s teams in sports like football, the conclusion remained that sports like football were highly associated with males and that if women wanted to play then it would have to be in a separate team or they would ‘hold back’ the men. Greater opportunities were provided by text than were used in the classroom, so that although issues were introduced, interview narratives show that students’ ideas remained undeveloped and unexamined. For example, in this instance, Australian football remained linked to what was perceived as Australian culture (personal journal, classroom observations, 22 April 1999). Indeed, football was more than a game but was complicit in the construction of particular forms of hegemonic masculinities (Messner & Sabo, 1990; Skelton, 2000).

Kevin admitted that females could be better athletes than males, however, like Richard (above) and other students, he was against mixed teams in contact sports, suggesting that it would be hazardous to females to join male rugby or football
teams. Despite Kevin’s insightful comments that females can be better at sports than males, males continued to be positioned against females, but at the same time homogenizing males. Although strength and vigour may disadvantage many females in sports like rugby and football, the same characteristics may also disadvantage many males in the same sports:

H.H.: So do you think that was discussed enough in the classroom?

Kevin: No that wasn’t really discussed I don’t think. We were more along the lines of discussing the money side of football coming in the problems between the characters. We were sort of looking at other messages that could have been presented in the book. I thought it wasn’t really much of an emphasis on women playing sport or it really doesn’t have to relate to sport. It could relate to anything really, be in the workforce, or something else.

H.H.: So do you think women could play say soccer or football with you, do you think they are just as good?

Kevin: They can definitely play. Some women are better athletes than men are, but I wouldn’t see them play in mixed teams unless it’s a non-contact sport… I really don’t think it would be in the interest of the health of play, for a woman to join into say a men’s rugby team or men’s football team. Maybe an all girls’ football team but I don’t think women should be allowed to play in the same team as men unless it’s a non-contact sport.

Although The Club enabled discussions of female roles within perceived male sports, female roles in this book were stereotypical female roles, as mother or as sister, or in sexualized roles. Pedagogical questions were raised about conflict and conflict resolutions, but essentialized female roles and male roles as intrinsic in the major ideas of The Club were left unexamined. Readings of The Club specifically reaffirmed prevalent male and female roles in sport even though students may experience a different reality. For example, Kevin believed his sister to be better at playing basketball than he was, but his narrative provides contradictory notions with implicit assumptions that boys are better than girls at sports generally:

Kevin: I think I sort of get the feeling that they [other students] were thinking along the same lines that I was thinking where I don’t think women should be involved in football. I mean some of the football players that I talk with now in football training, they sort of say, well, there’s not really girls in sports, not really. It was interesting this morning, today, one of the boys said your football team plays as bad as a girls’ basketball team, and I think we make remarks about girls in sport.
and other things. And if someone’s really bad, one of their mates that are really good says ‘oh, you’re a girl’ or something, you can’t pick up a ball or whatever. I think in the book women are made, well, there’s really no influence of women I thought. I know in our football team we sort of get the feeling that women don’t belong here in sport and that we’re sort of better than them. But that’s not really true, because my sister, well, she’s a better basketballer than me, but I think we sort of, in our football team, get that feeling.

There were contradictory discourses available for Kevin. From texts at school he was receiving messages that males should be those in control. Such notions were carried through both The Club and Gallipoli. However, this did not always relate to Kevin’s own experiences, where, coming from a single parent family, female influence was significant. Additionally, his own sister was better at sports than he was, which contradicted—but left unchallenged—many dominant discourses which suggest males are better at sports like basketball. This disjuncture is important and again reinforced dominant masculinity with the possibilities of restricting access to other forms of self-representations. Personal experiences appeared to be insignificant and overlooked in preference to prevalent discourses. Overall, students perceived sport, particularly sport like football, soccer and rugby, predominantly as a male domain. This confirms ideas that they are not only complicit in the construction of specific forms of hegemonic masculinities, but also serve to preserve them as such with their exclusion, or perceived exclusion, of women (Whitson, 1990). Significantly, despite Marilyn’s awareness of issues relating to critical pedagogy, reading of selected texts appeared to reinforce and not challenge preconceived notions of gender difference. For example, relating to his own family, Luke spoke of how males and females were essentially different, that boys liked to do ‘bad sort of stuff’ whereas girls liked to do quieter things. In Luke’s situation, readings of specific texts reinforced his own ideas:

Luke: It’s just that boys want to do always like bad sort of stuff all the time, like hard stuff, like just climb trees, hills, and all that stuff. And women tend to be like, say if you were like climbing a tree; some girls would normally not do that, like jump off of trees and all that stuff. They’d like just walk around and all that and they won’t run over rocks and all that stuff. Because my sisters, they like to comb each other’s hair and put on make-up, and we’re [my brothers and I] are like out the back playing in the pool and all that stuff. And my sisters, they like to dress each other up... and we’ll like go ride in the bush and all that.
The need for feminist pedagogy with the provision and encouragement of alternative readings is evident from students’ narratives. Deconstruction of males as a homogenous group is as important as the deconstruction of the dichotomous nature of gender. Kenway suggests that students:

learn that there are different ways of being a male, some more valued and prestigious and powerful than others, and that one way of being and feeling powerful as a male is to demonstrate power over other males and over females. Sport plays a major role here.

(Kenway, 1997, p.59)

Selected literary texts, specifically *The Club*, and students’ readings of school texts, certainly reaffirmed Kenway’s suggestions, whereby sport played a significant role in reinforcement of specific male power. However, some breaks and gaps to hegemonic discourses of power relations to sport and masculinities were apparent as students grasped alternative discourses thus pointing to future possibilities for “less rigidly policed and disciplined masculinities and femininities” (Epstein, Kehily et al., 2001, p.170). Students were not all taking up the same type of masculinity (Nilan, 2000). However, specific versions of hegemonic masculinity retained a sense of normality for male students not only through the reading of *The Club* and its relationship to masculinized sport, but also through the reading of *Gallipoli* with an emphasis on mateship, heroism and sport. Students easily embraced representations of specific types of Australian males within texts and thus enable me to examine some of the normalization regimes within hegemonic masculinities. Specific versions of hegemonic masculinity are linked to Australian males through existence of a powerful mateship myth, reinforced through specific texts such as *The Club* and *Gallipoli*. In the next section I examine how myths of mateship create specific forms of hegemonic masculinities and explore ways in which Marilyn, the English teacher, attempts to address and challenge such issues.

**Masculinities and mateship**

Peter Weir’s film *Gallipoli* is portrayed from an Australian perspective showing Australia’s involvement in a growing European war during the First World War. Although an anti-war film, it nevertheless celebrates and romanticizes male friendship in the extreme conditions generated by war. The two main protagonists are Archie, a blond romantic country boy, and Frank who is from the city. Using the war in Europe as a background, the film shows how Archie and Frank meet and become friends while running in races in Australia. When they enlist they are placed
in different regiments as ‘runners’: Archie into the elite Light Horse regiment and Frank into the Infantry. However, they meet again in Egypt and become comrades-in-arms when Frank is able to transfer to the elite Light Horse regiment. Gallipoli becomes their next stop and the film highlights Australia’s participation in the war through the fighting in Gallipoli and the fruitlessness of that battle. The film represents the Australian male in wartime, celebrates youth, life, friendships and courage, and romanticizes the notion of going to war. Issues relating to war, and more specifically the futility of war, are evident while the significance and strength of ‘mateship’ in Australia becomes apparent. In fact, as Buchbinder (1994b) writes, the film brings together some powerful myths which include the potent Australian paragon of mateship, as well as heroism in wars and the great interest shown in sports by Australian males. However, Gallipoli not only embraces these myths, but also recreates them within a narrow range of Australian models. How these representations are then deconstructed within classrooms is important. Through our interviews, Marilyn explored issues highlighted in Gallipoli relating to patriotism and war and how it is perceived as cowardly if a male does not enlist:

Marilyn: I think that’s another thing that came out and was certainly part of the overall focus, you know, why they went off to war. We all talked about this. I think this was in the lesson where you weren’t there. But we had some sheets about why people went off to war you know and their thirst for adventure. They want to go overseas. They want to fight for the mother country, for England. The ties were much stronger. We talked about people. It was interesting last year because there was a boy whose grandfather had refused to go and he was sent a white feather. He was seen as a coward, you know, if you didn’t go off to fight. And I suppose also if I’d had more time I would have tried to bring it a bit more up to date I suppose and talked about what, how would they feel in a similar position, you know in two or three years down the track. Because we see Archie is only eighteen, and lies about his age to go out to war and he goes off and has all these adventures around the world, and he’s the one who is cut down in his prime. So that’s certainly part of it, the patriotic sort of side of things.

Patriotism and romanticism of war were highlighted through Marilyn’s pedagogy. Cowardice as signified with a white feather is emphasized. Mateship was also particularly relevant in the film Gallipoli as my interview with Marilyn shows. Mateship relates particularly to males and how it was important to look after your mates and not ‘dob’ on them, a type of mateship which is exclusively male. Mateship was inherent in the way characters were portrayed as representing
Australia. A strong link is also made between the innocent young male and Australia as an innocent young country. Through Marilyn’s pedagogy there was an emphasis on patriotism, romanticism and mateship, issues which highlight masculinist discourses:

Marilyn: And I suppose things like mateship come up, the Australian male, looking after your mates, not sort of ‘dobbing’ on your mates. Dying you know, almost dying for your friends, and that’s certainly a part of it. In the past I’ve spent longer on the ‘country’ versus ‘city’ theme, and the country boy Archie and the city boy Frank. And that shows Archie as the blonde romantic sort of. Here you have the innocent too, innocent in lots of ways, whereas Frank is actually street-wise and knows how to look after himself, how to survive. And also what Archie represented, that he represented Australia, as a young country, they were innocents abroad. They didn’t know what they were going into. They had to make their own bombs, for example, and it was all so sort of, and also the British, you know a lot of the film obviously criticizes the British generals, blames them, it actually puts a lot of blame, the mistakes that were made. I mean that’s something. And obviously there’s a lot, there’s bias in that too. You could probably look at these things from a different perspective but the film certainly apportions blame in that direction. I was just surprised at their lack of knowledge of the Anzacs and the Diggers, and they asked you about it.

H.H.: Yes.

Marilyn: They didn’t know much at all about Gallipoli. Next time I’d really like to spend more time, looking at more of a historical perspective. I mean I did give them sheets and we talked about it and they were able to ask questions and I tried to answer as much as I could. I’m not an expert on it but I’ve taught it for sort of two or three years and I sort of have knowledge of historical events as it goes and reasons why Australians died. But I’ve tried to make some links back to the novel too, about you know, friendships and mateships, and Australia at a very different time.

In our initial conversations, Marilyn indicated that she was particularly concerned with gender issues and ways in which prevalent versions of hegemonic masculinity affected male students. Through the introduction of specific texts, Marilyn informed me that she intended to highlight issues of concern relating to gender and masculinity in her teaching. Her interview extract above shows how the introduction of texts such as The Club and Gallipoli introduced a specific kind of male bonding in the form of ‘mateship’. Mateship creates a specific kind of masculinity where it
is understood that males are not allowed to ‘dob in’ other males. Throughout the
texts, there appears to be a reinforcement of essentialist notions that males and
females are inherently different and the implicit idea that males should
unquestionably support other males. A macho style, males sticking together (Davies,
1998), masculinity was reinforced through ideas from The Inner Circle, The Club
and Gallipoli. Without deconstruction of texts, The Club further justified the
ideology surrounding mateship and how males are more significant than females.
Marilyn had indicated to me during informal conversations that she introduced the
specific texts to help deconstruct notions of hegemonic masculinity and deconstruct
notions of the dichotomous nature of gender (Davies, 1989b, 1993a). However,
students’ comments reflected how females were sexualized, negated and/or made
invisible in The Inner Circle, The Club and Gallipoli. Indeed, the maleness of
masculinity—competitiveness, running fastest, sexualization of females—was seen
as emphasized in texts to provide representations which fitted neatly into hegemonic
heterosexual discourses for students to access, although not always
unproblematically accepted. Students, like Kevin, were able to ‘read against the
grain’, resist dominant readings (Davies, 1989b, 1993b, 1997) and challenge
dominant discourses that the texts were seen to offer. My discussions with Kevin
supported the idea that rather than challenge prevalent discursive notions of power
relationships, texts used in the classroom appeared to reinforce them. Kevin
proffered:

Kevin: I got the feeling that in the book there was more of a
focus on men in sport and whether it be on the field or in
the boardroom or just making decisions, I think that I
really just didn’t agree with what the book was trying to
say. What it was saying to me was that you know men
should, I was sort of getting the impression that men
should control everything, but of course with my mum
being a single parent I also have the influence of women.

Kevin talked about how he found a level of racial or sexual discrimination existed at
school and in society, but he used mateship as a way of males sticking up for each
other. For Kevin, mateship was a significant factor in his having not many problems
at the school. The length of time at school was also important. In the six years at the
school, other students and teachers were able to get to know him well and he became
part of the normalized school environment. As an Indigenous Australian he
experienced racism, but found that within school his mates would support him. As a
result, he experienced a greater amount of racism outside of school by students from
other schools, when playing sports or in the streets, than within school:
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part of the normalized school environment. As an Indigenous Australian he
experienced racism, but found that within school his mates would support him. As a
result, he experienced a greater amount of racism outside of school by students from
other schools, when playing sports or in the streets, than within school:
Kevin: Yes, I think at this school. The teachers might teach all the school creed or the code of conduct may say certain things, but I think in any school there’s always going to be a certain level of discrimination, whether it is sexual, racial, whatever. But at this school I find I don’t really have any problems. I think from Year 4 I’m pretty much well known by the teachers and the students and we get along well and I haven’t really had any problems. But you always get the odd person making the comment whether it is from this school, another school, out in the playing field, or somewhere else.

H.H.: Does that make you feel uncomfortable at all or what?

Kevin: Sometimes it does but you know I really don’t pay much attention to it. I just get on with it. And my mates are pretty good. If someone’s trying to have a go at me they’ll stick up for me and I’ll just do the same for them. So it’s not really around my school environment, it’s more of an outside thing like on the football field or something, like playing sport, or on the way home, when you bump into the kids from other schools and stuff.

Gray (1996, p.51) wrote of ‘comradeship’, or what could be described as ‘mateship’ in Australia, as being one of the major appeals of war, and that often when “the original purpose becomes obscured, the fighter is often sustained solely by the determination not to let down his comrades”. In Gallipoli Australian males were portrayed such that Gray’s interpretation of mateship was clearly evident to students. Thus war provides a particular kind of environment. It encompasses a particular type of power and liberation that only comes from the “assurance of immortality that makes self-sacrifice at these moments so relatively easy” (Gray, 1996, p.55). Significantly, prevalent notions remained dominant for students, with powerful myths linking mateship, heroism and sport, proffered by the film Gallipoli left unexamined and undeconstructed. Pedagogical contradictions became apparent during classroom observations and student interviews. Marilyn was specifically concerned with gender and issues of masculinity which, as mentioned in Chapter 4, played a significant role in our original meeting. After our initial discussions, she selected specific texts to introduce issues of concern to students. I watched how through her own initiatives she attempted to highlight these issues for students in an all-male environment in the English classroom. However, a gap remained between her intended teaching and what students read in these teachings. Although specific texts were introduced into the classroom to deconstruct notions of hegemonic masculinities and to deconstruct prevalent notions of gender dichotomy, a critical pedagogy around these texts was not operating to effectively deconstruct such
notions and to fashion more permanent changes. Marilyn and I had planned to discuss my observations and Marilyn hoped to modify her pedagogical practices to address issues that emerged. Unfortunately, Marilyn’s move to another class made this impossible to follow through.

Violence, war and Gallipoli

During interviews, students introduced another element linked with hegemonic masculinity in the form of violence in connection with the film Gallipoli. Connell (1998, p.226) suggests that ‘patriarchal dividends’ for males lay in their control of the “means of violence, in the form of weapons and armed forces”. The most explicit areas where masculinities are positioned, reproduced or reconstructed are linked with the military and with war so that, “despite far-reaching political, social, and technological changes, the warrior still seems to be a key symbol of masculinity” (Morgan, 1994, p.165). Using violence is a way to gain temporary power. Although the fluidity of masculinities recreates power relationships between males, power reinvents itself in discourses of hegemonic masculinity through its vested interest in violence, thus helping to sustain male and female power relationships (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997). Violence within war remains very much a masculine discourse, a dominant idea reflected through students’ narratives. The film Gallipoli did not challenge male and female stereotypical roles, but male/female dualism was read into lived realities in respect of war. These ideas which were examined through classroom activities provided a platform from which students were able to discuss differences of gender roles during the time of Gallipoli and the present. When interviewed, Kevin earlier felt that gender roles of males and females should not be different, yet when it came to war he believed females should be at home or should occupy positions such as phone-operators or nurses, rather than on the frontline. Morgan (1994, p.166) suggests that the “gendered associations of war and soldiering have been, at least until very recently, one of the most abiding features of the sexual division of labour”. Students’ narratives confirm Morgan’s suggestions. For Kevin it was men’s roles to be at the front line, whereas women’s roles were non-active, non-violent and ‘caring’. Although during interviews there were some gender disruptions, no disruption occurred in respect of violence and war where it was reconfirmed that males should be active in war.

H.H.: Let’s go on to Gallipoli, now what do you think the females were doing, how do you think they were
depicted in the film? For example what were they doing, where were they supposed to be, what sort or type of people were they?

Kevin: I sort of got the feeling that the women in the film were sort of made out to be that, sort of war was not good. They mention, I thought the women were depicted to be sad that they [the men] were leaving. I actually think that women were in the war as, as like phone-operators, and nurses and stuff, [but] not on the front line.

H.H.: Do you think they should have been allowed on the front line, in the fighting?

Kevin: No I don’t reckon they should have, they shouldn’t be allowed to fight on the front line.

H.H.: So even now, if there was a war now, do you think females should be fighting alongside men?

Kevin: I don’t really think, I really think no they shouldn’t be out there, they should be back behind the thing as nurses.

H.H.: Why do you think that?

Kevin: I don’t know, it’s just sort of, I’m not really sure it’s just that I think it’s sort of a, what a man’s supposed to do is not really what a women’s supposed to do. I was talking about households before but I think this is a bit different because we’re talking about actually fighting and I just would expect women not to go to the front line and sort of just stay in the back, and do something else.

Kevin appeared to epitomize how easy it is to receive contradictory discourses, acknowledge them, and still believe they are not fundamentally contradictory. For example, students have suggested that within the home greater equity should be possible, however this greater equity does not extend to prevalent masculine roles such as fighting or defending one’s country. Nagel suggests that:

This unseemly, sometimes hysterical resistance to a diversity that clearly exists outside military boundaries makes more sense when it is understood that these men are not only defending tradition but are defending a particular racial, gendered and sexual conception of self: a white, male, heterosexual notion of masculine identity loaded with all the burdens and privileges that go along with hegemonic masculinity.

(Nagel, 1998, p.258)

Students perceived females’ roles in the home in opposition to war. The link to home and children strengthened hegemonic masculinity with a reinforcement of the
construction of heterosexuality. In Gallipoli the construction of hegemonic masculinity was within a white masculine framework and the film highlights the innocent white male who is fighting as the typical Australian for the colonizer (England), or the ‘mother country’ as Marilyn had earlier called it. The innocent white blonde male, young and fit, was seen by students to represent an innocent Australia. Indigenous Australian males were included in the fighting, as they were in all Australian wars since the First World War (Wilson-Miller, 1999), but steeped within Australian history whereby they were entitled to fight for the white people but at that time had little rights themselves. In a similar vein their film identities were also less significant. The special kind of ‘mateship’ discussed earlier that flourished during the Gallipoli war in the trenches was forgotten by the Australian government when Indigenous Australians returned home. The freedom that Indigenous Australians fought for alongside of other Australians was lost when they returned to their homeland. This history was also lost in the contemporary classroom (see also Chapter 8). The film highlights white hegemonic heterosexual masculinity in preference to Indigenous Australians, to other masculinities and to females. Feminine skills were constructed around nurturing and caring rather than coping with the deprivations and rigours of war (Morgan, 1994). For example, Robert’s understanding of females at the time of Gallipoli was also that females were at home, looking after the children, and looking after the home:

H.H.: Going back to Gallipoli, where do you think the females were?

Robert: At home.

H.H.: At home doing what?

Robert: Looking after the kids and that.

H.H.: Did they do anything else?

Robert: No, I don’t think so, other than clean up and all that, just keep the house tidy.

H.H.: So that was then. What about now, what if you had to go to war now, who do you think would go to war?

Robert: Probably the same sort of people, like macho and all this that were tough and all that, and the same sort of people that went to Gallipoli basically.

H.H.: So what about females, do you think they’d be able to go?
Robert: I don’t think they would be able to go, unless they were like nurses or doctors or something like that.

The film Gallipoli represents mateship as a specific Australian masculine paradigm. Students in this study reflected the film’s specific ‘feminine’ roles for females. Furthermore, females are excluded and marginalized in Gallipoli pushing for a perspective of hegemonic masculinity to be taken. Females are scarce in the film and are represented in limited roles such as mothers, wives, girlfriends or nurses. In the words of Buchbinder (1994b, p.124), the film Gallipoli provided ambiguities for students whereby females within this masculine ideology were “desired and feared, sought and rejected”.

Despite significant female contribution within perceived masculine institutions, such as the military, prevalent discourses persist with suggestions that females may only defend or represent their country in “familiar supporting roles: secretary, lover, wife” (Nagel, 1998, p.261). Tom’s narrative reflected similar ideas to Robert’s, where females stayed at home and that war was not a feminine activity, but Tom was also accessing an additional discourse where he believed females should have choices:

H.H.: What about females, what do you think females should be doing when there is a war, say there was a war now, what sort of things -?

Tom: I reckon they should just stay inside and look, I don’t know look after the kids, stay inside and just wait until it’s over. Because it’s not really a female thing, if you know what I mean. It’s not a male thing either, it’s just stupid. I’d say they should sort of all gather together and, I don’t know, if the males want to go to war then females should support them. But if they don’t then they can stay where they like or whatever. Actually I reckon they should have a say, females should have a say, because I don’t know some females differ. They might say, oh I want to be a man or I want to be heroic too or something so they’ll say send me along. But, they won’t fight or anything. I reckon everyone’s got a choice if they want to go to war then take them to war. If they don’t, let them stay here and look after the babies and they can stay sort of thing.

The construction of masculinity in the film Gallipoli was in the form of a heroic male. For students heroism reinforced hegemonic masculinity. Indeed males “who are shown as having normal responses to pain are often constructed as cowards, namby-pambies, or the enemy, often by definition less stoic and heroic than ‘our
side” (Buchbinder, 1994a, pp.75-76). This shows how texts are implicated in ways in which sexuality and gender are constructed in students’ lives at school. ‘Race’/ethnicity is also seen to be implicated when taking into account the ways in which white hegemonic masculinity is highlighted in Gallipoli. Although Tom (above) was able to access a discourse that suggested females should have choices, the act of heroism was understood in relation to hegemonic masculinity and thus Tom’s reflection that if a female wanted to be heroic it was also a link to wanting to be a man. William was similarly accessing discourses that females are moving towards more equitable positions:

H.H.: What about females going to war, do you still get females going to war this time?

William: There are females in East Timor at the moment.

H.H.: What position would they be fighting, doing the same jobs as males or what?

William: Few of them are I think, but I’m not really sure. There’s still obviously, there’s still that, you know, the whole world’s got this sexist point of view. Before I was alive anyway, women were considered not as good as men you know. But it takes time to get over something like that you know. And very slowly I think the world’s coming to grips with the fact that you know there should be equal opportunities for both of them. Australia is moving towards that more than anyone I believe. But like they can have the same positions as the males only they have to struggle a lot more. But that doesn’t mean they can’t happen, sort of thing, eventually, not too soon, but eventually. It will be great when women and men can fight in the same position, but it just takes time.

Continued divisions within activities relating to war reinforce the power retained by males as it reduces females’ roles to a domestic or nursing sphere. Kaufman suggests that males internalize and thus naturalize their diverse experiences of power within society:

into their developing personalities because, born into such a life, we learn to experience our power as a capacity to exercise control. Men learn to accept and exercise power this way because it gives us privileges and advantages that women or children do not usually enjoy. The source of this power is in the society around us, but we learn to exercise it as our own. This is a discourse of social power, but the collective power of men rests not simply on transgenerational and abstract institutions and structures of power but on the ways we internalize, individualize, and come to embody and reproduce these institutions, structures, and conceptualizations of men’s power.

(Kaufman, 1994, p.146)
Power that is exercised by males in society is often reproduced in schools (Mills, 2000b). Power, together with the dichotomous nature of gender as acknowledged in society, leads to hegemonic forms of masculinities to be recreated.

**Pedagogical possibilities and limitations**

As discussed earlier in this chapter, specific texts and questions were introduced in the classroom, opening up some issues relating to masculinities. Specific texts were initially selected because issues I was exploring could be made explicit and examined by students in the classroom. Inclusion of specific texts enabled students to relate to their own identities, discuss how they represented themselves, and also begin to understand how they were being represented within an all boys’ school culture. Discussion on issues such as masculinities was made possible through the introduction of particular texts although, as Marilyn suggested, the issues were of interest but were also positioned as secondary to texts themselves:

- **H.H.** Do you think you changed your planning or teaching in relation to my issues in particular?
- **Marilyn** I tried to bring in some things that I thought you’d be interested in through the texts themselves. But not too dramatically no. I didn’t really want to make it artificial. I wanted this to be just a typical class. But I tried now and then to ask questions, to cover a couple of areas which I thought might be of interest.

I identified and examined gaps between students’ readings and pedagogical approaches, gaps operating in part by the ways in which emerging issues were prioritized differently by the teacher and by students. Positioning significant issues as secondary to texts discourages open discussions on such issues and thus effectively situates education as “a political way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses, along with the knowledges and powers which they carry” (Foucault, 1981a, p.64). In contrast, throughout interviews I found students calling for more space to be opened up for discussion of issues which surfaced, particularly where students were trying to break from stereotypical images of the Australian male. Davies (1993b, p.153) suggests that teachers are assumed to have “formal ownership of knowledge ... [where] they have the authoritative codes for interpreting meaning”. Within classrooms, therefore, power relationships do not always enable students to challenge teachers’ learning priorities. During interviews
outside the classroom, however, students’ voices showed issues such as gender and masculinities needed more space in the form of in-depth discussions within classrooms. For example, Kevin explained how everyone should have the freedom to express how they felt and therefore not be restricted by perceived stereotypes. He particularly noted how lack of expression for students is associated with teachers’ own beliefs and feelings, and teachers’ lack of knowledge and understanding of issues of concern:

Kevin: Everybody has their right and freedom to think how they want to, to feel the way that they do, and do what they want as long as it’s OK with the law and that. Everyone should be given the freedom to express their views and feel how they feel. Like if you go back to the classroom situation [referring back to a role-playing incident where a student portrayed a gay person (see Chapter 7)] that was a time when we should have had the freedom to express how we felt about that certain issue. I think the main thing that’s stopping us from expressing ourselves at times is how the teacher or the person who’s the mediator feels about a certain topic. Whereas if they just sat back and listened, sometimes people often when they meditate, to show the example of how the teacher feels about a certain topic, they [teachers] won’t touch it and they’ll just leave it. Yes, that sort of again makes a person unsure. They’re not really educated about that certain issue. They don’t really know what’s involved with it and whether the side issues arise from that main issue.

Kevin insightfully recognized ways in which teachers’ own beliefs and feelings affect students’ opportunities of expression of their beliefs and feelings. Indeed, what students experience in schools is, what Foucault (1981b, p.34) notes, “a regulated and polymorphous incitement to discourse”. On the other hand, issues identified by students relate to creations of students’ self-representations. In society, support or sympathy for particular ideas, for example, support for feminist ideals and support for gender equity, does not necessarily mean that a change will occur in behaviour (Kaufman, 1994). Similarly in schools, male students may support new ideas in principle or agree to them because that is what they feel the teacher wants to hear. However, this does not always translate into changes in their own ideology or behavior. Mac an Ghaill (1994b, p.185) suggests that “the institutionalized structure of schooling creates the strongest effects on the construction of masculinity”, and my experiences in this classroom would certainly support Mac an Ghaill’s idea.
To implement programs or strategies for assisting boys to interrogate and critically reflect on the ways in which masculinity impacts on their lives is important in schools. Martino (2000c, p.110) suggests that "educators need to capitalize on boys’ already developed skills and capacities ... to help boys to interrogate masculinities in their lives at school". Existing programs have tended to rely on an essentialist or naturalized understandings of gender. Biological essentialism often results in the binary nature of gender being accepted as 'natural', with a hegemonic form of masculinity considered the norm for boys. There are many forms of masculinities and these may become concealed and not be available to boys. Strategies for teaching boys, therefore, need to take certain questions into account. Questions need to include how students can become critical thinkers, and more specifically how boys can be encouraged to think critically about hegemonic masculinities. Schools are situated in significant positions to deconstruct and destabilize types of hegemonic masculinities which intrinsically condone violence in any form. Kenway and Fitzclarence assert that more needs to be known about violence in educational terms so that schools are not complicit in endorsing hegemonic versions of masculinity and assert:

If schools implicitly subscribe to and endorse hegemonic versions of masculinity, particularly in their more exaggerated forms, then they are complicit in the production of violence. If they fear 'the feminine' and avoid and discourage empathetic, compassionate, nurturant and affiliative behaviours and emotional responsibility and instead favour heavy-handed discipline and control then they are complicit. If they seek to operate only at the level of rationality and if they rationalise violence then they are complicit. If they are structured in such a way as to endorse the culture of male entitlement and indicate that the needs of males are more important than those of females then they are complicit. If they are repressive in their adult/child relations and do not offer adolescent students in particular opportunities to develop wise judgements and to exercise their autonomy in responsible ways then they are complicit. If they operate in such a way as to marginalise and stigmatise certain groups of students then they are complicit.

(Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997, p.125)

In other words, schools are complicit if they favour 'heavy-handed discipline and control' and fear 'the feminine', and schools are complicit if they repress or marginalize students and do not offer opportunities for expression. Schools that do not address implicit violence, in effect enable students to accept and tolerate particular levels of violence as normalized. If students are treated as agents of educational ideologies, then challenging hegemonic discourses encourages deconstruction and destabilization of normalized ideologies. Anthony linked
political violence to wars as important issues which needed to be included in educational discussions, which he also linked to one of the purposes of school. Anthony suggests that education is a preparation into adulthood:

H.H.: Are there other issues or concerns that you should be talking about at school?

Anthony: There are a couple of issues you have to look at. But I think probably political violence. We need to learn a lot more about that because when you read the paper every day you don’t look for the political violence things… You have got to be able to understand why all these different things like the Indonesian policies that everywhere else hates, why they have these anti-independent militias going on around in Indonesia and that. You really need to be able to understand it. Like because there are Australian soldiers over there and that’s the reason I probably do know more about it. But you need to be able to have some knowledge otherwise you just grow up and you’re just like going to have problems… Education is really preparing you for being an adult.

Pedagogical possibilities include a greater understanding of issues such as war and violence. Within the time of my observation these options were not taken up in the classroom by Marilyn. However, because my interviews continued over the school year, students were able to bring up issues during these interviews that they became aware of and which were important to them. Many of the students were very aware of contemporary issues and were able to connect them to specific texts. However, without deconstruction of texts, students at times had to struggle to find alternative meanings to those suggested in specific texts. I found students were able to develop their ideas through the open interview discussions from, at times, a contradictory position to a more informed position. With the inclusion of Gallipoli it was possible for students to discuss historically changing ideas and expectations. For example, students were able to discuss how reasons for entering the armed forces change over time. During the First World War, at the time of Gallipoli, entering the army and fighting a war was romanticized, and if a male did not enlist then he was not considered a real man. War and its associated violence has predominately remained a masculine domain and feeds into the belief that males are inherently aggressive (Connell, 2000). Some changes relating to the violent nature of war, however, were perceived and students made comparisons to more recent times. For example, Luke believed Australians entering East Timor were entering as a unit to establish peace:
H.H.: What made them decide to join up [with reference to the film *Gallipoli*]?

Luke: I think it was like the thing that everyone should do otherwise people would say ‘oh, you’re a woman’ and all that stuff for not going and fighting in the war, and to like get fit and all that. Some people thought that, but they didn’t really understand the other side of it which was how bad it would be to see your friends die and all that stuff. They were like real happy to go to war and it would be fun and all that shooting people. But when they got there it was like disaster and everything.

H.H.: How different is that from now?

Luke: Now the people understand what they are in for and now they’re trying to change their way. Like, instead of trying to shoot everyone that they see, they try to make them give up peacefully, try to make it as peaceful as they can and not too much violence and bombs and all that. They like try to put people in jail instead of killing them, that sort of thing.

H.H.: Why do you think men and women want to go into war now?

Luke: I think they want to go into war like to protect their country and just for like a job. They get money for like work. So that’s good. And it’s probably a career they wanted to do, to learn skills and all that.

Kevin was able to further articulate how important the peace issue now was in relation to wars. He, like other students, was able to identify ways war had been romanticized in the past, and because of changes in the way wars are fought, there is now often more emphasis on peace. This emphasis on peace meant that the risk of soldiers dying in combat is reduced. Whichever way encouragement of entry into armed forces is undertaken, decisions of types of action taken which relate to risks of dying, and thus power, remain with officers in charge:

H.H.: What about *Gallipoli*, you were saying it just shows what wars were about and the importance of peace, how do you think it compares with the war at present in East Timor?

Kevin: I think in the film *Gallipoli* you see the innocent slaughter of life lost in the war. We see this again in East Timor. I was reading in *The West Australian* that, I can’t remember the exact figure, but they were talking about how many of the population of Timor had been wiped out over the years due to Indonesian military rule and that in East Timor. But it sort of, like in *Gallipoli* there was one, I can’t remember his name, but where the
officers in charge, had to make a decision whether to send the people over the top of the trench after I think the first two waves of troops had gone over and were just like sort of slaughtered and killed. And we see that in East Timor where we’ve got the decision to make of how we’re going to do things, how we’re to complete the mission they were sent out to do. It’s sort of high risk of dying and the person at the top has got to make the right decisions so that people don’t kill the ordinary soldiers out in the field.

H.H.: Do you think there’s a high risk of the soldiers actually dying, because it sounds like you were saying that in Gallipoli they were sent almost to die, they just sort of kept sending the waves out? Do you think that the soldiers now are in that same position?

Kevin: No, I don’t really think so, there’s always going to be risk of in times of war of people getting killed but certainly it’s not going to get a greater risk than it was back when they had Gallipoli and all that.

H.H.: What do you think is the difference between the attraction for the soldier to go out there or to become a soldier and go out, as opposed to now?

Kevin articulated how reasons for fighting and wars can change with times. Whereas Gallipoli romanticized fighting and portrayed males as brave and as needing to defend their country, the more recent movement of troops into East Timor was to contain the fighting and bring about some peace and stability. Australia’s physical closeness to East Timor necessitated action to bring peace to avoid a threat of invasion, and ultimately world war. Such ideas challenge the “belief that it is natural for men to be violent” (Connell, 2000, p.215) and show the potential for deconstructing hegemonic masculinities and their association with the production/reproduction of masculinized institutions, such as the army, at school level:

Kevin: In Gallipoli there was like I’m going out to be brave and defending your country and I think there’s different reasons to why soldiers are going to East Timor. I mean various... like because they (in East Timor) are so close to us, there’s different reasons why they were going to war.

H.H.: What are the reasons?

Kevin: I think just to me I think the main reason like our troops went up to East Timor was to if we could stop the in-house fighting in East Timor there—contain it—so that it won’t branch out. Because we’re so close and we
could be under threat of invasion or whatever. And because I was reading an article I think sometime earlier this year about how Paul Keating had deals with Indonesia without our troops going over to defend it. And there was also like they were coming in to train up in areas up in Queensland and other areas like that. Yes I think the main reason that we went up was to defend our own country’s interests and of course as members of the United Nations, and all the atrocities that have taken place and people being killed and shut down laws, refugees fleeing. And I think it was just a natural reaction for us to go in and help people of East Timor. It’s the same thing in Kosovo. I mean we recently with Ms Christina read an article about this war and the only way to achieve peace. We had to sort of list both arguments for and against. But like the Australian troops had to go to East Timor and the American troops into Kosovo and all that. And because we got to show the aggressor that what they’re doing is wrong that if we can’t contain it in their country it’s going to blow out into something bigger and bigger. Eventually it could lead to a world war or whatever.

In a similar vein, Richard was also able to articulate reasons for peace rather than war and how present times differed from the time of Gallipoli. However, as my conversation with Richard continued, he proffered that he had previously entered the army cadets. Although Richard strongly ‘hated’ war and what war stood for, the effect of media—which included females in a ‘flash add’—was that he joined the army cadets. Importantly, tactics to enlist have thus also changed from a romanticized view to using sex appeal. Normalizing regimes thus encourage conformity to the taking up of hegemonic masculinist positions (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997). For Richard, these regimes produced a contradictory position in response to the film Gallipoli:

H.H.: Do you think you’d ever want to join the army for any reason?

Richard: Well I did army cadets. That was like last year. And I didn’t really like it that much. But I hate war altogether. I hate getting involved in like combat or something like that. But if I had to, then I probably would. But if they gave me a choice, I wouldn’t, yes.

H.H.: What made you do the army cadet?

Richard: Oh well I saw it on the media, on the TV actually. There was a tall girl. Oh they had a real flash add about it. And I said to my mum oh, I’ll give this a go and I gave it a go. And I thought it would have been like fun and adventurous and all that. But it was like kind of the
opposite. It was like really strict and if you mess up somewhere you’ve messed up for like life. They really discipline you. Yes, I’m already like pretty much disciplined through like here school and all that. But just like so many people there weren’t disciplined. And if someone mucked up because, we’d have like platoons kind of like there was three groups we were like the beginners, and if you messed up, one person messed up the whole group would have to come back. So that the people who were disciplined had, would have like gone back and had to be like marching or something like that which really bugged me. So that’s why I pretty much quit because, oh I think a lot of people actually quit because when I went there, there was about something like oh forty of us and they because I was put on leave because I had rowing season and I couldn’t go because it was on Fridays and I had to train on Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings we had to race. And I went back there and I saw the names and like I saw about five people when I went to say that I was going to quit, they were from the last group and they like quit as I was quitting as well. So obviously they didn’t like it the experience that they had. Like if you go to war it’d be like twice as bad or three times as bad. So yes, being away from everyone and all that.

Pedagogical possibilities thus enable introductions of important issues which are part of students’ realities. Texts such as novels and films can be seen as “sites of pedagogical and political struggle” (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991, p.105) where specific ideologies are maintained but where techniques of critical analysis are potentially significant agencies for illuminating understanding. However, teaching in what has become conventional ways—with limited critical awareness and leaving political issues unchallenged—legitimates specific areas of knowledge and leaves power relationships intact. The strong link between ‘compliant masculinity’ and violence maintains male/female power relationships (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997), reinforces hegemonic masculinities and thus also power relationships of different forms of masculinities. Acknowledgement that teaching is not ideologically unbiased and innocent (Kramer-Dahl, 1995) is important. Students, like Kevin, were insightfully aware of the ways in which teaching was not ideologically unbiased, but felt that there was too little space within the classroom to challenge what was taught and what was expected to be learned. Indeed, in this specific situation, Marilyn’s emphasis on patriotism and mateship provided a reading of the text about archetypal male bonding in the extremities of war mainly within a masculinist discourse. Through interviews I found students were also trying to access understanding
through alternative and at times contradictory discourses which reflected non-violence and peace.

**Reflections**

Some particularly important issues relating to masculinities became evident during my research. For example, it was possible to observe that although Marilyn attempted to keep categories such as ‘males’ fluid and open by encouraging students to consider alternative masculinities, this was not always possible. The interrogation of processes of normalization and power issues showed that perceived dominant societal gendered roles and values remained strong. Although issues around masculinity were apparent through reading of specific texts, these issues were often seen as secondary to the texts themselves, and greater depth of discussion of these issues was not possible outside school limitations of identified readings of texts. Students perceived little emphasis on possible alternatives to dominant masculinist readings as a consequence of a lack of encouragement of these alternative readings. Constraints of school directives and lack of professional guidance to challenge hegemonic discourses still existed, and the challenge to stereotypes was therefore also constrained by school policies. Issues that surfaced, such as the difficulties of expressing emotions for males or hegemonic masculinity, were considered either not specifically relevant within classroom lives of male students or considered less important than, for example, authors’ meanings of specific texts. Thus a lack of priority of or interest in emerging issues resulted in identified gaps between students’ readings and pedagogical approaches. When considering strategies to adopt within classrooms, it is therefore important to consider not only whose voice is being heard, but also how other voices are silenced and what positions are being made available to students. Males’ perceived roles of males and of females is also important as this affects students’ own possible positionings and their positionings of, and thus also their interactions with, other males and females within society. When looking at the education of boys, this also pedagogically means to not educate boys at the expense of boys who do not easily fit the hegemonic masculine mould. Hegemonic masculine discourses were prevalent in this classroom although it was found that students continually attempted to challenge dominant discourses. These challenges were more evident with students like Kevin, an Indigenous Australian, and Tom, an Italian Australian. Students’ perceptions of female roles in society, in this instance varying from a feminine role to being like a male to succeed, also make it important not to educate boys’ at the
expense of girls. Even when teaching males in a single sex environment, it is crucial to recognize that relationships within schools affect relationships with both males and females outside of the school environment. Teachers’ roles become central in how strategies are accepted and taught to students.

Exploration of students’ narratives through this chapter shows that adolescent males in this school were still representing themselves through hegemonic masculinist and Anglo-Australian discourses, although there were significant instances of competing discourses at work. Pedagogical possibilities include the examination of competing discourses to enable students to access masculinities which were alternative to hegemonic masculinities. Issues of masculinities and mateship were significant to students and pervaded their understandings of specific texts in the English classroom. Violence seeped into discussions relating to issues of war and females were seen as necessarily excluded from active war participation. However, continual reference to boys being ‘like a girl’, particularly in sports, were made if males do not conform to discourses of hegemonic masculinity and were seen to be weak or emotional. Texts used also confirm but leave undeconstructed and unchallenged Aanerud’s (1997) observations on how whites in literature remain unmarked and thus are ‘known’ or perceived as white. For example, The Club remained within an unacknowledged white discourse within Australian sport. Analysis of ways in which whiteness is represented in literature could provide important tools for analysis of issues relating to ‘race’/ethnicity and racism.

The authors’ uses of words in selected texts influenced the ways in which masculinity and whiteness were represented and read. Although there was some understanding of dominant discourses and some attempt at gender disruption by students, new discourses incorporating equity ideology and multiple masculine self-representations did not completely dislodge old hegemonic masculine and white discourses. Instead, new discourses often competed with old discourses and often appeared in a position of lesser importance than older discourses, particularly in respect of prevalent discourses relating to masculine and feminine roles. Persistent references to the dichotomous nature of gender, which perpetuate the notion that males and females are opposites, continue to have the effect of reducing choices for males while reinforcing hegemonic masculine discourses. Power relationships effectively remain unchallenged. Although students were asked to read critically, it was not enough to expunge existing dominant discourses. Texts which presented alternative viewing of masculinity provided some awareness of alternative discourses
of masculinity. However, students continued to construct their gender through the reproduction of hegemonic forms of masculinities and the associated power relationships (see also Epstein, Kehily et al., 2001). The fluid nature of masculinities (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997; Mac an Ghaill, 1994a) was at times apparent as students attempted to make sense of contradictions between texts, dominant discourses and their own experiences. Deconstruction of dominant masculinist readings enables access to multiple positionings for students. A wider view of what it is to be male or to be female will enhance educational outcomes for all students.

The wealth of knowledge created through feminist research enabled me to view and report on empirical findings in alternative ways. Instead of taking an essentialist viewpoint and accepting that males and females are ‘naturally’ different, it was possible for males to represent themselves in myriad ways. Webb and Singh call for re-teaching from multiple perspectives when they wrote of the need to:

Focus on teaching the reading skills associated with critical literacy such as identifying gaps and silences in the text. We need to explicitly teach students to re-read and re-write school texts from multiple perspectives, most importantly from the perspective of the self-critical pro-feminist man.


Pedagogical possibilities are numerous, but they must challenge inherent notions in texts that reflect hegemonic masculinity. Like Wilson and Thomas (1995), I found students reluctant or unwilling at times to modify their previously held assumptions, particularly relating to emotional issues, when reading texts that presented alternative perspectives. By the very nature of reading, intertextual consistencies are created which reinforce prevalent discourses of masculinities for students. Alternative discourses that effectively challenged hegemonic masculinity and which assist students to examine alternative constructions of gender could be provided within classrooms (see also Martino & Mellor, 1995). As McLaren and Giroux suggest:

Students need to learn how to read not as a process of submission to the authority of the text but as a dialectical process of understanding, criticizing, and transforming. They need to write and rewrite the stories in the texts they read so as to be able to more readily identify and challenge, if necessary, how such texts actively work to construct their own histories and voices.

(McLaren & Giroux, 1997, p.30)

Unfortunately, because of the change of teachers in this classroom, Marilyn and I were unable to further discuss or reintroduce significant issues into the classroom.
During the time of the research, students were not specifically challenged to provide critical readings of the representation of gender in the selected texts and thus students’ perceptions of masculinist and sexist discourses remained unchallenged.

It is important to stress that hegemonic constructions of masculinities are cultural and social constructions rather than individual. As Davies writes:

This is not to remove the burden of responsibility that rests on individuals as members of the culture to bring about cultural change, but to emphasise that we are dealing with a problem in the entire culture, not just in a few ‘sick’ or ‘disturbed’ individuals.

(Davies, 1996, p.145)

In this chapter I initially provided an overview of the students’ readings of texts and explored how these relate to their self-representations of masculinity. First, I introduced *The Inner Circle* and highlighted the ways in which hegemonic masculinities were recreated through readings of the text, also showing how conflicting discourses became apparent. I explored ways in which stereotypes were often reinforced in school as well as through the reading of the text, and discussed how students took these stereotypes on board or challenged these stereotypes. Second, I introduced *The Club* and examined how students through this text constructed images of femininity and masculinity. A strong link between masculinity and mateship was apparent and this link was carried over to the third text, *Gallipoli*. Third, I examined students’ self-representations through the film *Gallipoli* with connections to violence and war. Finally, pedagogical possibilities and limitations were explored.

Specific texts provided an ideal platform from which to discuss multiple perspectives and issues, such as multiple positionings of masculinities, with adolescent boys. Carefully selected texts have the potential for students to acquire necessary critical skills for deconstruction and disruption of hegemonic discourses. I found that students’ narratives were rich with ideas and often-conflicting perceptions. At the same time, specific texts opened up spaces within the classroom to deconstruct normative masculinities, as well as to examine the normalization process of hegemonic forms of masculinities. Classroom activities, which enabled me to question students in more depth on such issues as stereotyping and literary representation of males and masculinity, provided opportunities for disruption and deconstruction of such issues. Disruption of notions related to masculinity provided a focus for this chapter not only by exploring issues of masculinity in adolescent
males' lives at school but also by investigating and contributing to knowledge of the pedagogical possibilities and limitations of interrupting hegemonic masculinity in classrooms. Two main issues identified in this chapter through interviews with students will be taken up in the next chapter. First, I will examine the underlying issue of heterosexism, which informed students' understanding about relationships and masculinities. Second, throughout the interviews I found students calling for more space to be opened up for discussion of issues which surfaced, particularly where students were trying to break from stereotypical images of the Australian male. Chapter 7, therefore, continues to explore how adolescent males negotiate discourses of masculinities at school but focuses on students' responses to issues relating to homosexuality and homophobia.
CHAPTER 7

REPRESENTATIONS OF MASCULINITIES IN THE CLASSROOM: (RE)CONSTRUCTION OF SEXUALITIES

Masculinist discourse ... is a discourse of power that not only has the potential to sexualise female teachers and female students, thereby diminishing their status and authority, but also has the potential to enforce and legitimate heterosexual masculinity as the only possible form of maleness.


Understanding issues of homophobia

In Chapter 6 I discussed ways in which adolescent males interrogated hegemonic forms of masculinities and found that school has the potential for students to acquire the necessary critical skills for deconstructing and disrupting hegemonic heterosexual masculinity (see Frank, 1987). In this chapter I continue to explore how adolescent males negotiate discourses of masculinities at school, but focus on students’ responses to issues relating to homosexuality and homophobia. Students’ responses are based on a specific incident⁶ in the classroom which occurred during classroom observations early on in the school year in 1999. The specific incident pointed to the potentialities for opening up pedagogical possibilities to deconstruct normative heterosexuality, which through discussions would have benefited students’ understanding of issues relating to the construction of hegemonic masculinities.

⁶ The critical incident discussed in this chapter formed the basis of a paper ‘Masculinities and adolescent males at school: Disrupting or recreating homophobic discourses’ which I presented at an international interdisciplinary masculinities conference “Manning the Next Millennium” at the Gold Coast, Australia, in December 2000.

A revised version of the above presentation paper also entitled ‘Masculinities and adolescent males at school: Disrupting or recreating homophobic discourses’ is published as a chapter in Manning the Next Millennium: Studies in Masculinities (see Hatchell, 2002).
I initially provide a brief theoretical discussion to contextualize issues that emerge from the specific incident. Then I recreate the specific incident and explore in depth the issues that emerge from it. These issues include homophobia, prevalent hegemonic discourses and their associated power, the need for creating safe spaces, and ‘gay’ stereotypes. Students’ fixation with heterosexuality and compliance with specific forms of hegemonic masculinities provide them with a perceived power over others (Frank, 1993). I posit that homophobia retains a prominent role in the lives of adolescent male students and that lack of professional support and the gendered nature of classroom interactions inhibit ways in which female teachers, specifically in boys’ classrooms, can address issues relating to homophobia.

Teachers often face quandaries in respect of sexuality education (Martino, 1998c). For instance, teachers need to ensure they are seen to be not breaking any social mores relating to the promotion of homosexuality—particularly within the context of a religious school—but at the same time they need to ensure that they are not discriminating against gay people in reinforcing a notion of homosexuality as deviant. Martino (1995; 1998b; 1999b) found that sexuality played a significant role in defining and policing acceptable masculinities. Anxieties surrounding sexuality often provoke a discourse of homophobia (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). Practices of normalization around heterosexuality are evident from a very young age (Davies, 1993a) and create a compromising situation around homosexuality for males. Thus, although different sexualities permeate schools, their effects often remain unrecognized “because their very existence is denied” (Epstein, O’Flynn, & Telford, 2001, p.129). There is a need to disrupt processes of normalization around heterosexuality in schools which lead to discriminatory practices against those who are perceived to be outside the norm. To disrupt these processes of normalization it is necessary to interrogate essentialist categories which position males and females as binary opposites and which promote a binary classificatory and hierarchical system of sexuality.

Homophobia and homophobic abuse are important issues to discuss, particularly because homophobic abuse often “acts as a form of policing, or punishment, for not quite fitting in to ‘acceptable’ modes of behaviour for girls and, even more so, for boys” (Epstein, 2000, p.23). Sexuality becomes a powerful means through which different forms of masculinities are policed and monitored by boys themselves “within heteronormative regimes of internalized homophobia” (Martino, 2000a, p.231); (see also Epstein, 1997; Frank, 1993, 1994). The discursive organization of
school as a public space somewhat contradicts the private discursive space surrounding sexuality and specifically of homosexuality and homophobia (Epstein, 1997). Thus, although it is within school that much of identity construction takes place—particularly around sexuality—sexuality itself is often considered a private concern. These contradictory discourses provide a justification for inactivity in respect of issues such as homophobic abuse. However, at the same time, the sexuality of male students remains under constant surveillance by peers at school as well as by others—both male and female—in society.

During classroom observations early on in the school year, I observed a significant incident that occurred during a conflict resolution role-playing activity. Critical incidents can provide vital information in the way we teach and how we understand particular situations. Teachers may often use their own ‘personal’ rather than “specialist theoretical knowledge as the basis for their judgements” (Tripp, 1993, p.7). However, it is important to think and reflect critically on everyday incidents and consider meanings behind them and what discourses are generated or reinforced through these incidents. It is also important to remember that, as Tripp (1993, p.8) reminds us, critical incidents are not “awaiting discovery like gold nuggets ... but ... are created”. Incidents occur throughout the day but usually are left unnoticed and left to blend in with ‘everyday’ life. Through analysis of particular incidents it is possible to also develop understanding of specific issues. The flexibility of qualitative research enabled me to explore sexuality and students’ awareness, and their confusion, of issues relating to ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ and homophobia (Mac an Ghaill, 1994a). I draw attention to how sexuality is implicated in gender issues and in the construction of compulsory heterosexuality in individual boys’ lives at school. After the role-playing, interview sessions provided opportunities to discuss issues of homophobia to a greater depth with students and the teacher. The way male students viewed homosexuality and heterosexuality directly related to their own self-representations in the classroom. Understanding the cultural specificity of students’ worlds would help in the more effective implementation of changes in school curricula that address homophobia and sexuality issues in schools (Epstein, O’Flynn et al., 2001). Students in my research appeared to view the role-playing incident within a homophobic framework and linked ideas of homophobia to Marilyn, the English teacher, although during my time at the school I found that the teacher displayed no hint of homophobia. That the teacher was working within a heteronormative framework imposed by the educational institutional is an important factor in the way the situation developed. In the next section I describe the critical
incident that occurred and then explore in more depth the issues that emerge from this incident.

**Conflict resolution and homophobia**

During an English class, students had been given ‘situations’ from which they were to create some kind of ‘conflict’. They were to develop these situations into dialogues to act out within the classroom. Marilyn, the English teacher, stressed that in these situations some conflict was to be resolved. A number of conflict situations were given (see Appendix XII). Significantly, students chose no female characters although Marilyn specifically mentioned female characters as being an option to consider. From these conflict situations William and Robert (both Australian-born) selected a scene where a dissatisfied customer returns an appliance that will not work to the department store for a refund, and where the sales assistant refuses to give the refund. Robert introduced his character as:

‘Customer’: I’m about mid-thirties, and like British, I’ve been brought up with really harsh values. I’ve been beaten and stuff, I’ve been beaten up and I’m really butch.

Marilyn: What’s the situation? ... Is your background relevant to your situation?

Without further explanation and in answer to Marilyn’s question, both students thought these background details were relevant to the situation. When in contrast William introduced his character as a gay person, everyone laughed at the high-pitched voice he used:

‘Manager’: I’m a typical stereotype for a gay person, all right, like a ‘wuss’ you know, just, yeah.

Marilyn asked whether being gay had any bearing on the script and also what William meant by a ‘typical stereotype for a gay person’ questioning whether this would not be offensive. At this point, the construction of being gay, which equals being weak and having no power, is not questioned. There was no attempt to deconstruct or critically interrogate the problematic association of being gay with being weak. In response to Marilyn’s question as to whether being gay had any bearing on the script, William defensively answered that he was not the one creating the typical gay stereotype or trying to be offensive but that in his role he, in fact, wanted to be helpful and kind:
William: Yes, I know, but it’s a typical stereotype see, I’m not making up a stereotype. That’s what it is. I’m not trying to be offensive, I’m just saying it’s the typical stereotype. I didn’t make the stereotype. All right, I’m about thirty, thirty-five just. I’m an attendant at a hardware store, I don’t know, I’m just a manager and I like to be helpful, I like to be kind. Yes, I’m on the service desk and he’s just the customer who comes in and wants his money back.

The dialogue of the short play followed along the following lines:

‘Manager’: Morning, can I help you sir?

‘Customer’: How about giving my money back?

‘Manager’: I’m sorry sir, but I don’t understand.

‘Customer’: I bought this from here, this stuff, and I want my money back.

Once more William mimics what he considers to be a typical stereotyped gay person, which again brings laughter from the rest of the class. (The way in which laughter relates to male bonding and peer approval is an issue I will refer to later in this chapter.) The dialogue continues:

‘Manager’: Speaking in a high-pitched voice. Ooh, dooo you. OK, well I just can’t give your money back. But we can give you a voucher though, all right?

‘Customer’: I don’t want your bloody voucher. I told you it [the appliance] won’t work and I want my money back.

‘Manager’: Like I said, we just can’t give you money back.

‘Customer’: Listen mate, either you give me my money back or I’ll beat you senseless with this hammer.

‘Manager’: Speaking in high voice again. Now there’s no need for violence. Laughter again.

‘Customer’: Action of lifting a hammer up and ready to strike.

‘Manager’: I’m sure we can come to some arrangement but sir, please put down the hammer. Just, j... j... here’s your money, now just leave me alone.

The lines themselves were not unusual. However, the characterization was such that it brought many laughs from the students themselves, although seriousness from the teacher. Robert was the customer and introduced his character as a male in the mid-thirties, brought up in a harsh family situation and where his character had been
beaten up when young. William characterized the sales assistant who was also male in his mid-thirties and was a ‘stereotypical gay person’. To summarize the actions, the customer was rough and demanded his money back. The sales assistant acted very timidly and spoke in a very high-pitched voice. The sales assistant also acted as what he called a ‘stereotypical’ gay person. It was these actions together with the voice that gave rise to laughter from the other students. At the end of the dialogue Marilyn suggests that maybe the focus should have been on the conflict itself rather than including the sexuality of a person. Marilyn, however, appears to be uncomfortable and the implicit understanding is that conflict can only be addressed if it does not involve potentially disruptive social situations:

Marilyn: I would prefer it if a person’s sexuality wasn’t brought into the scene at all. You needed to concentrate on the conflict itself.

William: But there was a conflict.

Marilyn: I know, but sexuality detracted from the actual situation itself. I would like the play being more effective using dialogue.

William: But it wouldn’t have come across as funny.

Marilyn: It doesn’t matter.

William: But then it would have just been boring.

Marilyn: Not necessarily. You need to use words to make it effective.

William: But how interesting would it be to watch someone walk in and ask for money back and eventually get it and walk out again.

Marilyn: You could have made it interesting. You could have given the play some point.

Marilyn pointed out that portraying gay men in this way might be offensive and asked why they had included sexuality in the characters. William related the stereotype of a gay character as ‘funny’, thus suggesting that the scene itself would not be interesting without including a character that could be mocked or derided. Thus, a discourse of feeling good at the expense of an ‘Other’ prevailed. These two students attempted to gain approval and the attention of their peers through homophobic discourse, thus acting out a practice by which ‘desirable’ masculinity is often fashioned. It appeared that William and Robert had chosen characters—or more specifically a gay character—which they knew would elicit laughter from their
peers. This action could be described as a particular type of bonding mechanism used among the boys whereby their peers would then affirm heterosexual masculinity. Sexuality was used to establish a specific type of male bonding and banter, which also effectively excluded the female teacher. Kehily and Nayak (1997, p.82) suggest that “homophobic humour is a means through which male exhibitionists are able outwardly to display a heterosexual masculinity”. Kehily and Nayak’s idea rings true in the enacted dialogue during this role-playing, but it is possible to be left feeling only fairly satisfied with this explanation. There appeared to be more than just a performance in this classroom as students tried to make sense of the issues that had been uncovered. Students here were unable to move out of the invisible boundaries created through focusing on whether, for example, the situation was funny or not funny.

Classroom discussions gave rise to many suggestions—made by students in this class who were acting in the role of an audience—as to why a gay person was portrayed in this way, with such ideas as bullying and suicide brought to the forefront. Kevin, an Indigenous Australian, suggested that:

Kevin: Maybe they are making the point that gay people get bullied.

Adding a different dimension to the issue, another boy purported that:

Anon: Eighty per cent of the people who commit suicide are gay people.

William further insisted that the play did have a message for the audience, saying:

William: It kind of does, it does have a message, you know, if you walked into a hardware store and saw that happen, who would you expect to eventually get their money back, some guy from the bush, some big bloke, or some other little guy, an attendant, like myself?

William’s message, however, related to the expectation that to get what you want you have to somehow have power over another person, a message which also related to the issue of bullying. It was a hegemonic discourse of power which was being reinforced in these students’ lives through role-playing and discussions relating to the play. In their choice of characters, both William and Robert chose to be male and in their thirties which suggested some degree of maturity for the selected characters. However, the differentiation of power was in the ideology surrounding gay people
and ‘butch’ people and students justified actions within the role-playing through this ideology. Power was invested with a particular type of masculinity through highlighting differences of sexuality (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). The idea that one had been beaten up and brought up in a harsh environment seemed to make it acceptable that he had some right to ‘bully’ others and particularly someone who was gay. In this way bullying, although it may not be acceptable in practice, becomes an apparently acceptable hegemonic discourse, which in this case led to an acceptance that the ‘bully’ would get his money back whereas anyone with less power would have less success.

Although Marilyn agreed that the acceptability of bullying—thus also a hegemonic discourse of power—was the message, she also suggested that this was not the way it should be. Marilyn tried to keep the categories fluid and open by suggesting that it was not only gays who were bullied. However, this also suggests that, at the same time, she wants to avoid addressing the whole issue of sexuality. Although the idea relating to who in society is bullied may still be grounded in heterosexist views, it also appeared difficult for students to accept this notion as significant.

Marilyn: But that’s not how it should be.
William: No, it’s not how it should be.
Marilyn: But you don’t have to be gay to be bullied either.
William: No, I know, but I don’t have to be thirty either, but I just chose to be that age, that sexuality, I chose to be male.

William suggested that he had not needed to choose his character to be thirty years of age. His choice, male, gay and thirty, was a significant interrelated choice, but the relationship was left unexamined as the issue of gayness came to the forefront. The remark about suicides was also, at this stage, left unexamined. Callahan suggests that:

It is no exaggeration to say that systemic homophobia is killing our kids. Roughly 30 percent of gay teenagers report attempting suicide, and roughly 40 percent of all attempted teen suicides are connected to real or perceived homosexual orientation… [However] it remains unclear how many accomplished teenaged suicides can be laid at the feet of homophobia.

(Callahan, 1999, p.263)

More recent research suggests that “the majority of teenage suicides may be connected with homophobia” (Epstein, 2000, p.23). Although the figures given by
Callahan above are not as high as that suggested by one of the students earlier, the figures are still significant. Having no school directives or professional guidance to include such issues within the English curriculum, probably exacerbated by the constraints placed on her by a religious school context, the teacher here is left with few options in how to examine significant issues relating to homophobia, bullying and suicide that arose from these specific role-playing activities within the classroom. As a result, Marilyn suggested the two students redo their role-playing the following day without including sexuality as part of the characters. She announced:

Marilyn: You will need to try this again without sexuality given. It can be interestingly done without sexuality brought into the context.

At this stage, opportunities to open up some space for discussion on issues of relevance, such as homophobia, bullying or suicide, were not taken. The importance of ‘debriefing’ (van Ments, 1994) in respect of role-playing was also missed. Debriefing offers opportunities to examine and evaluate underlying or deeply entrenched issues. Evaluations should not be confrontational but should take the form of talking through the whole range of issues, emotions and feelings relating to specific issues. A safe classroom environment is an ideal location where such evaluations could occur. It appears that these students felt sufficiently safe to raise issues, but the teacher in this instance did not appear to feel adequately prepared, perhaps because of or lack of school directives and lack of professional development in these areas.

Role-playing was central to this critical incident. Role-playing allows for the ‘stepping into someone else’s shoes’ and enables vicarious experiences of others’ perspectives. It can also be powerfully used as a tool in showing the interactions of people and how stereotyping often occurs (van Ments, 1994). In this particular situation, specific characters were introduced. William had introduced the stereotypical character of a gay person and acted it out to the apparent delight of his classroom peers. Kevin, as an observer, mentioned that there was a suggestion that gay people were more likely to be bullied. Robert had introduced his character as British yet it was important to note that at no stage was his choice questioned. Similarly, the ‘fact’ that the same character had come from a harsh environment and had been beaten up seemed to give him the right to bully others was never questioned. The possible connection between being British and being a bully, or the
connection between being British and being butch, was also left unexamined. Given the teacher’s intention to explore conflict, more of these issues could easily have been taken up and examined. It was important to challenge the stereotypical image of gay people particularly when these images may be portrayed in an offensive way. Unchallenged, these stereotypical images—and the power implicitly operating to normalize them—are reinforced. While the teacher attempted to challenge this image, discomfort for the teacher and lack of time were major factors in space not being made available to these students for further discussion on these issues relating to homophobia.

**Prevalent discourses and power**

Participants’ ideas were shaped through prevalent discourses available to them. Discourses have a way of shaping our identity while constraining and enabling our individual actions and thoughts (Weedon, 1997). Students are continually exposed to many discourses offering different positionings and the ways in which students’ subjectivities are shaped from these discourses is constructed and reconstructed daily (Kenway & Willis, 1993, p.3). Subjectivities are further shaped through differences in the relationships of power (Sawicki, 1991) that discourses make available to students. In this instance it is important to recognize that the students worked with repressive notions of power (see Foucault, 1980, p.90). The notion of how power represses was highlighted within the dialogue and action of the role-playing scenario whereby a hegemonic masculine character repressed the gay protagonist, despite the gay protagonist being situated in a more responsible and powerful position.

Because of the dominance of specific hegemonic masculine discourses, all males do not always have access to discourses which allow them to deconstruct stereotypes. However, males actively invest in certain discourses which reward them with a certain degree of power. The ‘asymmetrical power relationship’, which remains hidden and unchallenged in the constructions of gender (Hatchell, 1997), also remains hidden and unchallenged for many males within the social construction of masculinities. This is further complicated by the way “homophobia and (hetero)sexism are themselves imbricated with racialised meanings” (Epstein, 1997, p.106). By definition, normative families tend to be white, heterosexual and middle class. The happy ‘fantasy’ family provides the foundation from which relationships are played out within this ‘imagined’ society. While the “power of the norm”
remains “relatively invisible” (McNay, 1994, pp.94-5), hegemonic heterosexual masculinities and homophobia remain discursively dominant and often legitimated within education systems (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Epstein, O’Flynn et al., 2001; Frank, 1994).

When new discourses are introduced, these will need to somehow build upon an understanding of old discourses. In this way, “any disruptions to old relations of power must necessarily involve attempts to speak and respeak both the old and the new, each with their multiple fractures, their multiple contradictions” (Davies, 1994, p.52). The introduction of new ideas and new discourses does not necessarily mean old discourses are suddenly discarded. Old discourses, and particularly if they are also dominant discourses, are difficult to dislodge. As Davies writes:

The imposition of another discourse, however powerful, does not automatically rule out the old. Old discourses exist amongst/with the new. Ways of knowing and desiring overlay each other, bump into each other, inform each other. Like the palimpsest of writings on old parchment, where the old was partially rubbed out and the new overlaid on the old, the old can still be seen and shapes, at least in part, how we see the new.

(Davies, 1996, p.17)

In this classroom situation, although Marilyn introduced new ideas and suggested that the stereotypical image of a gay person could be considered offensive to many, this important message had not so simply erased already prevalent discourses. When interviewed later, our narratives show how Marilyn believed that issues, like the gay issue, were probably discussed during other classes in the school.

H.H.: Now, the gay issue that came up in one of the lessons, does that get picked up on at all in this school?

Marilyn: Oh yes. Do you mean are such remarks tolerated? No, definitely not.

H.H.: So does it get talked about …what are the expectations of the students?

Marilyn: I would imagine it’s something that’s dealt with in RE [Religious Education], I don’t know. But I don’t teach RE, but imagine there’s something in that, obviously we don’t think kindly to that sort of derogatory remark. In Year 12 English we’ve spent a lot of time talking about masculinity and that sort of thing.
Although having suggested that issues of masculinity and gayness are discussed in other classes, discussion of issues such as homophobia with Year 10 students remains difficult for the teacher. Marilyn's difficulties are revealed through further discussion where associations remained with the implicit expectation that an Australian male is not gay. Further, a link between homophobia and immaturity of students was made, implying that Year 10 students are still not mature enough to discuss the issue of homophobia. Although some students showed a sophisticated level of understanding, a predominant masculinist discourse that adolescent males are 'essentially' immature remained intact. A powerful link with immaturity left these 14-15 year old male students with no option or visibility of alternative discourses which could provide an alternative masculine positioning (see also Epstein, O'Flynn et al., 2001; Frank, 1993, 1994). The prevalent discourse of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) as the only real option for males remained unchallenged. These ideas were revealed as Marilyn continued with her narrative:

Marilyn: And we've talked about gayness and looked at an extract on an Australian male and how he's not gay, and the homophobia which comes with this, this is over quite a lot of classes. And they're still very immature with their attitudes towards such things, you know. You have to try and put some direction. I was annoyed on that occasion. I didn't like that representation. Also the boy, the boy too [referring to William], having just spoken to his parents the night before, having a really good chat with them the night before, I could see what he was trying to do. So I came down quite hard on him, I spoke to him privately about that. I did want him to do it [the role-play] again actually. Yes, we try to address that, certainly. Maybe not as much in Year 10 in this subject but certainly in Year 12 it becomes, we look at masculinity as a construction, that was a big part—A Year 12 exam analysis actually—looking at masculinity and the lack of communication in males. And there was an article called The Trouble with Testes which was interesting, short story, feature article, all basically samples from the curriculum council as to what type of things could be in their exams in November, and so on. We just use their material, so it was interesting to do that. But I'd say it's more for the little older, but they're still a little bit immature, but we don't allow such racist and sexist attitudes.

As Marilyn disclosed, masculinity is discussed, but at Year 12 level. Marilyn also revealed that the lack of communication in males was discussed in the classroom at Year 12 level. However, for some of these students this issue relating to lack of communication and the construction of masculinities was already significant.
Although Marilyn believed these boys to be too immature to discuss these issues, she also believed these issues were discussed on other occasions at this year level. Nevertheless, some students felt that not enough spaces were created for discussion on issues like homophobia and homosexuality thus leaving students with contradictory feelings. Some students informed me that no spaces were created to discuss issues of masculinity in any depth. More specifically, space was needed to discuss the role that homophobia played in how males learn to police their masculinities (Martino, 2000a). In fact, interviews with students indicated their willingness to engage in discussions on homophobia and showed how they responded and related to explicit homophobic acts. Without definitive school directives, it was too easy to fall into a complacency that assumes important issues have been introduced in some other class.

Tom, who identified himself as an Italian/Australian, raised the idea that it was essential to know about sexuality and homosexuality as part of gaining knowledge rather than because any particular person was gay. This idea relates to the power/knowledge nexus (Foucault, 1979, 1980) where knowledge (overt or hidden) of specific groups can be subjugated and hence denied. Knowledge thus becomes a struggle for power. By not allowing students to take on new knowledges relating to homosexuality, hegemonic discourses—such as gay people were different or heterosexuality was the ‘norm’—remained prevalent. A silence on homosexuality served to “reproduce and legitimate dominant heterosexual hierarchies. From this perspective, heterosexuality was presented as natural, normal, and universal, simply because there are no alternative ways of being” (Mac an Ghaill, 2000, p.176).

Tom was one of the students who felt that these issues could have been discussed in more depth so that students might become not only ‘knowledgeable’ but also ‘conscious’ of the issues relating to sexuality. During an earlier interview, I specifically asked him about homosexuality.

H.H.: Now issues like homosexuality have come up, do you think those sorts of issues should be discussed more?

Tom: I think it should be discussed so that people are knowledgeable but are also conscious of it, you know some people aren’t conscious of it but most people are conscious of it in an immature way at this school, if you know what I mean. More people have to be, not educated, but just have to be aware of it you know, in a more adult sort of way.
H.H.: In what way?

Tom: Well, not lessons like in RE. We had this whole sexuality thing. I saw some blokes and they're just like fully being idiots you know, acting so immaturity you know. But they don't understand that the people that are doing it are doing it for our benefit and teaching it for us so that we know what's happening. But some of the boys just oh, you know if you're not going to listen and not going to take it in then just go outside because there's no place for you here. So I think that it should be taught to the people who want to know about it because if people, I mean you can't say I want to know just because I'm going to be gay or I want to know if someone's gay. You just want to know because like, I don't know you just want to know. But you've just got to be aware of it. You don't just want to have a whole year of learning all this crap. Oh yes, it's their choice.

H.H.: It's part of life?

Tom: Yes, they do what they want to do. If they like it, then great. It doesn't make them any different if you know what I mean. They're still human beings. Maybe their behaviour is different but they can still be friends with you if you want. It depends on what kind of person you choose to be as a friend. It depends if they accept you and you accept them as being gay or being whatever.

Knowledge again forged strong links with power (Foucault, 1980). The implicit idea for Tom was that knowledge gave power. Although Tom considered it was important to gain knowledge about sexuality and specifically homosexuality, for Tom there was still an underlying belief that gay people were different and that it depended on 'normal' people to accept them as a friend or not.

Creating safe spaces

As a direct consequence of the role-playing activity in the English classroom, homophobia and homosexuality became a topic of conversation in interviews. During interviews, although many students acknowledged that gay people were not really any different, the homosexuality/heterosexuality binary appeared to remain intact. These binaries need to be deconstructed so that dominant discourses can be challenged. As Davies writes:

As long as the binary heterosexual/homosexual is kept intact, then anyone experiencing sexual attraction towards a person of the same sex is at risk of constituting themselves and being constituted in terms of the latter marked and marginalised term. If sexuality is seen,
instead, as multiple, fluid and complex, each person having the capacity to be attracted to both male and female, then the original binary terms have no meaning (since everyone is potentially bisexual) and, therefore, no purchase on the psyche of any individual.

(Davies, 1994, p.77)

At a later interview, Tom talked of how there were fewer gays in a single sex school than in a coeducational school. His argument was that girls influenced some boys and made these boys act ‘a bit like some girls’. Tom’s comments again show how boys effectively police each other so that they are not associated with being like a girl (as discussed in Chapter 6). Yet here a misogynist and homophobic association (Epstein & Johnson, 1998) was not only that boys were opposite to girls, but also that boys acting like girls would also be considered gay. By inference, it was also considered the fault of girls that boys became gay, that girls somehow influenced boys to act like girls and somehow become gay:

H.H.: What about homosexuality?

Tom: I don’t think there’s many here as a matter of fact. I think, to tell you the truth I think that there’s less here than there would be even at a coeducational school.

H.H.: Really?

Tom: As a matter of fact yes. Because there’s the difference between, I’d say trouble wise if you know what I mean. They’d say there’s so many boys here it’s just crap, and they’d say where’s all the girls, or you know. But with the boys and girls over in the coeducational school they’d say look there’s so many girls here, you know I think they’d be influenced by girls and start acting a bit like some girls. I don’t know it’s too ‘pfooff’, off the world to me. I can’t understand why anyone would want to be a girl or like the same sex as them. It’s so different. It’s like, because see, I’m taking my family’s view now, can you see that? I can’t believe I said that, like, yes. Because it’s not normal sort of thing like. I see it as not being right. I don’t know. I’ve been brought up that way.

Again contradictory discourses were displayed in Tom’s narrative showing his insights but also his own confusion. At an earlier interview he spoke of homosexuality as ‘it doesn’t make them any different’, and now he stated that ‘it’s not normal’. Such notions reinforced heterosexuality/homosexuality binaries with a link to normal/not normal. Tom also acknowledged that his latter ideas were gained through family influences recognizing that influential heteronormative discourses
received from home often had greater power than new discourses available from school environments. Continuing along these ideas, the discursive nature of the homosexuality issue becomes apparent. Although Tom acknowledged that one could not always tell whether someone was gay, he then related homosexuality to clothing as a possible way of identification. He explained, however, that because his mates at school all wear the same type of clothing it would not show with them. Tom was keen to demonstrate his acceptance of homosexuality—thus by inference an absence of homophobia—but reinforced his own masculinity through his continued binary classificatory framing of heterosexuality/homosexuality:

H.H.: Would you be able to tell who is [gay] and who isn’t?

Tom: Well sometimes you can and sometimes you can’t. But hey, if people think you’re homosexual just because of what you wear or, like my uncle gives me a lot of crap because he reckons soccer’s a crap game, because he doesn’t play. He likes rugby. He says, oh soccer’s a puss, like you’re gay if you play soccer. Oh yes, we always give each other words and stuff, because I wear stuff that’s tight fitting and stuff he goes yes look at you, trying to show off your muscles and stuff. And I say yes, at least I don’t wear baggy stuff not like you, you know. We bag each other. I mean it’s just that if you wear something, people can judge you. But like all of us here, all of my mates, everyone here we all wear the same stuff and so it doesn’t show. Just because what you wear doesn’t show what sexuality you are or anything, if you know what I mean.

Students already had some fairly sophisticated ideas relating to issues of the heteronormative policing of masculinity, and the role specifically that homophobia played in this form of surveillance. In fact, they had no hesitation in communicating their ideas to me during interviews. When I asked William, one of the protagonists in the role-playing, if students were given a chance to discuss issues like homosexuality at school, he felt that some topics like this were not discussed at school because they were ‘touchy’ subjects. Thus homophobia prevents students from talking opening, whereby it appeared that William feared being targeted as gay if he talked about gayness. He also felt that these were issues—similar to issues relating to Aboriginality—which you ‘piece together as you go along’ but were not necessary to specifically teach at school. Parallels are thus drawn between gay and Aboriginal positions. Hegemonic discourses act to repress positionings other than a ‘desirable’ hegemonic masculinist position:
H.H.: Have you been given a chance to talk about say homosexuality at school?

William: No, it’s a very touchy subject to some people; even I don’t particularly like going around talking about it, but it’s a fairly touchy subject to some. So no, they don’t usually talk much about it.

H.H.: So do you think you would like more opportunity to talk about it?

William: No, not really. I mean you don’t talk about Aboriginals that much here either. In fact in Year 4 you learned the Aboriginal language. But it’s all little bits of life that you piece together as you go along. You can’t learn everything in school.

Sometimes it appears that certain issues, what William refers to as ‘touchy’ subjects, are considered not necessary to discuss in greater depth, but at the same time there is not really understanding or adequate knowledge about the particular issues in question. For example, Luke, like William, could not discuss the issue of homosexuality in any depth, yet could discuss other issues which could be considered ‘personal’. Luke, who was born in Australia with Indian parents and identified as Indian, recognized that he would like more information on sexism, but seemed unclear about what he needed to know, since his own understanding still appeared to be vague. Luke felt that maybe these issues were discussed in other subjects and in other years—although he seemed uncertain about this—and talked about issues relating to gender and sexuality only on a superficial level. Luke’s need for greater knowledge in areas relating to sexuality and gender was apparent through his narrative:

H.H.: I think one thing that came up with Ms Marilyn was homosexuality; do you think that could have been discussed more?

Luke: I don’t really remember that class, but I remember it a bit. But they could have discussed it a bit more but without learning in different classes, like I think you learn it in like health and all that. But I think people like have a pretty good understanding of what it is like. In Year 9 they taught us about it, and in Year 8, so people would have a pretty good idea of everything yes.

H.H.: I think you wrote something down [in your questionnaire] that you would have liked to discuss more on sexism?
Luke: Yes, between males and females. Like they didn’t really talk about, like say the differences between them like say how they’re treated equally and all that. Sometimes they’re not, they’re regarded, yes but they could have talked more about that and, and say how they were like treated and all that and how what’s changed. And like if they’re still like uncompleted, like every male and female are treated equally and all that still, so she could have talked more about that, that’s all.

Most students appeared to feel comfortable talking to me about issues relating to sexuality and about homosexuality more specifically and one student spontaneously admitted to how comfortable he felt in talking with me. Yet in some cases students could not discuss in any great depth certain issues like homosexuality. For example, in the case of Luke who requested more discussion on issues such as sexism (a desire explicitly made in his questionnaire), he also contradictorily said during his interview that he had ‘a pretty good idea of everything’ but could not be explicit about what ‘everything’ was. In the case of William who felt that other people found homosexuality a touchy subject and by talking to me he suggested he was comfortable, although he proffered that even he did not ‘particularly like going around talking about it’. By not creating safe spaces for students to discuss what William called ‘touchy’ issues, opportunities for disrupting dominant discourses or opportunities for transference of specific knowledge are also not made easily available. It is important that teachers—and schools through teachers—do not attempt to transfer the responsibility for disruption of hegemonic discourses to students (Davies, 1996), which they are effectively doing by not taking responsibility themselves. Accepting and attempting to disrupt the ‘norm’ in respect of crossing of sexual and cultural boundaries could be a responsibility that schools and teachers could show they take seriously by explicitly addressing relevant issues. However, within the religious school context, the issues surrounding these responsibilities become more complex and raise pertinent issues around safety for teachers. Many teachers, and legitimately so, do not feel comfortable given the religious standpoint of the school in relation to homosexuality. It is not simply of not taking responsibility, but of not feeling equipped or feeling afraid in a system which endorses compulsory heterosexuality.

Kevin, an Indigenous Australian, had already developed a fairly sophisticated ability to deconstruct and understand some underlying ideologies implicated in the formation of particular cultures—particularly male cultures—within school which consequently created and opened up specific positions for students. During my first
interview with Kevin, I asked him to reflect on the role-playing incident, to reflect on discussions that followed, and to articulate his ideas. He felt that some important issues had been brought up through this specific role playing incident—specifically in relation to the way gay people are perceived in a stereotypical way and are often targeted within society—but felt that discussions had been cut short. In this way, specific issues relating to gay people and to policing of masculinities and homophobia were left unresolved.

H.H.: What about William, in the role playing he brought out the issue of homosexuality, what do you think of the way he depicted a gay person, or what do you think he was trying to show as well?

Kevin: To be honest I actually thought Ms Marilyn was a bit over the top in sort of what she said. I thought it was actually quite a good thing, he was sort of saying well you know maybe gay people or homosexual people are made targets out of society and we sort of perceive them as being. We all say if it was men, it’ll be like, say, ladylike and to move in the same way as a woman. But I thought it was a good play by William. He certainly raised up issues because one of my dad’s friends is gay and I think he did raise an important issue where gay people are sort of classified as being this, being that. I mean even if you were to say, oh go away, like hand gestures like that, people would say, get lost you fag, and things like that. But, I really thought Ms Marilyn wasn’t looking at what William was trying to say through his play.

At interviews Kevin showed that his level of understanding was advanced enough to allow discussion of issues such as homosexuality. At the age of 15 Kevin, like many of his peers in his class, was conscious of having contact with gay people, and had prior knowledge of gay stereotypes. In this instance Kevin was able to talk about the importance of discussions and the need to be able to discuss issues such as homosexuality in class. He was already grappling with complexities relating to such issues in relation to society generally. Furthermore, he was starting to grasp issues relating not only to homophobia but also in respect to racial and sexual discrimination. However, gay people were still ‘Othered’ within his explanations. When asking Kevin if some of the issues could have been discussed in the classroom, he replied:

Kevin: I think some of the problems that affect society where there’s sexual discrimination, racial discrimination or issues concerning Indigenous Australians or homosexuality, I think if it’s discussed in a class you
can see it from all points of view. You can then sort of get a better understanding of what these people feel like, what they’re going through, what they’re feeling, and what it’s like, instead of leaving it up in the air and letting people sort of think for themselves or how it’s meant to be and what it’s meant to be like. So I think in school, if you can sort of have a discussion and open it up and let people say what they feel and maybe have speakers in or something, and you can talk about these things. Instead of, well, I think Ms Marilyn she left it. Where she just stopped it straight away, we sort of couldn’t make up our own minds what actually she was trying to say—where we actually thought she was taking offense or she was offended by gay people, and or gay remarks or homosexual remarks and sort of thing. So I think if in a class you have a discussion on certain issues in society, you can’t change someone’s opinion but sort of give them points of view from all possible angles, of what other people feel like. Then I think there’d be greater understanding of the issues in society, if we could discuss it in a classroom environment.

Like other students in the single sex classroom, Kevin felt that open discussions were crucial to understanding multiple positionings available and multiple ‘truths’ (Davies, 1996), which have been highlighted through feminist and poststructuralist theories of knowledge. In addition, the issue of power becomes evident whereby there is a need to address power relationships (Foucault, 1981b) and the impact and effects of normalization on the everyday lives of people in schools. By not having the discussion space available, Kevin was left with not really understanding what the teacher was trying to say. He was further left with the opinion that the teacher was uncomfortable, signaling that teachers feel afraid of the repercussions of such ‘open’ discussions. Kevin was able to speculate further, that this could also make other students who were present at the time also uncomfortable and feel that this topic should not be talked about openly. He believed instead that by opening up space for discussion in the classroom, greater understanding could be developed. By leaving the issue of homosexuality and homophobia ‘undiscussed’ and ‘up in the air’, students were left with the feeling that this topic was unsuitable to be discussed in classrooms. The initial discomfort of the teacher placed constraints on Marilyn. By cutting short discussions in class, students felt insecure of their own feelings and speculated about unsubstantiated conclusions. Consequently, prevalent discourses, which included the heteronormative policing of masculinity (Martino, 2000a), were not challenged.
A 'safe' place for discussions of 'touchy' issues could have been more effectively created. However, wider regimes of homophobia imbedded in institutional structures preclude 'open' discussions. There are also issues of safety at stake for teachers who may well be placed in compromising positions for raising these issues; a situation which is more evident in religious educational institutions. Creation of such spaces could also generate discourses which contradict the ways in which schools lean towards a corporate managerial structure where policies may be set against different ideals than those of teachers (Davies, 1996). This is further complicated by the dominance of compulsory heterosexuality and the existence of institutionalized homophobia and heterosexism in this specific religious school. Awareness is important of corporate managerial structures which often enable only the 'good news' to be disseminated, thus contradicting any discourses that encourage student voices, or even teachers' voices, to be heard. Where only success is heard, 'fiction' then becomes a reality (Davies, 1996). Silence of specific issues becomes normalized. The significance of 'safe' environments for discussions on 'touchy' subjects was therefore apparent. Reminding Kevin that Marilyn had incorporated specific issues within the classroom through discussions of particular texts they had read, I asked him about the relevance of this:

H.H.: I believe Ms Marilyn brought up a lot of different issues over that first semester, do you think they've been discussed—these other issues—sort of like masculinity, sexuality, -?

Kevin: I don't sort of think we went into too much detail, I think we were focusing more on the play or the book or the film, but I think it would be good again if we could have open discussions.

Again Kevin referred back to open discussions and therefore implicitly advocated the need for a 'safe' environment for these discussions for teachers as well as students. Rather than just discussing what the author might mean, important social issues could be addressed through discussions of texts. In other words, provide some 'reality' to reading text in respect of students' own lives (Martino, 1998b). Importantly, discussions need to be held without any threat, or perceived threat, to students or to the teacher.

Kevin: Yes, a little more discussion so again you could hear all people's points of view whereas instead of us just looking at a book. And you are sort of getting the writer's point of view yes, but if we could hear everyone's and we could make a choice whether we like this, like that, disagree with this, or agree or, then we
could actually be tolerant towards these people or not. And again having an open discussion would be good because you’re sort of addressing the issue head on and willing to tackle it. Again if we were to discuss sexuality, say of like in The Club where there was no women’s influence. If Ms Marilyn had gone into more detail of this we could have, we could get opinions from people who think, well women shouldn’t do this, they should do this. And again we could make our own opinions and discuss in better detail, and get a more deeper understanding of what’s actually going on instead of just saying this is what happened in the play. And I think if we can sort of relate to what’s happening in a book to society, which I think we did in The Inner Circle. That’s a way I think we can address certain issues in society and deal with them and make people more aware of issues happening in society.

Kevin acknowledged that issues such as racism had been brought up in the English classroom, but he believed that more focus was placed on the text rather than issues that were introduced through texts. So Kevin appears to be suggesting that the text was deployed to avoid drawing any connection to the students’ lives or rather to avoid requiring students to express their opinions. Although in this way writers’ views were discussed, there was little room for other differing opinions. Kevin also acknowledged that he, like others in the class, could relate to the text The Inner Circle. As an Indigenous Australian, The Inner Circle—where one of the protagonists was also an Indigenous Australian—was particularly relevant to Kevin. Yet this relevance remained concealed. Kevin, like other students in this single sex classroom, emphasized the need for more ‘open’ discussions, thus implicitly emphasizing a need for space where teachers would not be in trouble or placed under surveillance for addressing such issues. Kevin suggested that teachers were ‘not understanding enough’. However, the call for more space for open discussions on such issues suggested that students misconstrued reasons for teachers not always providing space for discussion. It is more probable that teachers are aware of, and thus afraid of, repercussions in the face of no support. When Kevin suggested that issues could be related more to what was happening in society, I asked if this could be improved on in schools:

H.H.: So is that something that can be improved on in schools do you think?

Kevin: Yes, yes, open discussion would be good, where you won’t be in trouble for what you say and you can be free to say what you want to say within reason, of course, if it’s like bad language or anything. Where you can be
sort of able to express your opinion without fear of being in trouble from the teacher. I think sometimes teachers are not understanding enough. I find sometimes at this school teachers jump to conclusions about what students are doing or what they’re doing without finding out what is actually happening. Like, we’ll be late from PE and we’d be walking late to social studies and our teacher would just start yelling at us and tell us to sit down and won’t even give us a chance to explain what happened. That is something that needs to be, not just in a school environment but also out in society. I really sort of feel that problems should be looked at, well how can we stop it. We’ve got to look at why this is happening. I’m not just talking about in a school – whether it be racial discrimination in a school or outside the school. And I think if Ms Marilyn was to, or any other teacher in this school was to, sort of be a bit more understanding, and let kids explain, it would be I think a lot, much better. Because then you won’t have a relationship with the teacher that’s sort of not very good or something like that. If teachers can take the time and understand what people are talking about, I think that would be much better.

Whatever positions the teacher explicitly held or the students themselves held were subsequently for students made less relevant than the writers’ points of view. It is crucial that students are able to discuss issues of a personal nature, for example sexuality, without feeling intimidated in any way. The acknowledgement of homophobia is a sensitive subject in some schools. However, issues such as homophobia and sexuality can be safely discussed through the more general lens of gender. Discussions of such issues can be introduced through deploying literary texts in a critical manner, which as Martino (1998b; 2000b) suggests, is an unthreatening way of introducing issues of a sensitive nature. Thus sensitive issues can be discussed within a literary context. However, it is important to take this idea further and allow discussions in enough depth for students, so that issues can become internalized by students, and also so that students recognize the nexus of issues to their own and other students’ realities. For many students and teachers in current classrooms, only one truth emerges when discussing a text, but for many students, and even teachers themselves, this may not necessarily be their truth. The multiple truths that postmodernism (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Giroux, 1995; Kohli, 1995; Lemert, 1997; McLaren, 1995) and feminist theories (Davies, 1994, 1996; hooks, 1990; G. Jordan & Weedon, 1995; Kenway & Willis, 1993; Weedon, 1997) disclose are crucial for students and teachers to understand. The idea of multiple truths, however, also highlights issues of power and power relationships.
Institutionalized compulsory heterosexuality (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Frank, 1987; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2000) that exists in educational institutions highlights the asymmetrical power relationships built on a binary hierarchical system. Exploration of the way the text is taught and the questions that are asked has an added benefit of recognition and respect of multiple truths and of addressing issues of power.

This need to address issues relating to multiple truths and power relations became more evident in students’ and teachers’ narratives during my research, particularly as students from different ethnic backgrounds attempted to ‘fit’ themselves according to a hegemonic masculine ‘norm’ at school. In this way, significant issues were easily divorced from reality, divorced from these same issues as relevant to students’ own backgrounds. Issues themselves were not necessarily challenged thus often leaving stereotypical images intact in the minds of these students suggesting that more critical pedagogy was necessary. Knowledges relating to masculinities were not always grasped, nor spaces opened up where students could create their own knowledges. Hegemonic masculinity remained normalized.

At a later interview at the end of the school year, Kevin again felt that not enough spaces were opened up in classrooms for discussions on particular issues. He referred back to the critical incident relating to role-playing in which William acted as a stereotypical gay person. Kevin’s call for more discussion space on particular issues complemented other students’ thoughts and narratives, and reaffirmed Kevin’s ideas in his earlier interview:

Kevin: I think you know, that’s why when things come up like racism and stereotyping homosexuality, it’s important to discuss it in the class. I mean it’s you know, we can sort of stop the people who are against the homosexuality, who are racist, and if we can sit down and discuss it in the class where everyone can say how they feel about a certain topic, then everyone thinks for themselves. But we can sort of hear all the arguments why, why not on a particular issue. We can sort of make up our own mind on how we feel, and what’s our opinion on that particular issue. But yes because you discuss it in a class thing and you’re going out in society, we’re not going to have, we may or may not have these feelings about these, about homosexuals and have racist feelings towards people and stuff like that.

Kevin was thus expressing a need to be open and to be able to discuss issues of significance. He also made links between different types of oppression not only
relating to homosexuality but also to racism, although these issues were not addressed within the curriculum. It has been shown how when something is named, hidden underlying messages can be deconstructed and challenged (Davies, 1998; Gatenby & Humphries, 1999; hooks, 1990; Landry & MacLean, 1993). The discourse of secrecy and silence also continues to provide protection for power, while at the same time revealing its fragility and vulnerability (see Foucault, 1981b). The fragility and vulnerability of powerful hegemonic discourses, however, remain unchallenged when the discourses remain silent. In his narrative, Kevin revealed his understanding of this vulnerability so that although he believed his peers wanted spaces created to discuss important issues, reactions by the teacher in this instance made it difficult, consequently he believed Marilyn felt uncomfortable talking about these types of issues. Unfortunately, students were unaware of any possible consequences for teachers introducing such issues and effectively, there was little challenge to hegemonic discourses. I questioned Kevin about the importance of such discussions:

H.H.: So an important thing is to be able to actually discuss?

Kevin: Yes, for her to leave when William was like that, and for her to leave it and just do stuff that, it sort of gives us the feeling that, that she doesn’t, she’s got a problem, she’s got problems with homosexuals or homosexuality. If teachers can discuss it in class you know she should have showed us. Well she showed me how she feels on that subject and topic. She really didn’t want to talk about it or I think maybe if when she puts all her feelings and what she feels about homosexuality. If she keeps that up and lets the class discuss it, she can put her [view], what she thinks … Yes you can sort of resolve, not resolve the issue but sort of get people to talk more and you have a greater understanding. And you know again she just like, to me, made me feel that she didn’t really want to talk about it, she was, she felt a bit uncomfortable talking about it, about that certain topic.

H.H.: So do you think discussing it, like particularly the homosexuality issue, discussing something like that in the classroom, would that sort of stop and like help discourage homophobia?

Kevin: Yes, I think particularly in our class, because she [Ms Marilyn] left it up in the air, she didn’t want to talk about it, you sort of get the feeling oh she doesn’t like. We get the feeling that she’s homophobic, we’re not going to touch it, we’re not going to look at it, and we sort of get the same feeling as well. But if we were to just to discuss it we could see both sides and make our own decisions based upon what people say and what we feel, so if, yes.
H.H.: So, that’s one issue that could be discussed, do you ever get a chance to talk about that particular issue?

Kevin: No, not really, we don’t, we sort of, we didn’t really talk about after that, after Ms Marilyn. We don’t really, not after that incident; we don’t really talk about it much.

Kevin felt strongly that discussion was missing and that in this way issues—and in this case issues relating to homosexuality and homophobia—were left unresolved. In addition, the notion of homophobia was related to the teacher rather than to students, with the idea that issues relating to homophobia were not discussed in the classroom because the teacher was homophobic. Other discourses, however, may have been at play which accounted for the teacher’s discomfort, particularly given the religious context of the school.

When discussing the role-playing incident Richard (who identified as Australian and was from an Australian and New Zealand background) thought Marilyn was ‘pretty angry’ about the scene, and made some suggestions of why that could be, namely that there was a gay teacher at school. Thus a relationship was made between another teacher at school and the notion of ‘impersonation’ of that teacher, although at the same time Richard believed William was ‘mature’ enough not to impersonate another teacher. In this way, Richard, although the younger, became viewed as someone in a more mature position than Marilyn:

Richard: Yes, when she heard she was pretty angry about it, I don’t know why… I’m not exactly sure. Some people were saying there’s like a gay teacher at the school or something. I heard rumours about it or something. I’m not sure but. I’m not exactly sure on that one. Well, I reckon it could be. It could be because she was upset about it is not right to do, that it’s not right to impersonate other people, like gay people or something like that. It’s just not on. But we weren’t exactly sure really, because that’s what I think, but it could be something else, I’m not sure.

H.H.: But if there was a gay teacher in the school, do you think it would matter really? What do you think the students-?

Richard: Well it depends if like William knew there was a gay teacher at the school or not because if he did know he wouldn’t have done it. I don’t reckon because he’s more mature than that. But yes, if there was like if there was a gay teacher, I’m sure Ms Marilyn would be pretty upset about that.
Because no discussions developed, few options outside of appropriating ‘normal’ hegemonic masculinity were left to any gay students. Indeed, any student who did not fit neatly into a hegemonic masculine role was possibly “totally silenced”, as a student cited by Davies (1994, p.49) was effectively silenced. Students would experience what Butler (1990) names as the ‘heterosexual matrix’ where a person’s own lived masculinity is “embedded within a presupposed heterosexuality” (Renold, 2000, p.310). Gay, or even bisexual, persons are thus not given adequate support to enable them to cope with their own positioning (Epstein, 1997). Stories of suicide and attempted suicide as a result of lack of adequate support at school are highlighted by Clacher (1998). Gay students are obliged to disavow male homosexuality through heightening of emphasis on masculinity. ‘Stable gender identities’ are maintained through what Butler (1990) identifies as ‘oppositional desires’.

However, as Foucault (1981b, p.100) wrote “we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between the dominant discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies”. Through alternative strategies, therefore, it is possible to challenge hegemonic discourses. It is possible to strategically deploy texts to raise issues about normalization and power relationships and to move beyond thinking in a heterosexual/homosexual oppositional manner (Martino, 1999c). Lack of professional guidance and constraints of school directives and school policies were apparent in the role-playing situation leading to silences—and effectively secrecy—being left unchallenged with the issues of power remaining intact. It is precisely because of the lack of guidance and of constraints that teachers cannot or are unable to talk openly about homosexuality without fear of repercussions.

Notions that became transparent through this particular interview were that, although links may be made to school texts, homosexuality and homophobia were still very much subjects that were not to be discussed in classrooms. This has enormous pedagogical implications. Students like Kevin often made links between texts read at school and reality, but at the same time were unable to explore these connections through educational activities. Although through my interviews with Marilyn there was never any hint of this teacher being homophobic, she was operating within heteronormative frames imposed by the religious educational institution in which
she was situated and many male students read the critical incident within a
homophobic framework. Students’ reading of the incident reinforced the idea that
males should be masculine, in opposition to being feminine, with any crossover into
the feminine signifying homosexuality. Dominant stereotypical ideas may have been
fractured for a short time for a few students, but hegemonic discourses had not been
strongly challenged or erased. The challenge to stereotypes was constrained by
school directives and lack of guidance, thus implicitly suggesting that the issues are
not particularly important or relevant within the school lives of adolescent male
students.

How typical are ‘gay’ stereotypes?

The perceived typical ‘gay’ stereotypes became a pertinent issue within the context
of masculinities at the school. Judgments relating to one student within a classroom
do not affect just that individual, for example, judgments and events that followed
William’s portrayal of a gay person. It is important to acknowledge that “every
dealing a teacher has with one student will affect the other students in the class in
one way or another, which vastly increases the complexity and stress of the
situation” (Tripp, 1993, p.130). Responses by the teacher to the protagonists,
William and Robert, of the highlighted role playing situated in class were seen to
affect other students. All students who discussed the issue during interviews felt that
no space was created for discussions within class about this incident, leaving them to
imagine their own meanings. It appeared that Marilyn experienced difficulties with
creating the space called for because of the need to remain unbiased when
discussing sexualities. Initially this event appeared to be a question of remaining
unbiased, non-discriminatory, and non-offensive. On further reflection, however, the
critical incident seemed to be more than an issue relating to homosexuality, but
about dominant discourses relating to masculinity, homophobia, power, and also
about the acceptability of violence. Some male students were able to deconstruct the
stereotype of a gay male but at the same time recognize the associated power issues.
A prevalent dominant discourse suggests that masculinity is set according to
hegemonic masculinity of the more powerful. As Kimmel observes:

Within the dominant culture, the masculinity that defines white,
middle class, early middle-aged, heterosexual men is the masculinity
that sets the standards for other men, against which other men are
measured and, more often than not, found wanting.

(Kimmel, 1994, pp.124-125)
Hegemonic discourses relating to masculinity filter down into schools and into school cultures with schools located within a Eurocentric, white, middle class, male culture to which adolescent male students are expected to conform.

At interviews, I asked Marilyn and students about the incident relating to the role-playing of a gay person, and what their thoughts were. When I asked William about the incident and why he selected a gay character in particular, he realized he was reinforcing a typical stereotype. But he also believed there was a difference between what was perceived as a typical stereotype and what was typical of a stereotype in reality. Through William’s slight slippage of what he considered to be different meanings he was able to reinforce the gay stereotype—thus effectively affirming his own hegemonic heterosexual masculinity—while at the same time suggesting that gays did not easily or necessarily fit into perceived stereotypes. Through the slippage William also suggested that he had ‘absolutely nothing against homosexuals’ and that he had good mates who were also gay. The ‘good mates’ who were also gay were, however, effectively distanced from William when he volunteered their ages placing them in a much older group. William’s own hegemonic, white, heterosexual masculinity was further endorsed through his comparison of gay people with Aboriginal people and with the suggestion that the stereotype of an Aboriginal person would have been more acceptable in the role playing situation. (His comparisons continued at a later interview when he talked of being friends with Aboriginal people in the same manner he talked of being friends with gay people.)

H.H.: Now when you were role-playing you pretended to be a gay person?

William: Yes.

H.H.: A sales person?

William: Yes.

H.H.: Why did you do that, can you explain?

William: Well, all right I didn’t get the chance to do this before but you’ve obviously heard the homosexual stereotype. You know it’s not quite, they’re considered weaker, they’re considered more feminine than a male you know, they’re considered not quite tough you know, wouldn’t stand up for themselves, blah, blah, blah. And I was actually trying to show that, you know what would happen in that type of situation you know. The person comes up you know, gay person, and he’d show him by
the stereotype that the normal straight person is considered much stronger you know, got a bigger voice you know, and he has for some reason he has the right to, I don’t know. He has the right to put the homosexual down. I used to have close friends that lived across the road. I think they’re about forty, fifty I don’t know. But they live together, they were gay and they’re quite good, quite nice people, good mates of mine and I’ve had a chat with them you know. I have absolutely nothing against homosexuals but I guess that’s the way I came across.

H.H.: Do you think that the stereotype you portrayed was a typical stereotype or …?

William: A typical stereotype yes.

H.H.: Was it typical of a homosexual person?

William: No, no. The homosexuals that I know don’t, you know they have certain aspects that go along with that. But no they don’t fit into that stereotype at all. It’s just the way the public sees them. It’s the same as if I was doing. I just can’t understand why I got into trouble for that. If I’d have, if I’d have told them that I was an Aboriginal you know, and I did an Aboriginal voice you know, and I put in the Aboriginal stereotype then I wouldn’t, no one would have thought the less, everyone would have thought, a good intelligent play. But because I chose to be homosexual for some reason it, yes it wasn’t considered too highly.

H.H.: Yes maybe because it might have been seen as being derogatory to gay people.

William: Might have. But it all depends on the way someone takes it you know. If they want to, if they take it as being rude, then fair enough. Not much I can do about it. I’ve played my part. I tried to get the message across. Most, what surprised me the most was that ninety-five percent of the students got what I was saying and they knew exactly what was going on but Ms Marilyn couldn’t see it but yes… But anyway, you’ve got to get over that, you’ve got to get over it and realize it’s a fact of life and you’ve got to you know. It’ll happen, I just can’t understand when, you know when it happens it’s going to happen a lot. You’re going to be introduced to gay people you know, and you can’t react like that, it’s not on.

Stereotypes often portray negative characteristics and repeatedly marginalize groups who are stereotyped. Stereotyping also enables males and females to be homogenized. Hegemonic masculinity, a stereotype itself, has been strengthened by
the existence of, for example, gay stereotypes (G. Mosse, 1996). William felt that his was a legitimate role. He believed that most of his peers understood his intentions although the teacher had not. William’s idea was expressed in such a way as to imply that as a teacher, Marilyn would be unable to appreciate his ‘message’. Through this exchange William appeared to have a lack of understanding for the position he put Marilyn in. At the same time, Marilyn was not able to deal with the scenario, given both the lack of support and professional development around how to address homophobia and issues of sexuality in schools. In this instance, as a researcher, I was excluded from the pedagogical exchange although at other pertinent times students would look to see what my response would be. These types of incidents lead to issues of pedagogical exchanges which are seldom discussed or theorized, thus greater research in this area would be fruitful. Inducement of laughter through the introduction of a gay character into role-playing became a compelling technique for exhibiting conformity to heterosexuality (Kehily & Nayak, 1997) and enacting a performance for his peers, but effectively excluding the female teacher and the female researcher.

Although William conceded that his role-playing might have been derogatory towards gay people, this concession remained as a minor irritant for him with his suggestion that if anyone was to ‘take it as being rude, then fair enough’. William’s confusion over Marilyn’s reaction to his portraying a typical gay stereotype as somehow reflecting her reaction in meeting a gay person enabled his own positioning to remain within a powerful hegemonic discourse. Prevailing hegemonic discourses which positioned homosexuality in opposition to heterosexuality remained intact. Other students in this class confirmed the ways laughter and stereotyping were used to reinforce their own heterosexual masculinity, and in the following paragraphs I have highlighted some of their narratives.

Robert (who identified as an Australian) and Richard (who identified as an Australian/New Zealander) both suggested that mimicking a gay shopkeeper was included for added humour. The effect was to assert a collective masculinity grounded in asserting heterosexual masculinity (see Kehily & Nayak, 1997). Robert suggested that ‘everyone got involved and everyone was laughing’: everyone in this situation being male students but not the female teacher (and again I was excluded from pedagogical exchanges). Robert’s response confirms how sexuality is used as a bonding mechanism which affirms heterosexual masculinity and effectively excludes particularly groups of people such as females and gay people.
H.H.: During the role playing… when one of the boys tried to play a gay person, do you think that was fair what he did, do you agree with the way he sort of portrayed, is that what a gay person is like?

Robert: I don’t think he, well it would be. I don’t know if it’s the voice. I don’t know if the voice would be like that. But yes it was just adding a bit of humour to it. Yes, as he said, if you just go in there and say right no, yes and just like arguing, it wouldn’t be that funny, like when he did it everyone got involved and everyone was laughing and all that, yeah.

Interview responses such as Richard’s confirm that the critical incident was more about performing heterosexual masculinity than about representation of gay people. However, implicit in his discourse is a sense that there are normal and abnormal gay people.

H.H.: What about in one of the role-playings there was the gay… what did you think of that scene?

Richard: Oh it can be like funny in a way, because like you know that he’s not really gay or anything. But like it’s just funny to hear it. But people think that gays speak like that in a really weird tone and act like that. But half the time they’re not like that, some of them can be, but others just live a normal life and they get like abused and all that for absolutely nothing, yes, sometimes it’s a little bit sad for them, yes but yes, that’s what I think.

When questioned about the way gay people were represented, Richard recognized immediately that a gay person would be offended and saddened by such a scene which portrayed gay people as ‘wussy’ and scared of ‘normal’ people, and it is understandable why a gay person would be afraid given the reality of homophobic violence. Nevertheless, again ‘normal’ was seen in opposition to ‘abnormal’, reinforcing the binary nature of heterosexuality/homosexuality. Richard explained:

Richard: They’d be offended by that because like the customer was saying, oh give me my money back and all that. It’s like saying how wussy and scared they were of normal people. Yes, they’re just afraid of all that and if there was someone, a gay person sitting there I think they would feel offended and like really sad about it.

Richard has some idea about the positioning of gay people within a homophobic context of violence which is enacted against them on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender non-conformity. Nevertheless, his readings of potential
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Richard has some idea about the positioning of gay people within a homophobic context of violence which is enacted against them on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender non-conformity. Nevertheless, his readings of potential
positionings remained within a heteronormative framework operating within the
school which enabled homophobia to persist. Robert, however, like William (earlier)
only conceded after further discussion that yes, gay people would be offended by
such comments made in the role-playing. The notion that it is acceptable to make
fun of someone else pervaded.

H.H.: So do you think that’s fair, what if there were gay people
here listening, do you think it would be fair to them?

Robert: I don’t know. I think it would be to an extent like if you,
like if, if you kept on doing it, if it was just a play, I
don’t think the gay people would really mind you know,
just making a bit of fun and they would take that I would
think. But if they, if he kept on going like, every time he
spoke he was making fun of gay people and all that then
yes, it would be, they would have reason to get upset and
all that.

H.H.: But you don’t think he did that time?

Robert: No I don’t think he did it to upset anyone, just for, it was
just like for humour.

John (who was born in Australia and identified as English and New Zealander)
thought that it would be offensive if a gay person had been watching the scene. John
acknowledged that gay people were portrayed in a particular way and like ‘wussy
people’. This kind of portrayal thus effectively reinforced students’ own
heterosexual masculinity. John also reflected on the issue of suicide and its link with
homophobia. He suggested that most suicides are committed by gay people:

H.H.: What about during role-playing, when one of the boys
took on, pretended to be a gay person? What do you
think about that, how do you think, for example if a gay
person had been watching that, how do you think they’d
feel?

John: Probably offended because everyone was laughing at it.
But there’s not really anything wrong with that, wrong
with gay people, but they seem to get picked on a lot
because—I think I heard it was about seventy per cent of
people who commit suicide are gay—because they
always get beaten up or teased and stuff.

H.H.: Yes, so do you think what he was doing, the way he was
talking and that, do you think that’s how gay people are?

John: No, because my mum knows some gay people and they
don’t talk like that, but they’re portrayed as being like
wussy people.
Patrick (born in Australia with Scottish and Welsh parents) also thought the scene would be offensive to a gay person. Patrick was in a minority in acknowledging that maybe William, one of the protagonists in the role-playing, had been making fun of gay people while also showing how they were disrespected and were 'pushed about'. Patrick acknowledged how laughter could be elicited through mocking or deriding an 'other'.

H.H.: During one of the role-playing at the beginning of last term, it was William wasn’t it, who brought up being a gay stereotypical gay. What did you think of that?

Patrick: I think he meant a couple of things in a way. I think he could have been making fun of gay people, but also showing a point about they get pushed around and not shown respect by most people.

H.H.: That's a good point actually, yes. So what do you think if a gay person had been sitting there watching this, how do you think that a gay person would have felt?

Patrick: He would have found it probably very offending, yes, not felt very good about it.

The issue highlighted, therefore, is not simply about how a gay person might feel but about how power is deployed and legitimated. These students, by conceding that a gay person might feel mocked or derided, presented themselves as ‘concerned’. However, their own hegemonic heterosexual masculine positions remain intact. In addition, regimes of normalization become apparent in students’ narratives. Scott was less verbose than many of his peers. When discussing stereotypes, Scott thought of the typical or ‘normal’ stereotype, yet suggested that gay people were not like that but acted ‘normally’. Again there was a reference to the normal/abnormal dichotomy relating to heterosexual/gay people.

Scott: It’s just like the normal stereotype that people heard about gay people because that’s what most people are told, that gay people act like that.

H.H.: And what do you think, do you think gay people are actually like that?

Scott: No, they act like normally, just like, they act just like their same sex, instead of like a different sex.

H.H.: So do you think you can pick out who’s gay and who’s not?
Scott: No.

H.H.: So anyone sitting in that classroom who was gay, if we had someone sitting there, how do you think they’d feel?

Scott: Wronged.

H.H.: Would they have been upset by what happened?

Scott: Yes he probably would have because that’s not how gay people act, really act.

Acknowledging that gay people did not act like how stereotypes were perceived to act, yet at the same time implying they were different, suggests that homosexuality and heterosexuality played an active role in how males positioned themselves and were positioned by others (see also Butler, 1990; Mac an Ghaill, 2000). Nevertheless, for Scott there were more basic assumptions of intimate relationship through the suggestion that ‘they act just like their same sex’. Sexual difference functions to consolidate and strengthen heterosexuality (Butler, 1993). In a similar vein, Barry thought that gay people would feel pretty bad if they had watched the scene, since most would not act like that but would act ‘normal’.

H.H.: What about, in one of the classrooms when you were all doing the role playing, one of them sort of pretended to be a gay person, do you think that was how gay people act?

Barry: Some would, some probably would, but probably most wouldn’t.

H.H.: Have you met gay people who have acted like that?

Barry: No not really, they usually don’t act like that, they usually act normal.

Barry’s narrative reveals regimes of normalization whereby he linked normality to heterosexuality. Using particular discourses, students feminize and ‘other’ gay men in order to assert their own heterosexuality and to gain approval from their mates. The use of stereotypes also enables students to denigrate gay people while asserting their heterosexuality through a process of normalization. Anthony, who also identified as an Australian, like most of the other students talked about ‘normal’ and gay, thus by inference associating gay with abnormal or deviant. At the same time, Anthony suggested that it was not always possible to see if someone was gay because they did not always fit the gay stereotype image.
H.H.: When you did the role-playing, one person pretended to be a gay person?

Anthony: Oh right. Yes, yes we were doing. Yes that was William’s group. They did that for their play, the situation. Because it’s sort of like if you go into a normal hardware store, you see a big burly bloke standing at the counter and you’d sort of like go like, pull out a gun from under the counter, or pull out a hammer or something. It was that sort of thing. But if you’ve got, I suppose gays also have a stereotype of being a little bit whimpyish as well. And they sort of, like if there was a gay person behind the counter at the hardware store and you walked in and held it up they’d sort of like be, yes, pretty shocked. And be like cowardly and that sort of thing. Because they’ve got that sort of reputation, stereotype, so yes I suppose.

H.H.: Do you think it’s a fair stereotype?

Anthony: Probably not in a way. Because it’s like with many stereotypes it changes a lot and changes with different people. I mean like sure you’d have some gay people who’d be like that but I mean other people they’d do like just, the normal bloke standing behind the counter kind of thing. So you wouldn’t really notice the difference in everyday life and yes, sometimes with people you can tell and sometimes you can’t.

Anthony expanded on notions relating to how a gay person would feel in such a situation with the idea that in a school like this it would be difficult, and courageous, for a gay person to reveal his sexuality. Even though the story he related—of a friend of his auntie who told everyone she was ‘a lesbian’ and her friends remained her friends—was of a positive nature, Anthony still felt that a gay person in the school would ‘cop a lot of hassle’. He thus recognized that although society may be changing, the school remained a place where gay people would hide their sexuality:

H.H.: Do you think that if there was somebody who was gay, and happened to be sitting watching that, what do you think they would have felt?

Anthony: Oh, I suppose in a way they’d probably feel, I suppose, in a school like this they’d probably be hiding it as well. A fact like that because, yes they’d cop a lot of hassle about something like that. But yes they’d probably feel a little bit sort of harshly done by, because it’s sort of like, they probably can’t really be called cowards because you’d have to be pretty courageous to stand up and make a decision like that. Like if you, I know, like my auntie had a friend at school and she became a lesbian and she told everybody. But all her friends were like,
they’re still friends like, like life went on but she’s got a lot of relationships with gay people and things like that because she’s sort of like in the radio sort of show business. And yes, she knows a couple of DJs and stuff like that. That sort of idea that yes, like it wouldn’t be easy to turn around and say to your friends oh yes this is what I am. Because they’d be like, oh yes, we don’t want to know you sort of thing, but yes.

H.H.: So that’s unfair?

Anthony: Yes it’s really unfair to them because they just want to be the same sort of person that they were known as before. Just because they’re different, I mean if they didn’t tell, that’s how they’d want to be treated, like the same way. It’s like anything. I mean normal people treat say disabled people differently compared to normal people. It’s like they treat babies and that sort of thing when they don’t want to be treated like that. They just want to be treated like an equal person. But they don’t get it because they can’t help it because they show physical signs of it where gay people don’t really have to show physical signs of it. It might be in their choice to show physical signs but they don’t have to. But yes, it’s like probably easier. They want to be the same person that they were before they actually told anybody, because they feel they’d only tell somebody because they feel they could trust them. And yes it would just be like life would go on the same as it did before so.

H.H.: It shouldn’t make a difference?

Anthony: No not really.

Anthony’s understanding of issues relating to homophobia enabled him to discuss unfairness of treatment of groups which are not seen to easily fit into a hegemonic masculine model. However, there is a naïve assumption that gay people simply make choices about the way they act or perform their subjectivities. Visual impressions become significant whether, for example, they are gay, non-white, or non-able-bodied. Anthony’s interview response clearly showed him grappling with how different people were treated if they were not considered ‘normal’, but where ‘normal’ was perceived within a hegemonic masculine framework. Anthony, therefore, understood how differences, especially visual differences, made a difference to the way a person could be treated. Furthermore, for gay people to come out would mean that they would no longer be treated as ‘an equal person’.

It was evident that many students perceived gay people in a stereotypical way although they acknowledged that gay people do not necessarily fit into this
stereotype. That "some form of homophobia is central to the experience of men in most patriarchal societies, that homophobia and heterosexism shape the daily experiences of all men, and that such homophobia is central to the construction of sexism" (Kaufman, 1994, p.157) was evident in students' narratives.

Foucault (1981b, p.25) suggests that "useful and public discourses" were created in the eighteenth century for "policing of sex" and for the "necessity of regulating sex". At this time, the political construct 'population' created dominant discourses regulating the 'normal' family and sexuality which was apparent in some of my interviews. Sexuality remains within a boundary of 'official silence' but "sexualities of all kinds pervade schools, with their effects unrecognized, because their very existence is denied" (Epstein, O'Flynn et al., 2001, p.129). Regulation of sex and sexuality is visible in dominant discourses which contrast 'normal' and 'gay'. Despite many students knowing gay people either themselves or through family and friends, they talked of gay as being abnormal.

Students in the classroom I studied seemed to struggle between a number of positions: for example, acknowledging stereotypical homosexuality while not adhering to the idea of stereotypical homosexuality. Hatton, Maher and Swinson (1998) maintain that challenging stereotypes is likely to enhance lives of all rather than only gay people through a social justice that does not stigmatize or silence. Students acknowledged that any gay person listening would in all probability take the 'critical incident' which occurred in class as derogatory. Many students, during interviews, acknowledged that gay people could not always be identified through their speech, by their posture, or by their activities. However, the stereotypical image remained fixed and, as found by other researchers (Martino, 2000a), stereotypical images of gays which include body posture, mannerism, and voice continue to be reinforced and used in derogatory ways, often in an effort to emphasize one's own conformity to normative heterosexuality. Notions of inclusivity of 'Others' (Britzman, 1995) are significant. Deconstructing stereotypes of gay people and interrogating processes of normalization can be achieved within limits imposed by educational institutions through critical reflection on texts (Martino, 1999c). Students articulated some of their concerns during discussions emanating from the exposed critical incident thus confirming that greater disruptions of regimes of normalization are possible within schools.
Reflections

Although I had not set out to question students on issues of homophobia and homosexuality or the relationship of homosexuality to heterosexuality and masculinities, these issues became significant to students during classroom observations and during interviews. As Martino (personal communication, November 2000) suggests, this is not unusual given the prevalent role that homophobia plays in boys’ lives and within the practices of hegemonic masculinities. I found that most students showed maturity and a willingness to discuss issues such as homophobia. However, discussions surrounding homosexuality and homophobia remained implicated within a hegemonic form of masculinity (Nayak & Kehily, 1997) and contradicted their claims related to inclusiveness of gay people. Their own initial policing of sexuality boundaries with the use of humour was compounded by the teacher’s response. Although Marilyn, the teacher, ‘opened the door’ for these discussions, she hesitated and did not step through this opened door. It appeared that a lack of time and a lack of professional support, together with a fear of repercussion and the restrictions imposed by school policies prohibited creation of spaces for discussions on issues that were not directly included in the curriculum.

Marilyn was uncomfortable with addressing conflict issues relating to homophobia, and it appeared that conflict issues within the school could only be addressed if they did not involve potentially disruptive social situations. A problem that arose was how to handle a situation complicated by sexuality in ways that would educate and equalize (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). Marilyn’s hesitancy, however, had an unfortunate development in how students perceived the situation and led students to reflect that this teacher was ‘uncomfortable’ talking about sexuality issues. Inadequate spaces created for discussion proved a hindrance where the binary heterosexuality/homosexuality—linking to the notions that these were normal/abnormal—proliferated and was not disrupted. Students reached several other unsubstantiated conclusions because of this hesitancy. These conclusions included notions that there was a gay teacher at this school, that violence and humour against gay people were in reality condoned though not acknowledged, and that their teacher was homophobic, upset, angry or had taken offense. A final serious conclusion reached by many students was that it was wrong and unacceptable to be gay in our society, thus no long-term disruption or deconstruction of this dominant
homophobic discourse occurred. Instead, it appears that hegemonic, heterosexual, masculine discourses present us with the notion that:

Everyone needs a face to wear. To protect yourself, you must sometimes let the world think that you’re not who you are. Particularly I think you need this in Australia. A face to trick bad spirits with.

(Simone Lazaroo cited in Martino, 1997a, p.81)

A problematic concern is the distancing of theory and practice for teachers, as they themselves practice for an efficient and successful classroom. A wide gap between theory and practice was apparent in the classroom. A significant outcome of my research was students’ call for the creation of spaces for discussions of issues, such as homophobia, that are not specifically included in curricula. A further outcome was greater understanding of the role that sexuality plays in regulating and policing masculinities in classrooms, in school and in society. Although educators acknowledge that children are aware of many issues from a very early age, at other times it is suggested that students are not mature enough for introducing particular issues until they reach a certain age. But given the ways in which boys learn to fashion particular forms of masculinity in public spaces their behaviour may be interpreted as immature.

The consistent use of the word ‘normal’ by the male students was employed to affirm students’ own heterosexual, hegemonic masculinity. Students from all different ethnic groups used ‘normal’ to position themselves within a hegemonic, heterosexual, masculine framework. Significantly Kevin, an Indigenous Australian, was one of the few students who did not use ‘normal’ to describe himself in opposition to a gay person but was able to identify issues relating to gay people as similar to what occurs in racism. His Indigenous cultural background and racist experiences together with his maturity enabled Kevin to perceive connections to groups linked with oppressive discourses. The notion of normality was implicitly challenged but simultaneously silenced through lack of discussion space.

Compulsory heterosexuality reveals power relationships built upon a binary hierarchical system. However, my research reveals that homophobia and hegemonic discourses prevalent around the heterosexuality/homosexuality binary could be effectively challenged within classrooms. Unfortunately, because of the change of teachers in this classroom after the first half of the school year, Marilyn and I were unable to collaborate further or to discuss this issue in greater depth, nor reintroduce
it into classroom activities during the period of my field research. Students talked of needing space for discussions in the classroom, but it is equally important that professional development in required skills is made available to teachers. Teachers also need to feel safe and comfortable to follow up issues such as homophobia and feel comfortable with any classroom discussions. It appears that a focus in the classroom on specific outcomes and on what students have learned results in teachers having to implement certain activities and needing to stick to a schedule, without allowing for greater understanding of peripheral knowledge. For example, role-playing activities in this classroom were set up with specific expectations that excluded the issues of sexuality, an issue that students nevertheless found significant. Thus it is often easier to fulfill teaching requirements of content rather than value the outcomes of learning situations or ‘critical incidents’. Schools and curricula need to provide safe spaces for teachers as well as for students.

It was and remains important to challenge stereotypical images of gay people—often perceived within a deviant sexuality discourse—and of other disadvantaged groups, and to acknowledge hegemonic discourses. However, challenging itself does not necessarily change any underlying attitudes or ideologies. I have discussed how role-playing enabled the ‘stepping into someone else’s shoes’. The activity of role-playing provides vicarious experiences of others’ perspectives but it also allows for continuous reinvention of particular stereotypes unless some sort of debriefing occurs. Debriefing also enables the inclusion of what Davies (1996, p.145) labeled as ‘counter-hegemonic’ activities, which are basic requirements to “the destabilisation of dominant discourses which enable the oppressive domination of one group over another to be seen as right and good”. Learning situations become more significant when debriefing occurs within a ‘safe’ space created, where issues can be discussed in greater depth (as was called for by these students themselves). Through safe spaces it is possible to bring attention to prevalent discourses and to provide opportunities for breaks and ruptures to occur in hegemonic heterosexual masculine discourses. Although not unproblematic, texts provide such spaces for interrogating stereotypes and challenging heteronormative thinking and practices (Martino, 1999c).

In this chapter I found that many uncertainties and dissatisfactions, particularly relating to issues of homophobia, pervaded students’ narratives in my research, and it is here where effective pedagogy can be evolved. Indeed, as Schick suggests:

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An appropriate pedagogy is not a matter of disturbing participants’ self-satisfaction or wrenching from them their certain knowledge. Rather, it is those places of uncertainty, dissatisfactions, doubts—where identities are not secure—which are the places where possibilities for exploration and change reside.

(Schick, 2000, p.98)

My research thus contributes to the field of masculinities by providing, through the exploration of a ‘critical incident’, greater awareness of ways in which hegemonic masculinity pervades the lives of boys at school, and in this case specifically in a private boys’ school in Perth, Australia, and ways in which homophobia is constructed or reconstructed through a lack of openness. However, this lack of openness highlights ways in which teachers fear repercussions of such ‘open’ discussions, particularly in the face of no support. My research shows how the heteronormative framework imposed by the educational institution presented difficulties for the female teacher, which at times was read by students as homophobia.

Students in this study were effectively making connections between hegemonic masculinity and groups oppressed by the dominant discourses reinforcing hegemonic masculinity, and this chapter introduced how gay people were paralleled to Aboriginal people. Kevin, an Indigenous Australian, also presented such links and he was able to articulate ways in which he, like females and gay people, was marginalized. In Chapter 8 I discuss this issue further and explore how whiteness as a racial category fits in the school setting and I highlight how Kevin as a Torres Strait Islander constructs his subjectivity within a hegemonic masculine Eurocentric environment.
CHAPTER 8
MASCULINITIES AND WHITENESS IN THE CLASSROOM:
INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN (AND MULTICULTURAL) ISSUES

Perhaps one reason that conversations about race are so often doomed to frustration is that the notion of whiteness as “race” is almost never implicated.

(Williams, 1997, p.6)

Masculinities and whiteness

Earlier, in Chapter 6, I explored ways in which adolescent males took up different forms of masculinities particularly through their readings of specifically introduced texts in the English classroom. These texts provide an introduction for further platforms from which to discuss male students’ subjectivities, and in this chapter I explore ways in which adolescent boys adopt different forms of masculinities from within a framework that positions whiteness at the centre of analysis (see Aveling, 1998). More specifically I examine whiteness and Australian-ness and show how students overlook whiteness and its associated privilege in the process of shaping subjectivities. With whiteness acknowledged as a racial issue and as a socially constructed category, different forms of whiteness are interrogated through students’ narratives. In Chapter 6, one student paralleled gay people with Aboriginal people mainly because of the way both groups are marginalized, thus showing how some students are aware of issues of power and privilege. Central to discussions in this chapter is Kevin, an Indigenous Australian student from Torres Strait Islands.

7 The first part of this chapter has been written up as a paper entitled ‘Masculinities and whiteness: Marginalization of Indigenous Australians at school’ and was presented at the Crossroads in Cultural Studies, Fourth International Conference held in Tampere, Finland (June 29-July 2, 2002).

The second part of this chapter has been written up as a paper entitled ‘Privilege of whiteness: Adolescent male students’ resistance to racism in an Australian classroom’ and is to be published in Race Ethnicity and Education (see Hatchell, forthcoming).
Issues relating to racial prejudice are examined through a variety of critical incidents. I examine what Marilyn, an English teacher, is saying and how she introduces issues of racism into her classroom. I also examine what students are saying and how they perceive racism and racial prejudice. Students in my research often acknowledged the existence of racism against Indigenous Australians. White students in this study also acknowledged their own privileged ‘white’ position. However, the adolescent white male students who participated in this study presented ideas that because white people were racist against Indigenous Australians, then racism was ‘naturally’ exercised in reverse. Therefore, for these students, it was perceived as ‘natural’ for Indigenous Australians to be racist against white people. Educational texts, as well as teaching, often marginalize Kevin because he is an Indigenous Australian. Kevin is aware of this marginalization, yet he also feels he is able to remain an active participant in an educational setting that he perceives gives him few rights and often overlooks his Indigenous Australian experiences. I found that school texts play a critical role in how students define their own lives and create their own ‘visible’ meaning of whiteness in the English classroom, but conclude that awareness through school texts is not sufficient to fashion more permanent societal changes. This chapter explores some of the issues that emerged when discussing specific texts that incorporated Indigenous Australian and racial issues.

Whiteness is often considered unimportant and relegated as ‘invisible’ through deeply ingrained discourses which position the social category of whiteness as the norm (Roman, 1993). The normalization of whiteness strengthens power and privilege for some at the expense of others with the “omnipresence of power … produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another” (Foucault, 1981b, p.93). Issues relating to hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 1995; Mac an Ghaill, 1994a), as discussed in previous chapters, are further complicated by ways in which boys come to understand themselves as certain kinds of boys in relation to what it also means to be white or not white within a school system based on a white male Eurocentric middle class model. As a consequence, ‘race’ can play a significant but contradictory role in schools by placing students within the binary categories of ‘white’/’black’, with white often naturalized. As discussed in Chapter 3, white is not a homogenous category and has different meanings at different times, historically complicated with political actions defining who is white and struggles by particular groups to establish their whiteness (Hage, 1998). Whiteness is frequently associated with
colourlessness, so that the ways in which dominant discourses place whiteness as the norm enable white students to ignore their whiteness (see Aveling, 1998).

This is strongly exemplified by Patrick (a self-identified Australian with a Scottish and Welsh background) where white is considered unimportant yet fairly reluctantly acknowledged as an advantage. During an interview when discussing what was important to him, Patrick made a questionable statement that needed clarification:

Patrick: I think that being white is not that important.

H.H.: Do you think being white has been an advantage though?

Patrick: Probably.

I found Patrick’s notion of the unimportance of whiteness was common amongst white students. For students of colour, however, their ‘race’ and ethnicity are part of their daily experiences (G. Jordan & Weedon, 1995). Furthermore, whiteness takes the form of a marker by which different groups are oppressed or their status maintained (McLaren, 1998). The normalization process is problematic for boys who do not fit into a particular normalized masculine or racialized position. Students are not disadvantaged explicitly because of their ethnic background but by cultural and structural biases imposed on them through educational systems (Gilbey, 1998). However, as Tatum (1999, p.60) asserts, although we all possess multiple identities, “some dimensions of our identities are reflected more saliently than others”. Thus the social category of whiteness interplays with other categories, such as gender and social class, and creates different potential positionings for students. In this chapter I focus on analyzing whiteness and racism in a localized context in one specific boys’ school. I draw attention to the dynamics within the classroom for one Indigenous boy to highlight racialized social relations and practices.

**Overlooking whiteness in the shaping of subjectivities**

In Chapters 6 and 7 I explored ways in which the concept of masculinities plays a significant role in students’ self-representations. However, other factors are equally important to the way students see themselves. I found that whiteness as a racial issue, and racism remained an issue at the school. Feminist theories and postmodernism show the significance of ways in which subjectivities are not only shaped by conflicting discursive discourses, but also how we respond in different
ways at different times (Davies, 1996, 1997; Kenway & Willis, 1993; Kenway et al., 1994; Weedon, 1997). This is further explicated by Hearn and Collinson (1994, p.111) who suggest that: "it is very difficult, and probably impossible, to hold on to numerous composite identities equally at all times; some will be prioritized over others and their meanings may change over time". Students' cultural backgrounds add to the complexities of ways in which subjectivities are shaped.

During one English class I gave students follow up questions (see Appendix VIII) in which they were asked to list five things, such as colour of skin, being male, birthplace, ethnic group, social class, or other significant things that were important to them, in order of importance. From answers to this questionnaire I found that students often tried fitting into an Australian image, irrespective of cultural background. The majority of students represented themselves as Australian. However, Australian-born students tended to find issues such as being born in Australia or being able to speak English as important. Being male was significant to a number of boys. However, non-white students, and students with European backgrounds tended to include their ethnic group as being important. Significantly, being white was overlooked by all 'white' students and students from European background, although colour of skin was specifically mentioned in the questionnaire. Skin colour was significant to only one student whom I called Luke who is of Indian background. Students' self-identified ethnic groups have been given in brackets in the following examples of students’ answers.

Scott (Australian English): 1. Football. 2. Cricket. 3. The beach. 4. My bike. 5. Having three sisters to drive me around the place.


Roger (Australian): 1. Being born in Australia 2. Being able to afford a surf board and surf. 3. Football. 4. Having a fair family who loves me 5. Going to this school.


Tom (Italian Australian): 1. Being born in Australia. 2. The ethnic groups I belong to. 3. Being able to speak something other than English. 4. Soccer. 5. Being able to 'get by' by a long way, able to live life in the fast and easy way.

Adam (Italian): 1. Being able to attend this school. 2. Being born in Australia. 3. Being able to speak English. 4. Being born a male. 5. Playing rugby.


Answers to the questionnaire show that self-representations within discourses of hegemonic masculinity were reinforced for students, but without problematizing the way hegemonic masculinity is normalized within a framework that considered being white as the norm. In other words: for ‘white’ students, being white was unimportant but considered the ‘norm’, while ethnicity was important for non-English speaking ‘white’ students and for non-white students. However, narratives from interviews at this private boys’ school show that students represent themselves within a dominant masculinity discourse which is also within a white Anglo-Australian ‘norm’. For example, although Luke considered the colour of his skin and ‘being Indian’ as significant, when I asked him how his ethnic background helped or disadvantaged him, he replied that it made no real difference.

H.H.: What about your ethnic background, do you think that’s helped or been a disadvantage to you?

Luke: I’m not sure if it’s really made a difference to anything. No, it hasn’t really changed anything.

In this specific context, whiteness retains its ‘secrecy’ of ‘white supremacy’ (C. Clark, 1999). However, in this context of a middle class single sex boys’ school, whiteness remains subsumed under more dominant discourses of hegemonic masculinity.

During my research, although students’ cultural backgrounds were varied, significant issues relating to ethnicity that emerged—such as cultural invisibility—were more often in respect of Indigenous Australian issues. In other
words, students would more easily relate significant cultural issues to Indigenous Australians than to other cultural groupings. However, many of the emerging issues, specifically in relation to pedagogy, are also pertinent for other ethnic groups. Thus the examination of such issues have great pedagogical potentials. As Halse and Robinson suggest:

Many of the teaching styles appropriate for Indigenous students are equally effective for other students, particularly those who have difficulty in learning from teacher-centred lessons or who have difficulties with the status differential in teacher/student relationship.

(Halse & Robinson, 1999, p.213)

In my discussion of whiteness in this chapter, my focus begins with Indigenous Australian issues and moves to explorations of racism within the Australian context as perceived by students. Through discussions with Kevin, the invisibility of Torres Strait Islanders emerged as an issue. I found that Torres Strait Islanders are often subsumed under the more general named group of Aboriginal peoples. Although the experiences of Kevin are neither representative of all Indigenous Australians nor indeed of all Torres Strait Islanders, his experiences emphasize some of the struggles that exist for Indigenous Australians in Australian schools. Racism was identified as a persistent—though not always an explicit—problem.

‘A bit different because of the colour of my skin’

In this section I draw on the narratives of Marilyn (who identified herself as British) and Kevin (an Indigenous Australian) to discuss issues of racial prejudice. Centrally important to my argument is the idea that to be white also means to be privileged (DeRosa, 1999; J. O’Donnell, 1999), and this privilege influences everyday experiences with or without our knowledge or cooperation. White privilege, like male privilege (Connell, 1987, 1998, 2000), does not privilege all within its generalized category. However, I would argue that, like the continued existence of ‘patriarchal dividend’ (Connell, 1998), a white ‘dividend’ also prevails and is evident in the middle class single sex boys’ classroom. Recognizing that racism does not disappear through ignoring issues of racism it is possible to note that, conversely, issues of racism are not challenged simply through introduction of these issues. During our first interview, while discussing The Inner Circle (Crew, 1999), Marilyn considered the issue of racial prejudice. As introduced earlier, The Inner Circle is a story of two teenage boys struggling for personal identities, and narratives in the text are presented alternatively through the eyes of the two boys.
The story raises issues such as prejudice relating to an Aboriginal boy from the ‘bush’, and indifference of the world for a white Australian boy from a divorced family. The specific text, therefore, enabled Marilyn to introduce such issues as racial prejudice into the classroom in a not-so-personal way.

Marilyn: Joe [the central character of The Inner Circle] has been the victim of racial prejudice through his life – through primary school, when he went to work. And he’s had to create a web of lies to his parents, sort of thing, that he’s done OK and fitting in. And that was interesting. But you know there is an Aboriginal student in the classroom. But here I didn’t push it in any way and he didn’t make any comment, and no one questioned it really and what was sort of happening to that particular boy. They just sort of said in their written work: yes, it does go on and it’s really bad and it’s really stupid. And I think one of the questions I asked was had they experienced anything like it, prejudice and stuff, and no one had. But they all generally felt very supportive of Joe.

Links between Aboriginal people and racism were highlighted through the introduction of The Inner Circle. However, although racial prejudice was introduced to students, an underlying notion—as perceived by Marilyn—was that somehow Joe (a character in the text), as an Aboriginal person, or as an ‘other’, had to fit in with society even though he was the one who was experiencing racial prejudice. The teacher’s underlying notion reflected dominant discourses in society suggesting that ‘white’ experiences are the norm (Roman, 1993). The notion of ‘fitting in’ was also reflected in Kevin’s narrative. As an Indigenous Australian student, Kevin’s own experiences were often negated because they did not fit in with what was perceived as ‘normal’ or Kevin was given looks that identified him as ‘different’. During my discussions of The Inner Circle with Kevin he stated that he was able to identify with Joe, one of the protagonists in the book and an Aboriginal boy. Introduction of texts such as The Inner Circle thus enabled identification of marginalization, difference in treatment, and discrimination for students like Kevin. Kevin explored how he often felt ‘different because of the colour of [his] skin’, and how discrimination was not necessarily spoken, but was also from body language. These ‘feelings’ created uncertainties for Kevin, which he could not grasp and explicitly challenge, but were feelings which left him in a disadvantaged position. It is these hidden elusive moments of racism that Ang (1996, p.42) found so ‘infuriating’ because of “the fact that one cannot prove any ‘hard’ racism here while still feeling objectified, subjected to scrutiny, othered”. When I asked Kevin if he could relate to
the text *The Inner Circle*, our conversation took the following path as he discussed his feelings of discriminatory treatment and of his experiences of hidden racism:

H.H.: Can you relate to *The Inner Circle*?

Kevin: I think, yes, sometimes, because I’ve seen a problem with my brothers and sisters. They sort of have a problem with identifying who they are and I think some of the things, I can’t really remember his name. Joe, I think, is the Aboriginal.

H.H.: Yes.

Kevin: Well I think being a black person, I think some of the things that happened in the book certainly do, I can relate to because it happens sometimes. And, like if we walk into a shop, and it’s not just me, and if you’re out in a shop and you can see Aboriginal people or any other black people, if they walk into a shop there’s always sort of, you can feel someone’s watching you or you’re being looked at. When people start say cracking jokes about say Asians and you sort of think they’re going to maybe start to pick on you and find faults in you. Sometimes I feel that I’m a bit different because of the colour of my skin. And sometimes I find like that’s like a disadvantage, when really I shouldn’t look at it like that. But sometimes that’s how I feel. And it’s sometimes what people say or just from what the body language that I see from people giving or them just looking at me. That’s how I feel sometimes.

Kevin’s discussion of how he felt *different* and *disadvantaged* led me to ask about his experiences with teachers. Kevin expressed how he held teachers at his school in high esteem, and felt that their actions and language were not discriminatory. But, he also communicated that at school there was little opportunity to express his opinions, which left important issues unresolved for him and with hegemonic discourses and stereotypes unchallenged.

Kevin: Sometimes you’re not given the opportunity to say what you want to say. Again when we were talking about Aboriginals and where kids would come up with things like well they’re bludgers and they drink and there’s sort of not a chance to discuss that more. Being the only black person in the class, and being a Torres Strait Islander, I wasn’t able to sort of say anything. And I did sort of want to say some stuff but I was cut short. And again, you know, that sort of thing wasn’t resolved, that issue. People go away with negative feelings and thoughts and that kind of thing and they’re not making an educated decision based on what information that they received, like both sides of the argument not just one. And in the end, in that class, that feeling was still
there because it had not yet been resolved and I still feel a bit funny when I talk about it. I feel a bit sad but about how people feel and that not being able to discuss it more and stuff like that.

Kevin was able to express how important issues—such as Aboriginal negative stereotypes—were not possible to be challenged in classrooms. However, the effects of issues remaining unresolved were felt long after such incidents occur. In this case Kevin remained sad and still found such issues ‘funny’ to talk about. Although he felt that teachers were not discriminatory, hidden disadvantages and racism remained within the educational system. This informs a power relationship (Pettman, 1992) which exists within the school curricula which can exclude and contain Indigenous Australians. Assumptions can be difficult to challenge when opportunities are denied and this is evident in Kevin’s narratives. The expectation to conform to a societal system is high through constant monitoring and surveillance (Foucault, 1979). Thus Kevin’s ideas were expected to remain within the school’s ideology. bell hooks also identifies ways in which hegemonic ideas and assumptions of white people—such as the idea that whiteness represents goodness—are forced onto other groups.

Socialized to believe the fantasy, that whiteness represents goodness and all that is benign and nonthreatening, many white people assume this is the way black people conceptualize whiteness. They do not imagine that the way whiteness makes its presence felt in black life, most often as terrorizing imposition, a power that wounds, hurts, tortures, is a reality that disrupts the fantasy of whiteness as representing goodness.

(hooks, 1997, p.169)

Ways in which hegemonic ideas were continually dominant were evident in Kevin’s narratives and were considered discriminatory by Kevin. Yet these same or similar dominant discourses were not necessarily considered to be any form of racial prejudice by other students.

Racial prejudice

Although students had not admitted to experiencing any kind of prejudice by Marilyn during classroom discussions, students were able to discuss racial incidents with me during interviews. At the same time they did not always associate such incidents with racism or prejudice (discussed later). The educational environment silenced students like Kevin through the discourse of whiteness as the privileged
norm, so that they were unable to voice their experiences and thus make these experiences significant. For example, during interviews Kevin mentioned racism often thus showing it was a significant part of his life, and that he was aware of racism even when discussing other issues such as gender. With an understanding of how voices are often silenced (see for example Reinharz, 1994) and how direct questioning can be too confronting for students, I questioned Marilyn further on issues that might be considered sensitive to students:

H.H.: [Do you think that] sometimes though students might not want to actually say anything if it's too personal?

Marilyn: True. But often that comes out with English in their writing because they know it’s just me seeing that. And they know that I’m not going to stand in front and read it out and embarrass them. They know that. So often they sit there quite quietly, particularly you know Year 10 to 11, and particularly Year 12 that’s when it will come out, when they do maybe answer in front of their peers. They don’t want to, although I mean English is the subject really where you have to put a lot of yourself into. I’m constantly asking, well how do you feel about this, what’s your response. It’s different from other subjects. They’ve got to really get into the text. Their context is where they’re coming from is so important for the text, particularly in Year 12. That’s part of the syllabus, that’s the only type of questions that are asked in the text: the relationship between the reader and the text, and the writer on the texts. And certainly in Year 12 we try to choose texts that challenge their point of view I suppose what the syllabus perceives to be the kind of dominant point of view. Like we read the text *Wild Cat Falling* which is a very powerful Aboriginal text, which … kids have said oh this is just about stereotypical Aboriginals and whatever. And we really have to sort of say hang on and challenge that and spend time talking and giving them knowledge. And I know another teacher this year had trouble with his class and so he’s found really positive things to do with the Aboriginal liaison officer now, he’s become involved, to see another side of things. We really try and address that if it does come out. And it does come out in classrooms sometimes. But not in Year 10, going back to Year 10, not so much… It’s a shame it’s such a big group really but, yes in their writing it comes out and possibly with their close friends or something like that.

Notably, Marilyn acknowledged that teachers at school addressed Aboriginal and racial issues when these issues emerged. However, because issues were addressed only when they surfaced, institutional and hidden racism (Craven & Rigney, 1999) was never explicitly challenged. Again, significant issues were left undiscussed with
Year 10s because issues were not explicitly introduced by these students. However, during classroom interactions and discussions—when students were working on issues brought out through the reading of *The Inner Circle*—I found “non-white students identify racism as significant, whereas friendship and divorce issues seem to be identified by many of the white students” (journal entry, classroom observations, March 1999). My observations, however, were not explicitly noticed by Marilyn:

**H.H.:** Yes, when I actually talked to them they were in small groups, it was quite interesting how they were picking up different issues. And it seemed almost as if the non-whites were picking up more of the racial issues. And it seemed the others were picking up more of the problems, with the boys. So I was just wondering if that came out in their actual essays?

**Marilyn:** No, not that I remember.

My understanding that different students found different issues introduced through *The Inner Circle* as significant is, however, supported through students’ narratives. I found the conversational style of my interviews enabled students to introduce issues that were personally significant. Consequently, Kevin, a Torres Strait Islander, discussed many issues relating to racism and whiteness in depth, with a much clearer, first-hand knowledge of racism at work in society and in institutions. During interviews, Kevin introduced the topic of the stolen generation in Australia. The idea that whiteness represents goodness, an idea which is normalized through its identification with the colour white, also provides an underlying justification for the way Aboriginal children were forcibly taken away from their families. Kevin’s linking of not being given an opportunity to discuss Aboriginal issues at school to the stolen generation exhibited an understanding of how ‘black’ voices were often less significant than ‘white’ voices even on specific Aboriginal issues. This linkage related to the present as well as historically.

**Kevin:** And like our teacher was saying that they had like little babies, they would put them in the ground and they would kill them. That’s what our teacher was saying. And that’s sort of, you know, hard because it makes me feel like it’s again the thing with the stolen generations.

**H.H.:** What was the story behind putting them in the ground and killing them?

**Kevin:** It was sort of a way of wiping out the Aboriginal race I think.
Kevin articulated how people he knew were part of the stolen generation and how they subsequently were less able to identify with their family, customs or culture. By being placed with a ‘white’ family, their own ‘blackness’, which linked them to their Aboriginal culture, was lost or ‘stolen’ from them. Social injustices for Indigenous Australians have dominated much of recent Australian history (see for example Beresford & Omaji, 1998). Although Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their communities and families since the early days of European occupation (Forrest, 1998), acknowledgement of these stories is only slowly seeping into
school curricula. Only recently, and particularly with a 1997 Government Report, *Bringing Them Home*, have Australians been given opportunities to read stories by Indigenous Australians of their removal from family and communities. Thus "selective amnesia" (Patel-Gray, 1999, p.265) relating to Aboriginal realities in Aboriginal history filters down to schools through school curricula and enables myths to remain and resurface. However, the comparison—that Kevin mentions (above)—of government policies which forcibly removed Indigenous children, to incidents in Europe and America where children of young mothers were taken away to be adopted, provides an escape route for non-Indigenous Australians. Such comparisons enable the importance of incidents like the forcible removal of Indigenous children to be devalued and relegated as insignificant. For Kevin, significant Aboriginal historical issues remained unresolved and led to questions relating to school curricula:

H.H.: What about the curriculum itself?

Kevin: I think one problem I have had is when we start a discussion about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and there’s not a thing saying these two cultures, that these two people are different cultures, different kind of people, with different beliefs. And there are some similarities but on the whole there’s very different aspects and they’ve got different lifestyles.

Insightfully, Kevin identified how Torres Strait Islanders are often incorporated under a more general term of Aboriginal people, with assumptions that their educational needs and life experiences are akin to Aboriginal peoples. As Synott and Whatman (1998, p.55) observe, although the expression ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’ is often encountered in education, “the ‘Torres Strait Islander’ dimension in educational debates, policies and issues is rarely followed through”. The hidden and peripheral dimensions of Torres Strait Islanders filter through the educational system. To add to this peripheral dimension, living away from what could be considered Kevin’s ‘home country’, Kevin felt that links to his culture were broken.

Kevin: Well I think growing up in WA [Western Australia], and being such a long way from the Torres Strait we sort of, the ties with your culture, I think, break because you’re sort of learning a different kind of culture, European culture. You’re not learning the values of the culture, or the traditions that your parents were brought up in.
Breaks from what is considered one’s own culture are significant when, as for Indigenous Australians, kinship is attributed as an important element of identity (Forrest, 1998; Malin, 1998). This was evident from Kevin’s narrative where he identified family as being the most significant part of his identity. However, when I asked Kevin the most important thing about himself, his Torres Strait Islander identity was most significant. However, because this meant ‘being the other Indigenous race’ he found there were problems with Aboriginal people as well as white people, specifically in terms of not being recognized as separate to Aboriginal people.

H.H.: So what is the most important thing about yourself, to you?

Kevin: I think of myself as more of a Torres Strait Islander. I just think of everyone as just the same but there are cultural differences and your culture and your custom and your upbringing is always going to play a part in your future life or whatever you do… With being the other Indigenous race in Australia we have a problem with our Aboriginal as well as white society. Sometimes we’re seen from the white perspective where we’re one and all the same, and we’re not really. We’ve got a totally different culture. I mean there are a few similarities but different customs. We live differently. We eat differently and other things like that. We speak differently. That’s a problem for Torres Strait Islanders where they’re not recognized as a separate race and we’re sort of grouped as two. We see it with ATSIC [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Commission], the two together. But the Torres Strait Islanders now … are looking towards greater autonomy. They can be separate and have their own organization and look after their own affairs. And there’s also the problem of accessing various services within Australia, mainstream services. That’s a problem sometimes. I mean, not for me personally, but for other people. Sometimes it’s hard for them to access certain services that are available, the mainstream services.

H.H.: Do you find you’re almost forgotten here in the school, when they’re teaching history and that?

Kevin: Yes, I do. Because like we learned Aboriginal studies and we didn’t really learn anything about Torres Strait Islander culture. There’s not really a lot about what we are like, there’s more Aboriginal stuff, there’s not to say we’re neglected, we’re not discussed as much. The kids are not being taught really. They’re just taught like Aboriginals and that there’s not another Indigenous race of Australia. And I sort of do feel left out sort of. I mean I do sort of feel left out, because we discuss things like
NAIDOC week. NAIDOC week stands for National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Conservation. And I mean that I understood from Year 5 that the name, it’s National Aboriginal and Islander. Islander can be anyone. We’re sort of Islanders. That’s broad. There are different Islanders and it should have something like National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or something like that, because islander is just too broad. And we’re sort of left out in the dark. Certain policies are implemented by Aboriginal departments and government departments, without consulting Torres Strait Islanders and our sort of people involved in decision-making processes or the government agencies. And that’s one of the main reasons why there’s been a big push for a greater autonomy – so that we can have Torres Strait Islander people running their own affairs and making decisions for Torres Strait Islander people.

Thus although Aboriginal studies are taught at schools, Torres Strait Islanders often remain excluded from discussions. Kevin is acutely aware of his marginalization. However, resistances to power (Foucault, 1981b) as well as the need for negotiations with the contradictions presented to him are evident as Kevin positions himself significantly as a Torres Strait Islander, while at the same time he selects positions within a mainly white Eurocentric elite private boys’ schools, where he is also successful. The lack of inclusiveness for Kevin as a Torres Strait Islander is apparent. Kevin’s Torres Strait Islander identity is not reinforced on a daily basis at school, but instead is often made invisible in a similar fashion to how he is silenced in discussions which relate to his culture and identity. But, as Weedon (1997) suggests, although competing discourses may contain silences and gaps, competing discourses also provide spaces for resistance and challenge. Notions of resistance and challenge, with aspirations for greater autonomy for Torres Strait Islander people, are apparent in Kevin’s narrative. Significantly, Kevin is also resisting the tendency to homogenize all Torres Strait Islanders by stating that there are many ‘different’ Islanders. He thus highlights the diversity within Torres Strait Islander peoples. Indeed, overall there was a general lack of understanding of the many differences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including their many languages (Partington, 1998). The contradictions for Kevin show his resistance to dominant and more powerful discourses but within the social constraints of the school environment (de Lepervanche, 1994). Although not representative of all Torres Strait Islanders, Kevin’s experience of marginalization is an example of some of the struggles that exist for Indigenous Australians in Australian schools. Struggles relating to marginalization are further compounded by issues of racism.
which remain prevalent in schools. In the next section I draw attention to the issues of racism that became apparent during interviews.

**Acknowledgement of racism?**

The notion of unrecognized and unacknowledged privilege of whiteness, introduced earlier in this chapter, is evident in the reading of selected narratives of other male students. These students’ own whiteness was irrelevant to them and thus they felt that it was insignificant. However, there was a strong link between racism and ‘non-white’ people. In this section, I specifically draw on the narratives of Anthony, William, Ken and Robert (all of whom identified as either Australian or British). Students like Anthony and William took a more distant approach to the issue of racism whereby they acknowledged that racism existed in the school but accepted racism as part of life. The links of explicit racism to that directed at Indigenous people were strong for Anthony (who identified as Australian, born in Australia). Anthony suggested that there was *not too much* racism in the school because there were *not too many* Aboriginal students at the school. Thus fewer Aboriginal students at school were clearly and closely linked to less racism. Anthony also makes a distinction between Aboriginal students and students of other ethnic groups. With other ‘races’ it is possible, he argues, to ignore any racial comments more easily because of the possibilities of retorting with similar comments. In this way, selected racism can be overlooked. Racism thus appears in different forms in different situations (O’Grady, 1999; Rizvi, 1993). Racism is discerned to be less significant for other ‘races’ and Anthony returns to linking racism with Aboriginal people.

Anthony:  There’s not really any racism because there’s not many Aboriginals like there is in a majority of schools and I’m spending seven hours of my day here and the rest of it at home basically. So you come up against other races in sport and stuff and you just, if they do have racial comments against you, you just ignore it because you could easily turn around and say the same sort of thing back to them... Like you come across them like in town and they’ll ask you for money and stuff like this, and you just say no. I mean they don’t believe you and you probably because they face so many people who say they don’t have any money and they know you do. But yes, even if you don’t have any money they turn around and ask you and they probably follow you for like ages. But you’ve just got to say to them no. You just can’t turn around and say get lost you Abo [sic] or something like that because that’s when fights start and stuff like
This. And like you hear about all the Aboriginals in town getting into fights. But the police are always going to protect the white people over the Aboriginals because they've got that reputation that they start fights and all this sort of stuff. So yes, basically they're going to be the ones that they have to face the music basically when we don't and we probably just get off scot-free and that, yes they just start fights. Like you normally see them yelling out in town and all this sort of stuff and even the policemen will discriminate against them because that's how they've dealt with those sorts of situations before.

Anthony reiterates myths and stereotypes of Aboriginal people and their reputations in the city; reputations such as asking for money, yelling, getting into fights. He acknowledges that Aboriginal people are often discriminated against because of their Aboriginality. However, when I ask if he feels safe going into Perth he replies that he does feel safe and he then talks his way through his ideas and his experiences and negotiates himself into a position where he realizes Aboriginal people do not really hassle and cause trouble after all.

H.H.: Do you feel quite safe when you go into town?

Anthony: Yes, I still feel safe because you normally find the Aboriginals hang around in like groups and stuff like that and there's actually Aboriginal elders in the group. And they're sort of like, even guys that are like twenty-one, twenty-two years old they sort of like take responsibility of them and tell them what to do and this sort of stuff. So they just basically talk to one another in groups and you don't have a problem with them. But it's only like little kids that are walking around on their own when their parents aren't watching them. Yes you normally find it's the little kids that start hassling you or, either that they just like, or you just say you don't have any money and they just, like they'll ask you a couple more times and then they'll just leave. It's not a problem in town basically. Yes they all see that there's not much point going up to people hassling and hassling and hassling you because they're just not going to get anything out of it and eventually a policeman is going to walk past and they're going to be gone so yes.

Initial responses are thus informed by ingrained dominant discourses which form strong links between Aboriginal people and Aboriginal stereotypes. These initial responses did not, however, contain Anthony's contradictory feelings that Aboriginal people did not always fit their associated negative stereotypes. Furthermore, initial responses, if left undeconstructed, remain the more prominent ideas even if reality reveals different meanings. As our discussions continued
Anthony made a distinction between Aboriginal people in cities and Aboriginal 
people in the ‘bush’ (those living in rural and ‘outback’ Australia). He suggests 
that in the bush it was necessary to make friends with Aboriginal people because of 
the lack of choice one would have, but it would somehow be ‘all right’. Again 
Anthony makes the presumption that Aboriginal people are inferior to white people 
and that initially white people will always talk to white people, yet he suggests that 
over time it is possible to recognize that Aboriginal people are ‘pretty good people’. 
Through his presumptions Anthony retains his own more dominant social position 
of power (see also McLaren, 1998, 1999).

Anthony: You probably found that well, in Perth you’ve got more 
white Australians and dark skinned Australian so, you 
probably find that we’ve got more relationships with 
them. But if you go out into bush, I mean my cousins 
living up in Northam and that and if you go out there, 
there are lots of them and you probably find that you 
basically got no choice. Like there’s one running the 
shop and you’ve got no choice but to speak and 
gradually over time you just work out they’re pretty 
good people. But we only get that sort of opinion 
because we’ve got more people that we like I suppose 
we would go for, always go for talking to a white person 
to a dark skinned person. But if you go to the bush or 
something you’d probably find there’s a lot of dark 
skinned people, there so they, really, you’re basically 
stuck. You haven’t got a choice but then gradually you 
work your way through it and it’ll be all right, and you 
basically get to know and start making friends with some 
of them.

At a later interview, Anthony perceived a further connection between claiming land 
and Aboriginal people and racism. His digressive and sometimes contradictory 
thoughts enable racist ideology to remain intact:

Anthony: I reckon the racism issue was pretty big because it’s still 
going on even today and you’ve got Aboriginals trying 
to claim different parts of land and stuff like that. That’s 
something that has to be sorted out. You just can’t keep 
on going forever with it.

However, for William (who also identified as an Australian, born in Australia) any 
difference produced some sort of prejudice.

H.H.: What about the racism that was coming out of the book, 
The Inner Circle, did that relate to you at all?

William: Oh yes. But you see that almost everywhere. You don’t 
have to go and read The Inner Circle to see what racism
is all about. I mean it’s everywhere you go, isn’t it. I mean as much as you try and cut it down it’s everywhere. There are different races and different colour hair and different eyes and there’s always some sort of prejudice against each other.

For William there was a belief in the inevitability of racism because of differences, and thus a naturalization of racism (see also Morris, 1990). During interviews, in the localized situation at the specific time, I found that when students mentioned racism it tended to be linked to Aboriginal people. When implicitly linked to other ethnic groups, racism was discussed in such a way as to render it non-racist, but as friendly banter. For example, when I asked Ken (who identified as British, born in England) if he had any problems at school, he related to when he was called a ‘pom’. But, when I asked him what he thought about being called a ‘pom’, he replied:

Ken: Oh I don’t mind. It’s mainly by all my Italian friends. Yes, they think of me in that sort of way.

H.H.: In what way do they mean it do you think?

Ken: Just a term I think, just as a joke. I don’t take anything by it.

H.H.: And they are still your friends?

Ken: Yes.

Name-calling can take the form of racism (Craven & Rigney, 1999). However, students who considered themselves as friends would use terms like ‘pom’ and not consider the term racist. Ken also volunteered that he called his Italian friends ‘wogs’. Noticeably, as practices are used on a daily basis they become normalized (Apple, 1993; Morris, 1990; Ng, 1993). In this way, offensive and racist names are introduced into students’ everyday language and normalized. In a similar vein William spoke of how there was no racism or racist comments unless they were in ‘good taste’, thus suggesting that it was acceptable even though it might be considered racist. When William talked about Italian students he said:

William: You wouldn’t notice when you looked around the grounds that the Italians were all hanging in one group, but no one really thinks twice about it. There is no racism, racist comments around unless they’re in good taste to, you know, to the person, unless they’re friends or something. But you know wherever you go, there’s going to be some, you know, people are going to join together because they’re the same religion and they’re going to separate each other but that’s just life.
Racist names, as Robert (self-identified as Australian, born in Australia) indicates, are often not taken seriously by groups other than Indigenous Australians, and thus are not considered racist:

Robert: The Italians call us dumb-skips [sic] and all this, and yes so it does happen here by you know just not seriously. Like you see some white guys and they go Oh bloody bungs [sic] and all this, and they really get stuck in, and wogs [sic] and dings [sic] and all this. But it is going on but I don’t really see it.

Many students were able to identify situations associated with racial prejudice when related to Indigenous Australians. However, although racism existed between other ethnic groups within the school, it was not recognized as such, and in fact, was identified more as friendly banter than racism. Thus racism as an issue effectively remains hidden and obscured within school, but racism and negative stereotyping linked to Indigenous Australians remains perceived by these students as inescapable.

‘White trash’

Claims of resistance by white people believing that they are now the racially disadvantaged (see for example Nayak, 1999) add weight to popular prejudice within an Australian climate where Indigenous Australians are seen to receive privileges at the expense of white people (Mickler, 1998). These beliefs are reflected at all educational levels and led me to ask some of the students, during interviews when the issue of whiteness was discussed, if they felt racism could be acted out against white people. Richard, Anthony and William all answered with an affirmative. Both Anthony and William referred to Aboriginal people even though I did not mention them. Richard (who identified as an Australian and New Zealander), however, was able to discuss the issue in a more general and world-inclusive way, thus acknowledging that racism does not just involve Aboriginal people and white Australians. Whiteness only becomes visible when reference is made to non-whiteness (Muralleedharan, 1997). Richard also alludes to the power that is exercised by white people, but believes this is because there are more ‘white’ people than ‘black’ people in the world. It is easier to use binary pairs (Davies, 1996, 1997, 1998) such as white/black, which Richard links to powerful/powerless, so that it is less easy to acknowledge the existence of many different cultures.
H.H.: Do you think there can be racism against a white person?

Richard: Yes, there can actually I reckon.

H.H.: In what way?

Richard: Well like I hear people call them white trash and stuff like that just because they’re white. But there’s more, I reckon, I think there is like more whites than blacks, so it’s kind of like the whites overrule in that kind of way, but blacks just fight back kind of. And they can still call them whatever they want and all that. It’s just that, I reckon. And plus whites, when blacks get offended they get, sometimes they get really hurt inside and they get enraged and all that. So whites, I reckon that whites still can get like offended by all this and yes all that other country, other cultures and whatever.

Although Richard believes that it is the ‘blacks’ who are likely to be racially offended, he feels that whites could also be offended. Thus Richard was able to trivialize persistent racism against ‘black’ people by comparing racism experienced by white people to that experienced by non-whites. Simultaneous acknowledgement and trivialization of racism was also reflected in William’s narrative where he denies racism at the same time as exhibiting internalized racism. For example, he suggests that a lot of his mates are Aboriginal and so racism is not a big part of his life, yet he also suggests that it is not possible to walk past Aboriginal people without thinking of them in stereotypical ways or without thinking some racist thought. Thus he was able to unquestionably retain his white privileged position, while preserving the belief that he was not racist.

H.H.: Do you think people can be racist against a white person?

William: Surely yes.

H.H.: In what way?

William: If we can be racist against black people they can definitely be racist against us. It’s quite easy.

H.H.: Have you had experience with that?

William: Everyone, I think everyone has. Anyone that’s ever seen a few Aboriginals has seen racism you know. You cannot walk past an Aboriginal without, as hard as you try, it’s not, you can’t go past them and not think even the slightest stereotype or racist comment or things, like racist thought. It’s just natural to us because that’s the way we’ve been brought up, you know. But a lot of my
mates are Aboriginal you know, so racism isn’t really a big part of my life you know... it just comes naturally to me now. I don’t bother about whether someone’s black or white or you know. You notice it surely but it really doesn’t worry me because I’ve been around them so much that you know I’ve gotten used to them. They’re my mates you know. Quite good people.

For William it appears logical that if white people were racist against black people, then the reverse could definitely also be true. However, he provides no support for these ideas and instead reverts to discussing whites as having racist thoughts. William acknowledged that racism is socially constructed and ‘that’s the way we’ve been brought up’. However, his acknowledgement does not in any way challenge his own privileged white status. During interviews, other students like Anthony also contemplated discrimination against Indigenous Australians and the lack of tolerance and consideration showed to Indigenous Australians. Anthony acknowledged that as a nation, Australia was racist to Aboriginal peoples. However, he suggests that Aboriginal people will be racist because they are discriminated against.

Anthony: It’s a ‘catch 22’. Like they’re going to look at us and say well you’re Australian and you discriminate against us when we’re trying to get jobs so I don’t see why we shouldn’t turn around and discriminate against you. And they’re probably also going to think like look back at land right claims and stuff like that where we’re not very tolerant or considerate of their needs compared to ours, and we’re only interested in what suits us and not them. So they’ll basically look back and think that basically we haven’t given them any fair shots so they don’t really have to give us one.

Racism against Aboriginal peoples thus provided Anthony with a weak argument that Aboriginal peoples were racist to other Australians. At this stage, Anthony also does not acknowledge Aboriginal people as Australians. When I questioned Anthony further about racism against a white person, he answered that racism worked ‘both ways’.

H.H.: Do you think somebody can be racist against a white person?

Anthony: Yes, well, yes it’d have to work both ways. I mean I know, we’re racist too, in some ways we’re racist to Aboriginals. As a nationality we’re racist to Aboriginals and other races. But yes it’s got to work the other way because otherwise it just wouldn’t seem real. Because it would be like us being discriminated against by
Aboriginal people, and we don’t go and do it back sort of thing. It would have to work like that it just doesn’t seem that it would just be somebody just ignores it and goes like, ‘Oh yes, it’s all right’. People can’t do that these days, so yes.

A belief that ‘non-white’ people could be racist toward white people led to an acceptance and justification that racism was part of ‘the way life is’. The belief that racism against white people was a ‘reality’ enables the reconceptualization of racist discourses where white can be read as ‘victim’ and thus attributed a victim status (Gillborn & Kirton, 2000). A lack of historical knowledge on issues of discrimination and racism against Indigenous Australians has led students like Anthony to believe that racism occurs almost in a superficial way. The real life experiences of racism remain hidden. Racism is intrinsically connected to ways in which different cultures are perceived. Although students wanted to accept all cultures equally, perceptions with a dichotomous nature of ‘them’ and ‘us’ or ‘black’ and ‘white’ stubbornly remain. The persistence of stereotypes is significant, and it is important to discuss ways in which disruptions of stereotypes and thus a reduction in racism can occur.

Aboriginal stereotypes

Stereotypes, however inaccurate, are one form of representation. Like fictions, they are created to serve as substitutions, standing in for what is real. They are there not to tell it like it is but to invite and encourage pretence.

(hooks, 1997, p.170)

Stereotyping is a form of racism. Stereotypes are, as bell hooks (above) informs, a form of representation and thus help create and perpetuate myths. Myths can be maintained by social institutions such as schools, and aid in a continued belief of Aboriginal inferiority and help justify institutional racism (Beresford & Omaji, 1998). Therefore, it is important that teachers recognize and disrupt discursive understandings of stereotypes. Christina, aware of how myths were perpetuated, discussed how two of the students believed Aboriginal people received many benefits at the expense of white people. She was able to inform students when such an issue was introduced by students themselves, but it is unclear if any long-term deconstruction or changes in ideas occurred for students since as a result of the discussion students changed the subject. However, again issues were only addressed on an as-introduced and present-needs basis:
Christina: I read them an article about a young Aboriginal girl going for a driver’s license, I don’t remember what it was called, and they coped with that quite well, ‘oh wasn’t that unfair’, and so they do understand it... Tom and Robert had a fear about Aboriginals, how they were quite adamant that Aboriginals got all these benefits and Australians and the white people didn’t, we’re not responsible and that sort of thing. Actually, Tom and Robert, interestingly enough, I sat down with them and talked to them about different sets of issues about the fact that, put yourself in their position, imagine if you were taken away from your parents and put into an orphanage or your parents were separated. And your mother was abused constantly like sexually, emotionally, physically, you know. Put yourself in that position and then see what you come up with. They changed the whole subject and didn’t want to do it anymore. They chose something else after I’d spoken to them about it. Whether or not they changed it because it was too hard or I didn’t agree with it or whether they changed it because they thought maybe she’s got a point, I don’t know because I never asked.

H.H.: To what extent then, do you think they can take this on board?

Christina: Depends on whether you can educate them as much as you like, but the parents are the ones that have brought them up with these ideals. Because the parents are perhaps in a better advantage than the lower socio-economic, they’re likely to say things like the Aboriginals should do this or you know too many Asians, all that sort of thing. I’m sure their parents say it, because then they adopt the same principles. You can do as much as you can but those issues are so ingrained and so conditioned that, I’d like to say and hope to say that in the end they will go away feeling more tolerant toward different races and things. But it’s all we can do, all we can hope for.

Christina’s observations confirmed my own impressions of Robert’s attitudes toward Aboriginal people, perceived from an earlier interview. When discussing friendships Robert said he could be friends with anybody, but then added that friendship would exclude Aboriginal people because he would not get along with them. He appeared to construct Aboriginals as ‘others’ (Reay, 1995) and thus exhibit unspoken racism. However, Robert conceded that not all Aboriginal people fitted his image of an Aboriginal stereotype.

H.H.: Do you think you can be friends with anybody?
Robert: Well, you can be friends with anybody. It just depends on what they’re like. I couldn’t be friends with an Aboriginal because I wouldn’t get along with them and that sort of thing.

H.H.: Why do you think that?

Robert: Because they’ve been brought up differently. Like mostly kids at school here, their parents bring them up in a certain way, you know that this is right, this is wrong sort of thing.

H.H.: You say it’s difficult to be friends because they have been brought up differently, so how do you think you’ve been brought up differently to them?

Robert: Oh well, they’ve, from what the stereotype says and all that, they’ve been brought up like, the parents have their kids and then every Thursday they collect the dole and they sit around … and they just drink and smoke and all that. So that’s how they’ve been brought up you know. So that’s what they do. They just go as their parents. But we’re brought up, you know, you go to school, to get an education, to get a job and then you can earn money, and you can have a house and a life and family and all that. But then there are sort of like Aboriginal people that are, don’t do that, Aboriginal people that don’t collect the dole on Thursday and all that.

Challenge to dominant discourses that enable Munyarl mythology to persist and endure is essential and can be effected within schools. The phrase Munyarl mythology is often unknown in Australia, but importantly means “stereotypes and irrational beliefs about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Munyarl is a Bundjalung\(^8\) word that is best translated as pretend, make-believe (not true), a lie, or pack of lies” (Craven & Rigney, 1999, p.44). Although Christina was aware of myths relating to Indigenous Australians, there was still an underlying belief that parents retained greater influence than schools. Without more active school directives, her belief that students from higher socio-economic groups are less tolerant of different races and more advantaged than families from lower socio-economic groups left her with only a little hope of changing students’ ideologies. Central to social constructs of stereotypes is the notion of what Bhabha calls ambivalence, which gives currency to stereotypes and ensures:

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\(^8\) The Yugambeh-Bundjalung language, in its various dialects, was spoken by Indigenous Australians of the northern rivers areas of New South Wales into southeastern Queensland (see AusAnthrop: database on Aboriginal Australian tribes and languages, 2002).
its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalization; produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed.

(Bhabha, 1994, p.66)

Students were attempting to dismiss Aboriginal stereotypes as myths that had been perpetuated, but what Bhabha identifies as excess always proved to be easily recalled. Patrick’s ideas vacillated between Aboriginal people being considered the same at school, but also simultaneously being constructed as faster runners. He appears to be working with racialized stereotypes of Indigenous people as more athletic. His experiences were superseded by myths:

Patrick: I reckon they would be quicker. Yes. I’m not sure what else. Like at school level it would be the same, actually I think the Aboriginals would be faster.

H.H.: Why do you think that?

Patrick: Because of what I’ve seen of them. Like what looks you get when driving past and going through Derby. We usually stop to watch the game you know. They’re very quick, and like some of the AFL games.

Richard (who identified as an Australian and New Zealander) suggested that ‘not all Aboriginal people are bad’, but was perceptive when suggesting that first thoughts about Aboriginal people were often negative.

Richard: You see like Aboriginals when they are out in the streets and they don’t have anywhere to go they get like a reputation as to be like bad people. But not all Aboriginals are bad. Like there’s a couple at this school here they’re fine. It’s just like the way they’re brought up. Like as soon as you think oh Aboriginal you think oh yes on the streets trying to beat you up, or grab your money or something like that.

Stereotypes are often a false representation and a simplification (Bhabha, 1994). William easily recalled Aboriginal stereotypes, which included that they were rough, rowdy, rude and always drank. Although William was aware that these were stereotypical images and as a result of his experience suggested that the stereotypes were ‘completely untrue’, deeply ingrained ideologies were maintained with suggestions that there was some truth in these stereotypes but that Aboriginal people were ‘normally really good people’. William was insightful in how stereotypes remain dominant and that stereotypical ideology only needed reinforcement through
experience with one Indigenous Australian that was exhibiting stereotypical characteristics for these stereotypes to become dominant again.

H.H.: What about Aboriginality? Do you think you should be talking about it more in schools?

William: I think school’s more about learning your maths, your English, your social studies, you know geography. It’s not you know, learning about other races. That’s part of your social life so something that comes along as you grow up. You know they don’t teach you to wash your hands in school. That’s something that you’re taught at home you know.

H.H.: What about Aboriginal people?

William: Well the stereotype for them is that they are considered very rough and rowdy and most of them are considered to be very rude and most people are afraid of them when they see them walking down the street. And that’s all because like someone from another country can come over to Australia, hear what people say about Aboriginals and they see one walking down the street and they get very scared you know. Not because they’ve met them before but because of what other people have said. And I have a lot of friends who are Aboriginal because I used to play basketball and I live in Midland which tends to be an area where they hang out. And the stereotypes are absolutely untrue. Obviously there is some truth to it because the stereotypes are made when someone sees two or three Aboriginals drunk and passed out on the bench and they suddenly think ah, all Aboriginals are drunks and passed out on benches somewhere. So there are the few exceptions where Aboriginals are rowdy and a bit rough. But they’re normally really good people. I mean I’m sure there’s stereotypical, stereotypes about us. In fact I’m positive there is and it’s just something you have to live with.

H.H.: Do you think talking about Aboriginal people would sort of break that?

William: There are many, many groups that come to schools. They go to fetes, they go to the Royal Show you know and discuss Aboriginal rights and they discuss you know what the Aboriginals do to country and all that. But it does do a lot of good but not enough for me. Whenever someone sees that one Aboriginal that’s, you know, fighting or drunk or saying just, every time they’re going see though it just adds to the stereotype of their drunken. And the next month if they get over that stereotype a month later they see a couple of Aboriginals doing exactly the same thing it comes back into their head that they’re all a bit like that. And I guess it’s a way of you know. It’s like a short cut. Instead of going
around meeting all the Aboriginals you say, see one of them and your brain says, 'oh yes I know what they're all alike now'. So no one likes to be put into a group based on a person.

During my interview with William, he talked of being mates with Aboriginal people. However, William spoke of Aboriginal people being 'like half-castes', a term introduced by colonizers in Australia, with identities imposed on Indigenous Australians based on the colour of their skin and shades of darkness (Forrest, 1998).

William: Aboriginals aren't considered as highly by certain groups in Australia, especially in Western Australia. But other groups consider them to be perfect Australians. They were born here, they were bred here, they've been here forever, and you know we should respect them. That's what I believe.

H.H.: So you feel that you should respect them?

William: Yes, I believe that they're great people you know, it's just the stereotyping and all that. It's what people dislike about them.

H.H.: What sort of stereotypes do you hear of?

William: Well like, a lot of the Aboriginals are like half-castes that you meet on the street, a few of them they're considered trouble-makers and so on. And lots of them are, but then again so are a lot of white people. There's no more percentage of black people that are troublemakers than are white people you know. There are a lot of good ones out there so.

Through the use of such terms as 'half-caste', students' own privileged positions were amplified but Aboriginal people were relegated once more to less privileged, less significant, colonized positions.

Disrupts of stereotypes and racism

The reading The Inner Circle provided opportunities for students to explore their own connections to ideas presented in the text and in this section I examine students' discussions with regards to their exploration of concepts relating to stereotypes and racism. Students recognized the ease with which stereotypes resurfaced and the need to have only one Aboriginal person to depict a stereotypical
image for a more general suggestion that this image represented all Aboriginal people. Some students, like Robert, recognized how whiteness was an advantage:

Robert: If you’re white, you get treated better.

Stereotypes need to be deconstructed in classrooms as well as in society, but students also need critical analytical skills to successfully deconstruct racialized ideologies prevalent in society (see Aveling, 1998). Specifically, there is a need to disrupt prevailing myths of Aboriginal privilege (Mickler, 1998). Myths and stereotypes that surfaced during some of my interviews included the many negative racist stereotypes of Aboriginal people as drunks, trouble-makers and benefit-spongers. Noticeably, however, my interviews show promise for changes and the importance of teaching anti-racism at all levels in schools. For example, although images of stereotypes easily resurface, William believes in the need for respect for Aboriginal people, and overall believes that all cultures could mix:

William: There’s no difference between the Australians, Asians or Italians you know, they just mix in.

Believing that all cultures could mix and speaking from a ‘white’ Australian privileged position, however, presents a danger of slipping into an assimilationist position (see Haebich, 1988; Hollinsworth, 1998). Although William believes that there should be equity amongst different ethnic groups, William’s narrative shows that he recognizes how racism is deeply embedded in society, thus becoming ‘naturalized’, whereby racist thoughts initially resurface easily, unintentionally and unconsciously (Dyer, 1997). So that on further questioning, William also acknowledged the privileges of being white.

H.H.: Do you think you’ve got an advantage because you’re white?

William: Yes.

H.H.: In what way?

William: Well for some unknown reason, white people are considered more highly like, more highly than black people are. If a black person went to get a job, and a white person went to get the same job, same education you know, chances are that the white person would get it. If the population of the company was white, then chances are that the white person would get it you know. That’s obviously wrong you know. It shouldn’t happen but that’s the way life is.
So by turning the critical gaze on ‘whiteness’ there are possibilities for productive pedagogies committed to interrogating power relations and the privilege accrued to white people. For example, William was perceptive of the power of whiteness and how a white person was more likely to get a job because of hidden racial prejudice within the Australian society. Students like William thus acknowledged that racism permeates society and was clearly evident in employment situations, whereby students expect white people to get jobs or to be promoted ahead of non-white people. Scott similarly recognized that some rights, particularly in relation to employment opportunities, are not given to non-whites.

Scott: Sometimes black people are not treated with the same rights as white people, being treated as you, have the same rights as other white people.

H.H.: In what ways?

Scott: Just like if you had a job and had a racist boss, like you’d get promoted ahead of a black person. But even though they are better than you at the job, you get promoted faster than them.

Recognition in itself of privileged positions, however, was insufficient for any permanent changes. For example, Anthony understood how Aboriginal people were discriminated against in Australia. He acknowledged how stereotyping provides motives for continued discrimination, the unfairness of the situation, and that not all Aboriginal people fit their stereotype. However, the following interview extract shows that Anthony’s ideas remained embedded within dominant discourses reinforcing Aboriginal stereotypes, and reinforcing notions of ‘othering’ through identification of ‘them’ and ‘us’. At the same time as challenging the notion that Aboriginal people are an inferior race, through the suggestion that Aboriginal people aspired to the ‘same sorts of dreams as us’, thus aspiring to what could be perceived as ‘white people’s dreams’, Anthony is positioning Aboriginal people as inferior. His contradictory beliefs exhibit his willingness to accept new readings of Aboriginal stereotypes and Aboriginal history, but lack of new knowledge does not enable him to discard prevalent hegemonic discourses.

H.H.: You talked about how Aboriginal people had a hard time getting a job because people may not trust them, what makes you say that?

Anthony: Well I suppose in a way. Like you walk through town and stuff like this and you see one, like a lot of people like there may be three or four Aboriginals in town but you get an indication. You look at them and think oh yes
well if they’re in, if I’m in town there’s a lot of Aboriginals. I suppose they don’t really care about anything so they just like yell out and all this sort of stuff. And you think well, you’ve got, like, as soon as you see an Aboriginal somewhere else he might be raising a family of his own or something like that and have a perfectly good life. But you look on and think he’s Aboriginal who might be exactly the same as someone maybe in town, like an Aboriginal in town. And you basically take a view of the race as one whole one not as individual people. And also you hear a lot about like Aboriginals getting into trouble. Aboriginals doing this. Aboriginals doing that. And like people probably just have a racial discrimination against them and they just think that Aboriginals probably won’t work as well. And like, certain amount of people or anything like that, I don’t know what they actually think. But yes, you probably definitely can see that Aboriginals will get discriminated against in an Australian country I suppose.

H.H.: Do you think that is fair?

Anthony: It’s not really fair. But I suppose you can’t really do anything about it at the end of the day, when you think about it. Yes but it’s not fair because, when you think, you might know an Aboriginal person but then you just got discrimination of them on the whole. And also the fact that you just get stuck with it. And you hear Aboriginal jokes and this sort of stuff and they’re all like fun and games and that. But then you meet Aboriginal people but you really need to know them as one person not their race like, because you can get fairly decent Aboriginal people. And yes, they’re just like us raising a family and trying to get a good job and all that sort of stuff. And they’ve got the same sort of dreams as us but we’ve got to see them as an inferior race to us so we end up discriminating against them.

Anthony’s statement that ‘they’re just like us’ also raises dominant liberal-humanist assumptions (Weedon, 1997) which mask social power struggles and does not challenge his own positioning. The easy recall of negative Aboriginal stereotypes by students provides further evidence that dominant discourses in society are difficult to dislodge (Kenway et al., 1994; Weedon, 1997), even when personal experiences do not confirm or strengthen hegemonic discourses. Like William (earlier), Anthony could see how Indigenous Australians were disadvantaged when looking for jobs. However, there was also a contradictory belief that Kevin who was an Indigenous Australian from the Torres Strait Islands would be advantaged because of this same background. Anthony, like other students, strongly believed that one advantage for an Indigenous Australian, for example
attending a good school, would override all other disadvantages experienced within this position, thus newly situating this Indigenous Australian in an advantaged position. In this way, students are able to now reposition themselves as the newly disadvantaged despite their real-life advantages.

Anthony: I think he’d find it a lot easier being educated in a good school if he wanted to do something like Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders Commission or something like that. He would find it a lot easier to get in because he’s got a good education and also you can’t really have Australians looking after Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. They don’t really know what they’re talking about in a way, in a sense... He’ll definitely have an advantage in Australia because you probably don’t find too many Torres Strait Islanders in WA [Western Australia] anyway. They’re more restricted to Queensland and that sort of stuff, near their islands.

Students in my study remained uneducated about the many injustices and discriminations that faced Indigenous students like Kevin on a day-to-day basis. Anthony’s ideas suggest that education is of primary importance to Indigenous people. But his notions are inherently drawn from white hegemonic discourses whereby education conceived within white Eurocentric ideologies is more important than education about Indigenous Australians and their historical perspective, and will lead to greater success (but again within white Eurocentric ideologies and environments). Thus Indigenous Australian history and culture can remain subsumed under white history and culture. Schools are a powerful site where changes and challenges to dominant understandings are possible. Through discussions of issues highlighted through the deployment of specific texts in the English classroom, students were provided with opportunities to discuss issues such as stereotypes and racism. Specific texts can be particularly influential and narratives of Kevin, Patrick, John and Luke specifically show how anti-racist teaching could provide a more productive understanding of issues around racism and stereotyping. I was particularly interested in hearing what Kevin, as an Indigenous Australian, felt about these issues. Kevin identified with one of the boys in the story and felt such issues could be learned through reading books like The Inner Circle (Crew, 1999).

Kevin: You do learn a lot from watching films and reading books and reading other newspaper articles and things like that. You sort of get to learn about racism. You learn about the effects of racism on other persons, stereotyping. Like in The Inner Circle, he was always stereotyped as being just an Abo [sic] and really he suffered from a loss of identity. He didn’t really know who he was and he couldn’t be himself because he’d
always be referred to as Aboriginal. And you see how important the effect of stereotyping is, and racism.

*The Inner Circle* provided opportunities to disrupt deeply ingrained ideologies to enable boundaries to be broken and for a greater acceptance of people who are different or who have been ‘othered’. As Patrick wrote,

Patrick: *The Inner Circle* is a novel about boundaries that can be broken, no matter your colour, your country or your language. The two boys, Tony and Joe, both learn to accept each other for what they are... The novel is about life, about what friendship is about and how there is always room for two people no matter what colour they are or where they are from.

Without further deconstruction of emerging issues, Patrick’s understanding that ‘there is always room for two people no matter what colour they are or where they are from’ could remain within a liberal humanist discourse that not only “masks structures of male privilege and domination” (Weedon, 1997, p.41) but also masks structures of white privilege and domination. Such texts as *The Inner Circle* appeared significant to many students who, like Luke (self-identified as Indian), could relate racial issues to reality and to how people from different cultures could be friends, but more importantly understand and thrive on learning about different cultures. Luke’s narrative particularly shows that people from different cultures can identify with each other and be friends. His narrative also shows that people unlike themselves are not ‘freaks’, but that the embracing of different cultures would in fact be of benefit and allow for different foods and cultures to be welcomed. Luke’s narrative remains within a “rhetoric of ‘celebrating cultural diversity’ and tolerance” (Ang, 1996, p.36), (see also Hollinsworth, 1998; Jamrozik, Boland, & Urquhart, 1995). However, Luke’s understanding, for example that they are not ‘freaks’, also shows the potential for more productive deconstructions of issues such as multiculturalism and racism in which power relationships can be examined rather than cultural diversity and tolerance of not only Indigenous Australian cultures but also of the many other cultures within Australia. Luke recognized that school was an ideal place for such interactions because of students’ many different ethnic backgrounds.

H.H.: Going back to last semester you looked at different books, and Ms Marilyn tried to bring out different issues, what sort of issues do you think came out?

Luke: Oh yes, issues were I think it was racism, between black and white people. And, yes it showed how when like the
two boys became friends it was like a big step for the black and the white, the different cultures like combined. So that was like interesting.

H.H.: How significant do you think that is in real life?

Luke: Oh in real life I reckon it's good so like people can like understand each other and to know that they're the same people and they're not like freaks or anything like that. And they can all live together and find out about different foods, cultures, and things like that which is like important. So people can try out the different varieties in the world.

H.H.: How important do you think that is say in a school like this?

Luke: School? I think it's good too. So people can become friends with other people and they don't like disregard them. They stay in like, the white people and the black people are like different, they can like combine and become friends instead of just like one race there and one race on the other still don't know anything. So that's good. They can just play with each other and talk to each other just normally.

H.H.: How much does that happen in this school?

Luke: It happens a lot. Yes because everyone in this school is probably, like there's mixed cultures around this school so that's good to know everybody. And like nobody's like oh say you're like different so you get to play with someone else or something like that, it's not like that. They like to play with everyone. So that's good.

In a different way, John found he could relate to Tony in The Inner Circle because Tony (a protagonist in the story) came from a broken family and got shuttled around from his mum and his dad. John had written in a school essay that: ‘Tony was white and is living in a white trash hell’. When I asked John what he meant by this comment, he responded:

John: Well white trash, it's only sort of with white people, because black people seem to always stick together like families. Always do what their parents do, and they always support each other. But white people are different... and they separate from their own family just to get more money and stuff like that.

For John, there were significant differences between Indigenous Australians and white people and he felt himself disadvantaged as a white person. John was able to understand the special significance of kinship within Indigenous Australian
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communities and was unhappy about the way white people placed more importance
on money and material possessions and less on emotional needs. From the text The
Inner Circle, many students also identified the symbolic meaning of a palm tree
planted amongst roses: symbolizing Aboriginal people’s situation within a ‘white’
society. A poignant example is from Victor:

Victor: The palm in the middle of the roses is just like him (Joe),
a black man in a white man’s society.

For each of these students, reading and discussion of The Inner Circle provided
opportunities to explore their own connections to ideas presented in the literary text.
Although issues of concern were not always developed within the classroom,
examples of students’ narratives show promise for the thriving of more productive
anti-racist discourses. In many cases these discussions led to exploration of
concepts relating to stereotypes and racism. During interviews and discussions in
the classroom, I found students attempting, and at times succeeding, to disrupt
stereotypical images, as well as opening up issues of racism through the
introduction of texts highlighting such issues. However, resistance to Australian
Indigenous perspectives remained within the school culture, and students were left to
examine issues highlighted in their own time, if indeed they had that time.

Resistance to Indigenous knowledge

Osbourne and Tait emphasize the importance of treating marginalized or
disadvantaged groups as:

equal participants in the educational process. This task is not easy
because the extensive process of marginalizing Indigenous
Australians has often led to the loss of important knowledge – as
Indigenous knowledge bearers have been killed or died of old age
and because their ideas have been denied, refuted or dismissed as
superstitions.

(Osbourne & Tait, 1998, p.86)

The process of marginalization encourages younger people to ignore the wisdom of
elders, and oral history is often dismissed as inaccurate with ‘westernized’ ways of
storing knowledge in print as the significant acknowledgement of knowledge. Ideas
of hearing disadvantaged voices to facilitate democratization of power are reflected
in feminist writings (see for example Davies, 1996, 1997; Kenway et al., 1997;
Weedon, 1997) and in Foucault’s (1980; 1981a; 1981b) writings. Embracing such
notions within classrooms provide significant steps to social equity.
A discourse that divides Indigenous Australians from other Australians remains prevalent in the school. For example, Anthony, like many others, talks of Aboriginal people rather than Australians, and talks of Indigenous history from a privileged white standpoint. Anthony’s self-positioning is reminiscent of what Richardson and Villenas (2000, p.260) suggest as a situation which “ignores the cultural knowledge and histories of resistance and resilience”. In other words, regenerating history that ignores the cultural capital of Indigenous Australians.

Anthony: We’re not actually doing history yet, but next year. But we learned about Aborigines like in the first term and just about all the different theories about how they came to being here and how they lived from the land. Like, they changed to different areas. Like one minute they’ll live by the sea, and they worked in cycles when they came back to a spot, it’ll have a lot more resources for them to eat and use to build things with and that when they came back. Like there’s all the theories about the ice-age and like how they paddled down from Malaysia and it was mainly about that and the sort of tools that they used and the myths and sacred land and burials.

H.H.: What did you learn about white Europeans, when they came over, what happened?

Anthony: They were like probably really happy, like finding land or something, and they think it’s theirs sort of thing. So then when they dock up and find these people that don’t talk their language, really hard to get along with. And it’s like a lot less of them by the time they settled a colony. They just wanted to get rid of them, get them out of the way sort of thing. They like didn’t really care about them.

That “Indigenous peoples were free and self-governing societies at the time of colonisation, but were unjustly treated as disparate bands of ungoverned people, as non-societies” (Mickler, 1998, p.288) is seldom included in the school curricula. In Anthony’s narrative there appears to be some understanding that white Europeans invaded Australia and thus it was not a peaceful settlement as often suggested and taught. As our interview continued, Anthony acknowledged that, historically, treatment of Indigenous Australians was not fair and so problems have persisted to present times. Simultaneously, however, there was an acceptance of prevalent discourses, reinforced through the media, suggesting that Aboriginal people are ‘going a bit too far’ with their land claims:
H.H.: How fair do you think that is?

Anthony: It wasn’t that fair, because they were really here first. But I suppose you can’t really change anything now. It’s already happened. But it wasn’t really fair on them. We wouldn’t have had the problems we have today if something had been sorted out between them then. It’s still been going on for hundreds of years so it has to be sorted out sometime. It’s probably developing over time as we go. But like I think that it’s kind of yes we have to like be able to look at it ourselves, and just like learn that how to have some tolerance because it’s like really their country. They were here first. But it’s like we should be able to share it at the same time. But also the fact that yes it’s sort of, don’t really know how to say it, but they’re like, they do belong here at the same time. And I think, just a personal opinion, I feel that they are going a bit too far with claiming things, because they keep on. They win one case and then they’re back at it again two days later sort of thing. They’re never happy with what they’ve got. They’re going to eventually claim the land anyway, because they’ll just keep on winning at all these different national parks and that. It’s going to be hard to like keep our dominance I suppose. But it shouldn’t have been dominated in the first place. That’s the problem, it should have been shared. If we didn’t dominate the country in the first place it would have been a lot easier to be able to share the land, instead of our turning into their dominating it. But it’s taking them this amount of years to actually get it back from us when they should have done that anyway. So much time and money has been wasted on something as little that we could have been sorted out like years ago. I suppose they didn’t have that sort of knowledge then.

Acknowledging that Indigenous Australians were treated unfairly by white Europeans, Anthony spoke from a white dominant position whereby we should be tolerant of them because it was their country. Anthony reinforces a popular racist view that Aboriginal people keep winning in such issues as native land claims but are never happy, resulting in a situation where it would be ‘hard to keep our dominance’. In other words, ‘white’ dominance is believed to be the ‘natural’ state. A hegemonic white discourse prevails. The idea that Aboriginal people are ‘going a bit too far’ does not take social justice and historical discrimination into account. It fails to address the social construction of whiteness as a power base. So that even though Anthony believed Australia belonged to Aboriginal peoples, a racialized slippage enabled him to paternalistically suggest that non-Aboriginal people should be tolerant of Aboriginal people. The slippage enabled Anthony to retain his dominant white masculinist and racialized position within society.
Reflections

In this chapter I examined ways in which adolescent male students constructed their own identities within a privileged white position. I acknowledged whiteness as a racial issue and interrogated different forms of whiteness through students’ narratives. Through the examination of students’ narratives the “relational character of power relationships” (Foucault, 1981b, p.95) became clearer. Adolescent white male students in my research recognized their own privileged ‘white’ position, but prevalent discourses inherently positioned white people, and more specifically white heterosexual males, in ‘naturally’ dominant positions. Students were thus placed in a contradictory situation whereby interrogation and challenge to what historically has advantaged specific subjectivities also meant a challenge to their own privileged status. Students often acknowledged the existence of racism against Indigenous Australians. However, these students also presented ideas that because white people were racist against Indigenous Australians, then racism was ‘naturally’ exercised in reverse. Students, however, were perceptive of the power of whiteness and recognized how this privilege was reflected at many levels in society. Thus my research exhibits the promise for possible changes and shows the importance of interrogating power and practices of normalization, as well as incorporation of teaching anti-racism at all levels in schools.

Recent government proposals to introduce Aboriginal Studies as compulsory in Australian education is an initial step in recognition of the importance of Aboriginal history, but in itself is also problematic. For example, the title ‘Aboriginal Studies’ implicitly excludes Torres Strait Islander Studies or Torres Strait Islander Studies is subsumed under Aboriginal Studies, as indicated by Kevin in my interviews. Teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies is important, but the ways in which it is taught are significant to how students receive information. Attitudes and perspectives of teachers and what knowledge are taught is important (Lou, 1994) so that teaching should not remain, as in the past, within dominant white perspectives. Education can identify and examine how culture is often used to divide groups of people and produce ‘otherness’, but education can also lead the way in how to overcome subsequent divisions of peoples. Indeed, “schools have already proved a critical forum in the ongoing fight against racism” (Willinsky, 1999, p.90). Through education and the provision of multiple positionings, students can be encouraged to understand the complexities and interweavings of the social
constructs which provide them with their own positions. Marginalized or minority students could thus also be situated in more significant positions. As Davies wrote:

Each person comes to see the multiple ways they are positioned and the ways in which they are constituted first through one discourse and then another. Each person (no longer just those from subordinate or marginalised groups) takes up a knowledge of their own specificity, their embodiment as this person with this specific cultural/gendered/ethnic history, but also with political awareness recognising they are always constituted and always constitutive of others.

(Davies, 1996, p.146)

The use of one text in one specific classroom enabled some deconstruction of whiteness and of Aboriginal stereotypes. I found that texts can play critical roles in exploring ways in which students represent themselves and create their own ‘visible’ meaning of whiteness. The specific deployment of texts in the English classroom reveals the malleable nature of whiteness as a ‘racial’ category. Students’ narratives show promise for changes and illustrate the importance of teaching anti-racism at all levels in schools. My research shows that it is not enough to address issues only when students introduce them because students often find sensitive issues difficult to bring up. Frankenberg (1997b, p.215) reminds us that “the bulk of antiracist work is being done by people of colour” therefore it is important that white people also be active participants in antiracism. As Aveling (1998) suggests, there is a need to teach white students to deconstruct whiteness. At schools, teachers play a central role, but despite the best efforts of teachers, some students remain alienated. Social injustices continue and degrees of prejudice continue.

During my research I found evidence of dominant discourses which suggest that the ‘white’ experience remains the norm in Australia today. Further exploration on ways in which teachers can play crucial roles in the deconstruction of dominant ‘white’ discourses, for example through the use of texts and open discussions in the English classroom, is important. In this study I found that deploying texts in the English classroom played a significant role in Kevin’s experiences at school, where, as an Indigenous Australian, he was able to identify and discuss issues of marginalization, differences in treatment and discrimination. However, these issues remained unimportant for many of the students in this classroom. Greater exploration of these issues by teachers within the classroom could more effectively highlight and challenge issues of racial discrimination. The centrality of the school positions it as a significant arena where issues and dominant discourses can be
challenged and shaped by teachers, as well as by society through school policies. Although I found that school texts play a critical role in how students define their own lives and create their own ‘visible’ meaning of whiteness, I would conclude that raised awareness on its own is not sufficient to fashion more permanent societal changes.

Racial prejudice lingered and students perceived racism in different ways. Racism was often related to Indigenous Australians, but when students discussed name-calling (a form of racism) in relation to groups other than Indigenous Australians, racism was perceived as friendly banter. Despite teacher awareness of racial issues, I found that institutional and hidden racism was never explicitly challenged. Indeed, a shift from racial issues to multiculturalism obscures social processes which shape students through their education. Myths around Aboriginal stereotypes persistently reappeared but students showed their receptiveness to challenge and disrupt these stereotypes. Students’ narratives showed a promise of possible changes, and also illustrated the importance of teaching anti-racism at all levels in schools.

In this chapter I have shown how Torres Strait Islanders tend to be subsumed under a more general classification of Aboriginal people and Kevin as a Torres Strait Islander was often silenced on Indigenous Australian issues. Noticeably, experiences of Torres Strait Islanders can vary significantly to Aboriginal Australians and this should be recognized more widely. It is also important to recognize that although members of disadvantaged or marginalized groups experience educational social justice or succeed in perceived equitable educational systems, this must not be seen as representational of all in disadvantaged or marginalized groups. Although Kevin’s position as a Torres Strait Islander is not representative of all Torres Strait Islanders, it is also important to note that Kevin remained marginalized despite being positioned in a relatively ‘advantaged’ position in a private boys’ school.

Lastly, in this chapter, I examined ways in which systemic racism persists although the racism is not always explicitly acknowledged. Importantly, students recognized that racism against Indigenous Australians continued to exist but without educational tools in this instance to help students deconstruct these notions in a more permanent fashion, they were left believing in the inevitability of racism against Indigenous Australians. I explored the acknowledgement that racism was strongly linked to non-whiteness—which in this instance was linked more specifically to
Indigenous Australians—and how racism within white groups remains hidden in the form of friendly banter. This form of friendly banter was particularly evident amongst white students in respect of other white students of non-Australian cultural backgrounds, such as Italian and British. Racism could thus be used in daily practices and become normalized. Greater research in this area would be fruitful and Frankenberg's words remain pertinent:

Examining whiteness is as urgent now as it ever was, because of the persistence of systemic racism... I believe that we can turn the corner ... knowing more about what 'being white' means than we did two decades ago. Moreover, we will know it from a standpoint that is specifically antiracist, one that will at the very least challenge the apparent invisibility or neutrality of whiteness, and at best will also see whiteness as a place from which to participate actively in struggles for racial equality.

(Frankenberg, 1997b, p.216)
CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSIONS

There is a sense that no one theory can give the whole picture of an ever-increasingly complex global arena in which shifting gender meanings are experienced and negotiated in complex ways. Hence rather than try to tie up the understandings and definitions of masculinity, we suggest that masculinity needs to remain conceptually open and disputed. It should not preclude differences but should actively acknowledge incongruity as an important process of developing the field of inquiry.

(Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2003, p.146)

Reconsidering critical themes

In this thesis I conclude by identifying some of the main arguments in respect of theorizing masculinities as informed by a feminist poststructuralist perspective and show how my research has the potential for new knowledge to significantly influence teaching strategies and transform educational practices which can affect social justice issues. I looked at a specific group of boys in a particular localized context at one middle class single sex boys’ school in Perth, Australia. I focused on one localized context of masculinities and their formation in a group of adolescent males students’ lives. I also focused on analyzing the situationally specific formation and negotiation of subjectivities in adolescent boys’ lives at school. In this way I drew attention to how gender is implicated in or interweaves with social class, sexuality and ‘race’/ethnicity in individual boys’ lives. I also drew attention to these dynamics for one Indigenous male student to highlight the extent to which issues of masculinity are implicated in racialized social relations and practices which illuminate the effects of whiteness. I highlighted the ways in which hegemonic heterosexual masculinities remained dominant discourses allowing homophobia to resurface easily, despite students’ contradictory experiences. Moreover, I highlighted specific effects of masculinity through a focus on students’ responses to and engagement with specific texts in the English classroom. I also examined the male students’ interactions with their female teachers in the English classroom.
Through this research I thus produce further knowledge about the gendered relations and effects of certain pedagogical practices and their impact on boys’ fashioning of their masculinities. My study reveals the complexities surrounding discourses of hegemonic heterosexual masculinities (Frank, 1987) and privileges of whiteness of the situationally specific formation and negotiation of subjectivities in adolescent males students’ lives in one school.

In this thesis I elaborated on the theorization of masculinities by drawing on the works of feminist and profeminist writers (see for example Connell, 1995, 2000; Davies, 1996, 1997, 1998; Epstein, 1997, 1998; Frankenberg, 1993; R. Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Weedon, 1997) (Kenway, 1995, 1997; Lingard, 2001). An underlying feature of feminist poststructuralist research shows that people who are disadvantaged because of gender, ethnicity, social class, or sexuality are often denied agency through a process of shifting blame for prejudice to some other issue. An examination of ways in which the personal interweaves with the political shows how social injustices resurface. Although it is evident that empirical research on males per se is not new, it is worth noting that research on males as a non-homogenous group has grown with the expansion of feminist research and the growing understanding that females and males are not homogenous groups. Indeed, feminism has enabled the creation of an expanded vocabulary which includes ideas related to the gendered division of labour, patriarchy, sexual politics and sex/gender dichotomies (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2003). Moving away from understanding where it appeared not possible to “think through more than one difference at once” (Kobena Mercer cited in Hey et al., 1998, p.129), within critical sociological and feminist epistemologies it is understood that gender, social class, ethnicity and sexuality intersect and interweave in complex ways to shape subjectivities. A fruitful way to view the relationship between social constructs is that:

Racism is supported and reinforced by classism, which is given a foothold and a boost by adultism, which also feeds sexism, which is validated by heterosexism, and so it goes on.

(Yamato, 1990, p.22)

The methodological approach taken in this thesis was informed by a critical and poststructuralist feminist analysis within qualitative research (Weedon, 1997). Data was created from classroom observations, questionnaires, informal style interviews with teachers and students, and through an examination of texts used in the English classroom.
Overall, links were found between notions surrounding gender, sexuality, whiteness and racism and continued inequalities of power relationships. Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2003) suggest that it is power relations which remain undisturbed despite the historical changes to representations of masculinity. Central findings of this study show that adolescent males in this single sex boys’ school easily maintained socially constructed ideas surrounding the masculinization of males and feminization of females, with notions of homophobia embedded in discourses of hegemonic masculinities. A resistance to alternative masculine discourses shows the impact and maintenance of hegemonic heterosexual masculinities for adolescent males. However, my interviews with students also reveal that contradictory discourses were accessed by these students and show promise for possible changes and demonstrate the importance of teaching gender issues and anti-racism at all levels in schools.

Processes of normalization within gender regimes and heterosexual masculinities became apparent. Students in this school were aware of the power of whiteness and recognized how this privilege was reflected at many levels in Australian society. These students’ subjectivities were constructed within a privileged white position and represented through hegemonic masculinist and Anglo-Australian discourses. Racial prejudice lingered and students perceived racism in different ways. Racism was often acknowledged, particularly against Indigenous Australians. However, students also presented the notions that because white people were racist against Indigenous Australians, then racism was ‘naturally’ exercised in reverse. Although racism was more often related to Indigenous Australians, when students discussed name-calling (a form of racism) in relation to groups other than Indigenous Australians, this type of racism was perceived as friendly banter. The interrogation of processes of normalization and power issues showed that perceived dominant societal gendered roles and values remained strong, while attempting to accommodate new discourses which disrupted these dominant discourses.

Confirmation of hegemonic masculinity was often achieved through binary oppositions such as masculinity/femininity and heterosexuality/homosexuality, despite students’ contradictory life experiences. Indeed, data analyzed support Kimmel’s (1999, p.121) suggestion that “homophobia is intimately interwoven with both sexism and racism ... [whereby] women and gay men become the ‘other’ against which heterosexual men project their identities”. In the single sex school of my research there appeared to be an intensification of hegemonic masculinities and
homophobia with an unwillingness to interrogate these issues. This difficulty is not surprising given that this school is also a religious school where politics around particular issues, such as sexuality, are considered taboo. Tensions emerged between religious expectations and ways in which one teacher in this study managed the politics around issues such as homophobia, suggesting that teachers are policed in these types of situations.

A major conclusion of this study is that social injustices are easily maintained through educational institutions as active agents of reinforcing ideas and ideologies, particularly when changes mean disruption of privileges, such as privileges associated with hegemonic heterosexual masculinity or with whiteness. Although this study was conducted within a middle class milieu, and thus students were from an advantaged position in life, this does not justify their ignorance of issues of social justice. Indeed, the findings highlight the importance of this kind of critical approach with middle class boys in single sex schools. Important implications of this study are that schools need to challenge/assist students to interrogate deeply ingrained ideologies informing perceived gender dichotomies, the masculinization of males and the feminization of females.

Findings in this research also contribute to ways in which privileges, such as the privilege of whiteness, can be deconstructed and interrogated by those in privileged positions. My findings have potential significant implications for pedagogical practices. Education provides a means by which tools can be utilized to deconstruct and interrogate notions which maintain privileges, and in this study particularly white heterosexual male privilege. Within the educational system, an understanding relating to how subjectivities are shaped within a classroom setting will also lead to greater educational insights into how specific texts and classroom interactions affect students’ self-representation and understanding. Providing alternative reading positions and readings is recommended (see for example Martino & Cook, 1998). Students’ experiences are crucial so it is also important for strategies introduced into schools to “engage with the experiences of masculinity such readers bring with them” (R. Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998, p.200). Overall, a gender equity and social justice curriculum committed to interrogating the ways in which male students subscribe, invest and negotiate hegemonic masculinities is advocated and has particular relevance to those males already in privileged class positions in terms of working towards a more socially just society.
Emergence of significant arguments

In Chapter 6 I explored how certain issues played a central role in students’ attempts to understand and deconstruct hegemonic discourses that surrounded them on a daily basis in classrooms. Marilyn, the English teacher, introduced specific texts to help deconstruct notions of hegemonic masculinities and notions of the dichotomous nature of gender. It appeared that stereotypes continued to be reinforced and that the ways in which masculinities were recreated were relational and oppositionally defined in relation to femininities thus reinforcing a binary nature of gender (Davies, 1989c). Hegemonic heterosexual masculinities prevailed and many students continually used phrases such as ‘just like a girl’ or ‘like a woman’ in a derogative way, yet they never acknowledged that these phrases were detrimental to males and females. Significantly, some students accessed contradictory discourses and there were attempts at disrupting the binary notion of gender through acknowledgement that males and females were equally able to actively participate in private domains, which includes cooking and housework. However, these discourses remained subsumed under more dominant discourses that suggested these activities remained ‘female’ roles and that males were simply ‘helping out’. Students’ narratives thus showed how easy it was to receive contradictory discourses, acknowledge them, and yet remain convinced that discourses were not fundamentally contradictory. This is further illustrated through data examined in this same chapter which showed that adolescent males continued to reinforce the sexual division of labour through an association of gender with soldiering and war (Morgan, 1994). War was significantly associated with masculinity, whereby, although students suggested that greater equity should be possible within the home, this notion of greater equity was not extended to prevalent masculine roles such as fighting or defending one’s country. Findings in this chapter also reflect Haywood and Mac an Ghaill’s (2003, p.146) observations whereby “the difficulty of discussing gender is that we tend to know in a common-sense way (implicitly), the meanings and significance of masculinity”.

Data explored in Chapter 7 reinforced the dichotomous ways in which students shaped their subjectivities, only this time employing the binary of heterosexuality/homosexuality. The emphasis on hegemonic masculinity was heightened through the disavowing of male homosexuality and thus ‘stable gender identities’ were maintained through ‘oppositional desires’ (Butler, 1990). Discussions in this chapter were based on students’ responses to a specific incident
which occurred in the classroom. This incident signified important potential pedagogical possibilities for the deconstruction of normative heterosexuality and, through classroom discussions, could have benefited students’ understandings of issues relating to the construction of hegemonic masculinities. Students’ own initial policing of sexual boundaries was with the use of humour and remained implicated within a hegemonic form of masculinity (see Nayak & Kehily, 1997). There was a naïve assumption that gay people simply made choices about the way they acted or performed their subjectivities. However, the tensions around the subject of sexuality within a religious school effectively policed the teacher and also revealed a wide gap between theory and practice in this classroom. As a result, classroom discussions remained constrained and had an opposing effect to that which was desired and students reached several unsubstantiated conclusions, which included notions that there was a gay teacher at this school, that violence and humour against gay people were in reality condoned though not acknowledged, and that their teacher was homophobic, upset, angry or had taken offense. Anti-racist and anti-sexist policies exist in Australian schools, but at times racism and sexism appears difficult to recognize in practice and thus gaps appear. It is important to close the gaps between theory and practice and one way is to provide teachers with tools to address issues of racism and sexuality that emerge within classrooms.

Power relationships were evident as students emphasized their own hegemonic heterosexual masculinities (Frank, 1987). Despite their varied ethnic backgrounds, students situated themselves within a hegemonic heterosexual masculinist discourse as a way of distancing themselves from homosexuality. Notably, however, Kevin, an Indigenous Australian, was one student who implicitly challenged heteronormative thinking and practices by identifying issues relating to gay people as similar to those that occur for Indigenous people with regards to racism. His Indigenous cultural background and racist experiences together with his maturity enabled him to perceive connections to groups linked by other parallel oppressive discourses. These findings highlight considerable pedagogical potential whereby teachers could recognize that oppressive discourses can be challenged and interrogated in such a way as to not contradict the politics within religious schools. Greater support for teachers to address issues of power in classrooms would help support notions of multiple masculinities.

Within a ‘whiteness’ frame, the role of school texts in creations of subjectivities was examined in Chapter 8. School texts play a critical role in how students define their
own lives and create their own ‘visible’ meaning of whiteness, and in this chapter I explored how participants constructed their identities through an “interpretive process” (Tobin, Butler Kahle, & Fraser, 1990, p.7). I drew attention to the dynamics within the classroom for one Indigenous boy to highlight racialized social relations and practices. In contrast, examination of ‘white’ students’ narratives showed that recognition of privileged positions in itself was not sufficient for any permanent changes. Through a slippage of language, students were able to retain their privileged positions while preserving a belief that they were not racist. A silence around racism operated whereby racism was often unacknowledged. However, when it was acknowledged it was either linked to non-whiteness and to Indigenous Australians, or if within white groups it remained hidden in the form of friendly banter. Without further deconstruction of emerging issues, statements such as ‘there is always room for two people no matter what colour they are or where they are from’ or ‘they’re just like us’ could remain within a liberal humanist discourse that masks structures of white privilege and male privilege (Weedon, 1997). Given that liberal-humanist assumptions often disguise social power struggles and do not challenge dominant assumptions or positionings, active participation by schools and teachers are necessary for successful interruption of hegemonic discourses which reinforce inequalities in power relations.

The easy recall of negative Aboriginal stereotypes by students provides further evidence that dominant discourses in society are difficult to dislodge (Kenway et al., 1994; Weedon, 1997), even when personal experiences do not confirm or strengthen these hegemonic discourses. That we are socially positioned as opposing racism in public and private discussion is also supported by a recent study conducted by McLeod and Yates (2003) and supports the claim that silences around racism in Australia persist. Comparisons of incidents such as those of the ‘Stolen Generation’ to adoption of white children in Europe devalued and relegated incidents related to the stolen generation as insignificant. ‘White’ students’ self-positioning and understanding of Australian history also distanced and ignored the cultural capital of Indigenous Australians (see also Richardson & Villenas, 2000). Schooling is a major arena where Indigenous history is often mis-learned and, therefore, also a significant site where Indigenous Australians’ cultural capital can be incorporated into the curriculum. The creation of, for example, National Sorry Day in Australia (26 May) is a step towards acknowledgement of past injustices. For all these findings, as Frankenberg (1997b) reminds us, continued examination of whiteness remains pertinent and urgent.
Political support for hegemonic masculinity

The political stage has often required specific hegemonic masculine attributes. Sexuality, however, was often noticeably not acknowledged—or hidden—within public spheres and my research confirms that notions such as these continue to dominate when adolescent males access available discourses in the process of creating their subjectivities. The ways in which males perceive females and female roles are significant to understandings of power relationships. This research showed that these males’ perceptions of females often continued within dominant discourses that situated females mainly within private spheres. Females in particular have often been excluded from the political stage on the grounds that they did not conform to the ‘masculine’ characteristics considered necessary for the public sphere (Phillips, 1991, p.156). In the past, men’s knowledge was considered objective knowledge, while women’s knowledge was considered private and subjective. However, through the emphasis on men’s subjectivity and on masculinities as varied, it may be possible to ‘unmask’ and ‘depower’ males’ pretense of objectivity (Brod, 1994). Importance should be placed on society to treat females and males without discriminating on the basis of gender, ethnicity or sexuality. Nevertheless, it would remain necessary to ensure that there is a balanced presence in higher offices if females or minority groups are shown to be treated unfairly by society (Phillips, 1991). Equity in decision-making is crucial since females and males are all affected by any political policy decisions made. A balance of presence in all spheres is, therefore, important with respect to gender, ethnicity, sexuality and social class, so that, for example, it is not only white middle class males who are representative of all males. This balance of presence is also critical with the written word, so that it is not only specific male ‘voices’ that remain dominant. Research on masculinities, particularly in schools, creates greater understandings of multiple masculinities, many of which do not easily fit a hegemonic masculinity label.

My research shows that dominant discourses that essentialize male and female characteristics continue to be more easily accessible to these adolescent male students at school, despite students’ contradictory notions and experiences. Significant potential research can be undertaken to explore how teachers can make a difference. The social and political choices of males and females are affected by prevailing social discourses. However, choices are constrained, structurally and
morally, by their situation in context. Williams questions what real freedom or choice we have:

In our legal and political system, words, like ‘freedom’ and ‘choice’, are forms of currency. They function as the mediators by which we make all things equal, interchangeable. It is, therefore, not just what ‘freedom’ means, but the relation it signals between each individual and the world. It is a word that levels difference.

(Williams, 1998, p.148)

Williams further suggests that the term ‘freedom’ often becomes meaningless. There are sometimes no ‘real’ choices, for example, for females in having or bringing up children with constraints such as “lack of resources” or “gendered moral rationalities” in place (David, Davies, Edwards, Reay, & Standing, 1997, p.409). This leads to frustration and incessant guilt for females when societal expectations cannot or are not met. On the other hand, males often do not have the choice of bringing up children, but are expected to be the ‘bread-winner’. The prevalence of such ideas is confirmed in this research. Feminism has significantly contributed to issues relating to democratization within the family home by highlighting these issues (Phillips, 1991). Changes in public policies continue to have an impact on families which frequently create greater sexual and social inequalities. Policies which accept gender binaries unproblematically continue to contribute to the way females are expected to retain, often single-handedly, the greater responsibilities relating to child-care within the family. This effectively restricts that choice for males. In my research I found the concept of hegemonic masculinity invaluable in that it “allows for the unbalanced nature of gendered power relations in the schools to be explored whilst recognising that the dominant position is one that has to be constantly won” (Skelton, 1997a, p.351). The strengthening of hegemonic masculinity discourses effectively restricts access to other forms of masculinities for many males.

Discourses promulgated by populist writers with a strong thread that ‘boys will be boys’ resort to “invoking a fundamental biologism to account for boys’ behaviour and practices” and thus increase dangers relating to “programs founded on essentialised and naturalised notions of masculinity” (Martino, 1999a, p.291). In fact, Denborough (1997) views these expectations relating to ‘traditional’ masculinities as having destructive effects on males and females. Traditional masculine behaviours are subsequently used to “justify rather than explain behaviour” (Martino, 1999a, p.291). Ideas that boys’ hormones justify their behaviour or assumptions that ‘boys will be boys’ posit that all boys have similar
problems (Jackson, 1998). Perhaps it is “the fetishism of sexual difference” (MacInnes, 1998, p.31) evolving as an ideology because of a perceived threat to male power that reinforces gender as a sexual divide that becomes naturalized (see Peterson, 1998). Naturalized notions lead to discursive ideas such as boys are ‘naturally boisterous’ while girls are ‘naturally quiet’, girls find it easy to open up emotionally but boys do not, or that it is boys’ hormones at work when they are noisy. Boys are often expected to be competitive and aggressive whereas emotions, dependency and such things as touching are often discouraged or even forbidden. Naturalized notions that reinforce gender dichotomy remain discursively prevalent with a need to be continually challenged, and result in feelings of ambivalence. These expectations become essential components to males’ identities and are often reinforced in society. The quest for different explanations relating to gender issues suggests that there are different possibilities and answers to what can be done (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2003).

**Pedagogical possibilities and implications**

In Australia it has been acknowledged that we live in a multicultural society. This is reflected in differing degrees in classroom compositions around Australia. The multicultural features are further recognized through the introduction and implementation of public policies. How policies are accepted and implemented in schools and society will affect ways in which people are positioned and position themselves, as Pallotta-Chiarolli indicates:

> Today’s children are living in a world which is increasingly acknowledging the realities of its multiracial, multicultural, multisexual composition. As we are all exposed to a myriad of cultures, religions, traditions and lifestyle options, we need to develop in ourselves and in students skills of critical perception, critical thinking, the negotiation of differences, the passion for social justice, that engage with diversity rather than reconstruct it as homogeneity. (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1997, p.16)

However, cultural diversity is often ‘overlooked’ in a bid for power and maintenance of hegemonic discourses. Schools continue to have a powerful influence on the creation of social constructs (Connell, 2000; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2001) and teachers are often complicit in reinforcing discourses of hegemonic masculinities, aiding the socially constructed gendered division of labour. My research confirms ways in which such dominant discourses persist despite efforts to interrogate and deconstruct them. However, rather than blame students or teachers, it would be more
productive to provide educators and teachers with a framework for interrupting discourses of hegemonic masculinity (Meyenn & Parker, 2001) and deconstructing privileges of whiteness at schools. Providing teachers with adequate knowledge is not always easy, as Britzman (2000, p.200) notes, “there is still little agreement in our field of teacher education as to which knowledge matters”. It is here where more fruitful research could be conducted, with a more positive approach to how teachers can successfully enable students to interrogate hegemonic discourses that persistently reemerge despite the accessing of new layers of alternative discourses. My research reveals how it was possible, through the use of particular texts, for female teachers in the all boys’ classroom to open up spaces for male students to interrogate hegemonic forms of masculinities, to access alternative masculinities, and to interrogate power relationships, although this does not necessarily translate into a transformative social practice for boys in their everyday lives. Furthermore, my findings also show how easy it is for students to ignore social injustices in relation to racism and stereotyping of Indigenous Australians, and to retain notions that reinforce these injustices.

Connell (2002, p.xiii) reveals examples of the worldwide decline in gender equity with the continued gender disparities in both political and economic power. He warns that “history is not a one-way street [but that] things can get worse” and argues that a move towards a more ‘democratic gender order’ is important. Inequity is a concept that is fluid but its meaning at any given time is significant to educational policies. The focus of new research, however, should not be on male students’ disadvantages as opposed to female students’ disadvantages but “how can we address the problems that both girls and boys face in learning how to balance their roles in the private and public spheres of social life” (Lingard & Douglas, 1999, p.56). Deconstruction of dominant discourses, which position hegemonic masculinity as desirable, and how this positioning affects males and subsequently females is a step toward addressing such problems. A possible suggestion to rupture hegemonic discourses is to ‘immerse’ students “fully and exclusively in a radically different perspective that challenges mainstream ideology and confronts the learner with ‘information slanted in the opposite direction’” (Marcuse cited in Brookfield, 2002, p.278).

Schools are important arenas where masculinities and femininities are acted out on a daily basis. They are also important sites where not only critical awareness can take place, but where space and understanding can be created for all students. My
research reveals an area which I have been unable to explore in depth within the limitations of this thesis, but would be worth greater examination whereby white female teachers, even though they are white, as well as teachers, are at times situated in less powerful positions than adolescent male students (see also Bailey, 1996). The English classroom—my choice of site for this study—is a significant site where critical awareness and deconstruction of gender can occur. Teachers are in a central position to disrupt deeply ingrained hegemonic discourses which resurface and reappear with apparent little real change (Davies, 1989c). There remains a need to encourage male students “to shift ideologically in their thinking about masculinity; to read differently, acknowledging the naturalization in literary readings of misogynistic and patriarchal positions” (R. Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998, p.212), (see also Martino, 1997a, 1999c, 2000b).

Within classrooms it is possible to provide spaces for the disruption of binaries and of specific ‘norms’ because different speaking positions are available, where the unnamed “are named back into existence as part of a strategy necessary for moving past them. As teachers in particular, we are constantly caught between introducing something new and providing a critique of the old” (Davies, 1996, p.147). Generalizations about who is disadvantaged are difficult to make if based on whole groups. Instead it may be more prudent to address inequalities “that arise from the unequal distribution of resources, recognition and respect both within and beyond education” (Collins et al., 2000, p.17). Thus, it is probably more prudent to ask ‘which girls, which boys’ are disadvantaged (Collins et al., 2000; Lingard & Douglas, 1999; Raphael Reed, 1998; Teese et al., 1995). By taking into account issues not only of gender but also of masculinities, and not only of ‘race’/ethnicity but also of issues relating to whiteness, as well as issues relating to social class, schools could become more inclusive places. It is equally politic for schools to offer “the possibility for other voices and experiences, and a supportive environment for other ways of knowing” (McDowell & Sharp, 1997, p.102). Teachers remain central in effecting any desired policies. Although, as Lacey acknowledges, schools—and thus teachers—”cannot ‘solve’ the problem of racism [or sexism, or classism] in our society … they should surely not contribute to it, to the extent that they do” (cited in Gillborn, 1990, p.1). A significant difficulty which lies with any change of policy is that the effect is not always seen immediately. The effects may be seen only after a long period of time. Additionally, as Connell (2000) found, parents and society retain a great influence and may even be a source of resistance that is constantly being acted out on and by students.
Research continues to emphasize how students from perceived ‘disadvantaged’ groups persistently fail to succeed and how students continually make gendered subject choices (Collins et al., 2000). However, students coming from one or more of the perceived disadvantaged groups, Indigenous Australians for example, can and do succeed in schools. Troyka (1993, p.42) warned of how it was possible to contrive “a version of reality in which racism was seen as independent of and not integral to the way society is organized, structured and legitimated”. Although writing in the United Kingdom context, his warning is also pertinent in Australia. In this respect it is important that such issues as ethnicity, social class and gender are addressed within schools by taking anti-racism into consideration.

In research, teachers often tend to be cast in a secondary role with students as primary protagonists. I found that teachers were rarely in the foreground of ethnographic research, with a few notable exceptions (see for example Mac an Ghaill, 1994a). Pedagogical exchanges are under-explored within research on schools and this could be a fruitful avenue for future research. Teachers nevertheless play a vital and central role within schools and in the implementation of any curriculum (Renner, 1990) and particularly in what could be termed as the ‘hidden curriculum’—where teachers reinforce their own ideologies through their teachings. Where teachers are the ‘main characters’ in research, then it is often in a ‘critical’ manner. The far-reaching effects of teaching and the number of lives touched as discussed by Clark and O’Donnell (1999) emphasize the importance of the roles of teachers. The existence of masculinist discourses within education has major consequences for female teachers, and this has particular significance for female teachers in a private boys’ school where they are a minority as females but also form part of a white majority. In my research I found that pedagogical exchanges in the classroom affected teachers’ positionings. The manner in which masculinities is perceived affects teachers’ responses to male students at school, as well as to the ways in which teachers position themselves or are positioned. To some extent, my research confirms Connell’s observation that “to understand the gender regime of a school one must understand the way gender relations impinge on different groups of teachers, the responses they make and the strategies they try to follow” (cited in Mac an Ghaill, 1994a, p.18).

Researching with female teachers is significant because they do not need to fit into a specific hegemonic masculine role. When male teachers do not fit into a hegemonic
masculine type, this may affect their abilities when confronted by sexist attitudes in male students. Katz (2000) suggests that this could be particularly difficult for gay teachers and subtle reasons may exist for a teacher’s silence. It is essential for male and female teachers to actively participate in the research for pedagogical changes. At times, female teachers can stand back from becoming these ‘macho’ figures, or role models, and they can also distance themselves from being only a mother figure (as for example both female teachers in my research, Marilyn and Christina, effectively did in different ways). It is important to challenge hegemonic discourses to enable the emergence of equity for non-whites; for females; for non-able-bodies; for gay and lesbians; and for any other group that may be categorized as ‘other’ and hence marginalized. Teachers are pedagogically central to where, as Harvey and Hergert (1986, p.158) wrote, “meaningful educational change must ultimately take place in classrooms”. Significantly, no real changes happen without teachers. At the same time teachers need to understand and believe in the need for changes in order to institute these changes (Gaine, 2000). Since a change needs to also occur with males, it is imperative that the call for more female, or ‘feminist male’, teachers in boys’ schools as well as ‘white allies’ be adopted.

A socially unjust educational system is also created through under-representation of groups such as Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in the education profession. Although teachers and classrooms are small units within educational systems, they are also positioned centrally for any social justice policy implementations. As Lingard pertinently writes:

> In education the smallest and most important unit is the teacher and the classroom. It is here that social justice will have to be achieved through reconceptualised curriculum and pedagogy. This is the very core of the educational process, that is, the complex interactions between teachers and students.

(Lingard, 1995, p.11)

Pedagogical exchanges, the complex interactions between teachers and students, provide frameworks from which future social justice policies can be employed. As suggested earlier, teachers are central in any educational learning situation yet in research they are often positioned as secondary to students or blamed for (re)creating inequalities and disadvantages at schools.

Attitudes and expectations of teachers are important (Gillborn, 1990; Hatchell, 1998) and frameworks through which they understand students and thus choose information and strategies for teaching are constructed over teachers’ lifetimes. Mac
an Ghaill (1994a, p.25) suggests that biographical details are “important in shaping male teachers’ subjectivities”. Biographical details are equally important for shaping female teachers’ subjectivities and this factor was revealed during my interviews with teachers. Previous understandings of masculinities and teaching of males was particularly significant for these teachers teaching in an all boys’ school. Blair (1998, p.17) found that teachers, through the use of stereotypes, often made sense of the way particular groups of students behaved. She therefore suggests that one of the advantages of interviewing teachers was that it enabled the deconstruction of “teacher’s discourses in order to understand the framework used by teachers for understanding pupil behaviour”. Through educational research relating to single-sex and mixed classes, teachers become aware of such issues as how mixed classes do not always enable both female and male students to develop all the necessary skills. Teachers often become aware of how female students are used in classrooms to help control the behaviour of male students. One study led to teachers’ confessing “to having learned a great deal about gender issues ... and to have expanded their repertoire of teaching strategies to include more gender-inclusive approaches” (Parker & Rennie, 1997, p.129). It is important for teachers—both male and female teachers—to understand how discourses of hegemonic masculinity affect them and their teaching, as well as to be aware of how hegemonic masculine discourses affect their students. Greater research in the area of pedagogical exchanges in different types of classrooms would be fruitful.

**Final reflections**

Although my research focuses on males, it is important to recognize that hegemonic discourses of masculinity and whiteness and their associated privileges affect both females and males. Thus the interrogation of normalized practices of hegemonic masculinities and privileges of whiteness will also affect females. At this point, it is important to re-emphasize that I do not intend to generalize the findings of this research and suggest that all schools in Australia will have similar responses. Thus a limitation of such research is that my findings relate to a specific site at a specific historical time. Nevertheless, there are noticeable similarities in my research to other studies, not only in other Australian contexts but also in other ‘westernized’ countries. Through linking my findings to studies in other ‘westernized’ countries, a pattern can be discerned showing that Australia is moving towards a global concept of hegemonic masculinities and the notion that whiteness remains a privilege.
My study reveals how easily students from different cultural backgrounds become influenced by dominant societal discourses in Australia. However, the diverse ethnic backgrounds of the students in my research also enabled glimpses of differences in accessing alternative discourses. These glimpses support the need for research which explores "how other cultures may produce different kinds of genders that are not confined to a rigid fe/male binary" (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2003, p.149). Looking towards the myriad societies worldwide, it is possible to explore alternative gender regimes. However, with the rise of globalization and the spread of western capital to 'non-western' countries, it is also important to examine the effects of normalized practices of hegemonic masculinities on localized culture (Connell, 2000; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2003). The close connection of hegemonic masculinist discourses to 'the privilege of whiteness' discourses presents us with further questions relating to the colonizing forces of globalization and how these will potentially affect gender regimes in localized cultures. This interconnectedness between globalization and patriarchy (or hegemonic masculinities) provides a fruitful area for further research.

My research supports that notion that a strong force appears to keep old discourses in place (Davies, 1996). With the emergence of new discourses, while old discourses remain unchallenged and relatively strong, there is always the danger that it is these old discourses that will return to take a dominant place in society again. For example, discursive power relationships often remain unexamined and so the 'privilege of privilege', such as that associated with hegemonic masculinity, remains invisible. Kimmel suggests that:

The privilege of privilege is that the terms of privilege are rendered invisible. It is a luxury not to have to think about race, or class, or gender. Only those marginalized by some category understand how powerful that category is when deployed against them.  
(Kimmel, 2001, p.3)

Instead of uncritically accepting that, for example, all males accept hegemonic masculinity and the related power as the norm, school curricula must develop skills in students which enable them to understand the significant bond between power and knowledge (Foucault, 1980). This understanding provides a way to explore different truths. Pedagogy is a crucial tool which can be developed so that students recognize "how social forms at particular historical conjunctures operate to repress
alternative readings of their own experiences of the world” (Giroux, 1995, p.49). Opportunely, we need to remind ourselves that knowledge is associated with power and with freedom. Learning our multicultural and Indigenous histories will enable us to gain knowledge and move out of entrapment which dominant discourses may enslave us in (Donovan, 1991). Schools play a crucial role in this learning. In this way, students are able to interrogate processes of normalization which reinforce notions of hegemonic masculinity and the privileges of whiteness, and to access alternative discourses.
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APPENDIX 1

Copy of letter from school to parents

Dear Parents,

During Semester One an educational researcher, Ms Helen Hatchell, will be visiting your son’s class (Ms Marilyn’s Year 10 group) (name given in original correspondence but pseudonym used here).

Ms Hatchell is completing her Doctor of Philosophy at Murdoch University and her observations of the class are part of her research for her doctorate.

Ms Marilyn will be teaching the group as usual. Ms Hatchell will merely be observing the group from time to time to evaluate how the boys are positioned in response to text and she will also evaluate the methodology used in classroom presenting of material the students are given.

The aim of the research is to explore the many ways to improve teacher delivery in the classroom in order to maximize student learning and enjoyment in the learning process.

Some of the students may be interviewed (and sometimes taped) and a questionnaire will also be given for the boys to complete at home.

All materials will be treated highly confidentially by the researcher. (We will only be given the results of the research not the information received from the students).

If you have any concerns about this research please feel free to phone me or Mr (name given) (Acting Deputy) during school hours on (telephone number given).

Yours sincerely,

(Head of English)
26 February 1999
## APPENDIX II

**Parents' occupations, education and family income linked to social class**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother's Occupation</th>
<th>Mother's Education</th>
<th>Father's Occupation</th>
<th>Father's Education</th>
<th>Family Income</th>
<th>Social class identified with</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registered nurse</td>
<td>University degree</td>
<td>Company director</td>
<td>University degree</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relocation consultant</td>
<td>University diploma</td>
<td>Powder-coater</td>
<td>University diploma</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>University degree</td>
<td>Bricklayer</td>
<td>Apprenticeship</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>University degree</td>
<td>Mechanical draftsman</td>
<td>Technical college</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>University degree</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Secretarial</td>
<td>Business consultant</td>
<td>University degree</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Upper middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary Teacher</td>
<td>Year 10 GCE A levels</td>
<td>Teacher and psychologist, principal environmental scientist</td>
<td>Masters degree, University degree</td>
<td>Above average, Above average</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Franchisee</td>
<td>Year 11, apprenticeship</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Upper middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home duties</td>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td>Advertising manager (own company)</td>
<td>Went to university</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>Plumber/builder</td>
<td>TAFE*</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank officer</td>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td>Public servant</td>
<td>TAFE diploma</td>
<td>Average-above average</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Manager of courier company</td>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settlement agent</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Graphic reproducer</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic chores</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>State public servant</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Below average</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Marketing executive</td>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td>Social trainer</td>
<td>Year 10 &amp; TAFE</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director sec/business proprietor</td>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td>Small company manager</td>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre assistant &amp; surgical technician</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Company owner</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchandiser</td>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>Technician supervisor</td>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book-keeping</td>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td>Builder by profession, catering business</td>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisor</td>
<td>Year 9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Working class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Year 8</td>
<td>Computer contractor</td>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td>Below average</td>
<td>Working class</td>
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</table>

*Technical and Further Education*
APPENDIX III
List of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marilyn***</td>
<td>British</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina***</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Australian, Italian</td>
<td>Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albert</td>
<td>Australian, Italian</td>
<td>Australian/Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td><em>information not provided</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony**</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry*</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td><em>information not provided</em></td>
<td>Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gavin</td>
<td><em>information not provided</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td>South African, Australian, Scottish</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry*</td>
<td>Australian, English</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>South African, British, Australian</td>
<td>Australian/British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td><em>information not provided</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Australian, South African, English</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John*</td>
<td>English, French, German, New Zealand</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken*</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin**</td>
<td>Torres Strait Islander</td>
<td>Indigenous Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larry</td>
<td><em>information not provided</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke*</td>
<td>Australian, Indian, Nepalese</td>
<td>Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td><em>information not provided</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>Australian, Yugoslavia</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noel</td>
<td>Australian, Italian</td>
<td>Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick*</td>
<td>Australian, Scottish, Welsh</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard**</td>
<td>Australian, New Zealand</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert**</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>English, Australian</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott*</td>
<td>Australian, English, Irish</td>
<td>Australian/English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuart</td>
<td>Australian, Italian</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom**</td>
<td>Italian, Australian, English, Welsh, Greek</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>Singaporean, Bruneian</td>
<td>Singaporean Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesley</td>
<td>Australian, Italian</td>
<td>Australian/Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William**</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Students interviewed once

** Key students also interviewed at the end of the school year

*** Both teachers interviewed
## APPENDIX IV

**Language(s) spoken at home**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Language(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albert</td>
<td>English mostly but sometimes Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>English, Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>English, Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>English mainly, Torres Strait Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larry</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noel</td>
<td>English mainly, some Italian with grandparents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuart</td>
<td>English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wesley</td>
<td>English, Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>English</td>
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</table>
**APPENDIX V**

**Students’ places of birth, nationalities and ethnic backgrounds**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of birth</th>
<th>Nationalities identified with</th>
<th>Ethnic groups</th>
<th>Mother’s place of birth</th>
<th>Mother’s nationality</th>
<th>Father’s place of birth</th>
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</tr>
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<td>Bunbury, WA*</td>
<td>Australian</td>
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<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>New Zealander</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>New Zealander</td>
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<td>Australian</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<td>Australian</td>
<td>Melbourne Aus</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>Anglo-Saxon</td>
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<td>Australian</td>
<td>Australian</td>
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<td>Australian</td>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth, WA</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Yugoslavia</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Australian</td>
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<td>Australian</td>
<td>England</td>
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<td>Italian</td>
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<td>Queensland</td>
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<td>Perth WA</td>
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<td>Italian</td>
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<td>Nepalese</td>
<td>Madras, India</td>
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<td>WA</td>
<td>Italian, Sicily</td>
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<td>Italian</td>
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<td>Australia</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Australia</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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<td>Australia, English, Welsh</td>
<td>Welsh</td>
<td>Christchurch</td>
<td>Yugoslavian</td>
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<td>(single mother)</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perth, WA</td>
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<td>Indigenous Australian</td>
<td>Thursday Island Queensland</td>
<td>Torres Strait Islander</td>
<td>(single mother)</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Brunei</td>
<td>Bruneian</td>
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<td>Singaporean</td>
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<td>Scotland</td>
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<td>British, Australian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Western Australia*
APPENDIX VI
Initial questionnaire

Name:
Address:
Telephone number:

Investigator’s name and address: Helen Hatchell
Institute of Education, Murdoch University, WA 6150.

Please return this questionnaire sealed in the envelope provided.
I would appreciate you answering all questions. Some of the information I have asked for may be of a sensitive nature and may be difficult to write about. However, I feel these are important issues relating to my research and to social justice.
All information revealed in this questionnaire will remain confidential and anonymous.
Additionally, these questionnaires will be securely kept in a locked cabinet.
Appendix

What is your age now? ..................years ........months

Which TEE (Tertiary Entrance Exams) subjects are you planning to take?

What do you think you would like to do after leaving school/university?

What is the highest qualification you wish to attain? (e.g. teaching diploma, science degree, printing apprenticeship).

Where were you born?

What is/are your nationality/nationalities?

Indicate which ethnic group/groups you feel you belong to (e.g. Australian, Malaysian, German) i.e. you can belong to more than one ethnic group.
Where was your mother born?

What is/are your mother’s nationality/nationalities?

What is your mother’s present occupation?

What was the highest formal education attained by your mother?

Where was your father born?

What is/are your father’s nationality/nationalities?

What is your father’s present occupation?

What was the highest formal education attained by your father?
Describe your parent’s combined present income (please circle):
below average average above average well above average

How would you describe your social class? Are you (please circle):
working class middle class upper middle class

If your parents have moved to Australia: How long have they lived in Australia?

If your parents have moved to Australia: What were your parents’ occupations prior to arriving in Australia?

If you have moved to Australia: Have your parents maintained their level of living standards since the move? In what ways?

If you have moved to Australia: Since moving, please explain in what ways your environmental and living standards have changed?
In what ways do you think being a male has privileged you in your educational opportunities?

In what ways has your social class given you educational opportunities which you may otherwise not have been given?

In what ways has your ethnic background affected relationships with your peers at school?

In what ways has your ethnic background affected relationships with your teachers at school?

In what ways do you think a different ethnic background would have provided you with ‘better’ educational opportunities?
APPENDIX VII

Copy of consent letters

(Originals on Murdoch University headed paper)

Project Title: Students' interaction with school texts.

I am a PhD student at Murdoch University investigating how students position themselves in the classroom particularly in response to selected school texts. The purpose of the study is to illuminate and understand how students position themselves in relation to race, gender and social class, the results of which is likely to have implications for future classroom praxis.

You can help in this study by consenting to complete a questionnaire and to be interviewed. I would like you to take the questionnaire home to complete and do not anticipate it will take very long. Contained in the questionnaire are questions about level of education, income and other questions which may be seen as personal and private. Therefore, participants can decide to withdraw their consent at any time. However, I do feel these questions are important within the context of this study. The interviews will be conducted at school, during lunch breaks, and these will usually take no longer than thirty minutes. The interviews will centre around questions relating to the selected school texts studied and will be audio-taped. All information given during the research is confidential and no names or other information which might identify you will be used in any publication arising from the research.

If you are willing to participate in this study, could you please give your consent by signing this letter, and also asking your parent or guardian to sign, retaining one copy and returning the signed copy to me in the envelope provided as soon as possible. If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact either myself (Helen Hatchell) on 9360 2625 or one of my supervisors, Dr. Nado Aveling, on 9360 6261 or Associate Professor Jan Currie, on 9360 2377.

My supervisors and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study has been conducted, or alternatively you can contact Murdoch University's Human Research Ethics Committee on 9360 6483.

Many thanks and best wishes.

********************************************************************************
I (the participant) have read the information above. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to take part in this activity, however, I know that I may change my mind and stop at any time.

I understand that all information provided is treated as confidential and will not be released by the investigator unless required to do so by the law.

I agree that research data gathered for this study may be published provided my name or other information which might identify me is not used.


Participant                      Date

Parent/Guardian                   Date

Investigator                      Date

Investigator's name: Helen Hatchell
APPENDIX VIII
Follow-up questions

Name: ..................................................
(N.B. All the information given will remain anonymous)

What language(s) do you speak?

What language(s) do you speak at home?

Think about your own situation now: who you are, your home life, your school life, your choice of career. Compare and contrast this with how different you think things would be if you were a female.

Additional thoughts: (E.g. Thinking of the differences you have identified, how fair or unfair is this?)
Student’s name: ......................................

What do you understand when people talk about the ‘middle-classes’ in society today?

List 5 things, in order of importance, that are important to you:
Eg: Things like:
. being born in Australia or being born somewhere else (specify country/city);
. your social class (please specify which)
. the ethnic group/s you belong to (please specify)
. the colour of your skin
. being born a male
. being able to speak English and/or being able to speak another language (please specify other language)
. soccer or rugby or rowing or ...?
. being able to attend this school
. being able to live ... (please specify where)
. anything else that is of importance to you

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Why did you place No. 1 in that position and why is it important to you?
Student’s name: ...........................................

We often hear the phrase “boys will be boys”. Discuss.

What do you understand by the phrase “just like a girl”? 
Student’s name: ....................................

How is an “Australian” portrayed in the film Gallipoli?

How do you fit or not fit into this image?

How would you describe an Australian today?
Appendix

Student’s name: .........................

Draw or describe something and/or someone that is uniquely ‘Australian’.

Which character can you identify with in ‘The Club’? Explain your choice (about a paragraph).

Circle the words which you think best describe a typical ‘Australian’ (see Martino, 1997a, p.16).

- friendly
- scornful of authority
- loyal
- daring
- rough
- unfairly critical
- a rebel
- unashamed
- larrkin
- mediocre
- a knocker
- rejects snobbish behaviour

- defiant
- a mate
- homophobic
- bigoted
- insensitive
- uneducated
- laid-back
- adventurous
- lazy
- down to earth
- an underdog

- easy going
- boozier
- emotional
- male
- sexist
- unrefined
- enjoys drinking beer
- slob
- racist
- pragmatic
- egalitarian

Add any of your own words:
How has gender been significant to participants?
What is the significance of being male?
What are the roles of females today?
How has social class been significant to participants?
How has ethnicity been significant to participants?
In what ways have participants felt discriminated against?
What issues have been highlighted through reading *The Inner Circle*? Further explorations of gender roles, masculinity, ethnicity and Aboriginality, and emotions are possible.
What issues were identified as important through reading *The Club*? Further explorations of sport, masculinities, and females’ roles are possible.
What issues surfaced through watching the film *Gallipoli*? Further explorations of Australianism, whiteness, war, mateship, and violence are possible.
APPENDIX X
Texts used in the English classroom

Gary Crew: *The Inner Circle.* Published in 1999

*The Inner Circle* is a story of two teenage boys struggling for personal identity, and the narratives are presented alternatively through the eyes of both boys. The story raises issues such as prejudice relating to Joe, an Aboriginal boy from the ‘bush’, and indifference of the world for Tony, a white Australian boy from a divorced family. Neither one of the boys believes that he ‘fits in’ society. Both boys feel like misfits, but for their different reasons. They find themselves connected and are able to provide solace for each other through sharing of their stories.

David Williamson: *The Club.* Published in 1978

*The Club* is a satirical glimpse of Australian males and looks at the power behind the ‘big men’ of the sporting world. It is about a Melbourne football club. It is about modern football which is “part of the popular entertainment industry. It has its performers, its managers, its promoters and plenty of hype” (Ian Turner, Winners and Losers in the City, *The Club*, p.x). *The Club* is also about money and massive transfer fees, about loyalty and big business, pride in craftmanship and ethics, about financial gain and social ability, and about winning and losing and hangers-on. Issues of masculinities are inherently displayed, with the ‘ocker’ male image portrayed. The contradictions and the group power struggles that occur within such groups and organizations become apparent through the narratives.

*Gallipoli.* Film written and directed by Peter Weir (1981)

Peter Weir’s film *Gallipoli* is portrayed from an Australian perspective showing Australia’s involvement in a growing European war during the First World War. Although an anti-war film, it nevertheless celebrates and romanticizes male friendship in the extreme conditions generated by war. The two main protagonists are Archie, a blond romantic country boy, and Frank who is from the city. Using the war in Europe as a background, the film shows how Archie and Frank meet and become friends while running in races in Australia. When they enlist they are placed in different regiments as ‘runners’: Archie into the elite Light Horse regiment and Frank into the Infantry. However, they meet again in Egypt and become comrades-
in-arms when Frank is able transfer to the elite Light Horse regiment. Gallipoli becomes their next stop and the film highlights Australia’s participation in the war through the fighting in Gallipoli and the fruitlessness of that battle. The film represents the Australian male in wartime, celebrates youth, life, friendships and courage, and romanticizes the notion of going to war. Issues relating to wars, and more specifically the futility of wars, are evident. The significance and strength of ‘mateship’ in Australia becomes apparent. *Gallipoli* additionally shows the strong ties that still existed with England, while at the same time representing Australia as still a young country.
APPENDIX XI

“The Thought Fox”

I imagine this midnight moment’s forest:
Something else is alive
Beside the clock’s loneliness
And this blank page where my fingers move.
Through the window I see no star:
Something more near
Though deeper within darkness
Is entering the loneliness:
Cold, delicately as the dark snow,
A fox’s nose touches twig, leaf:
Two eyes serve a movement, that now
And again now, and now, and now
Sets neat prints into the snow
Between trees, and warily a lame
Shadow lags by stump and in hollow
Of a body that is bold to come
Across clearings, an eye,
A widening deepening greenness,
Brilliantly, concentratedly,
Coming about its own business
Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox
It enters the dark hole of the head.
The window is starless still; the clock ticks,
The page is printed.

Ted Hughes, The Hawk in the Rain (cited in Stake, 1995, p.73)
APPENDIX XII

Scenarios provided for students' conflict resolution role-playing

1. A father objects to his son playing loud rock music.
2. A mother wants her daughter to work on her homework instead of watching television.
3. A teacher orders an insolent student to get out of the classroom. The student refuses.
4. A customer takes an appliance that will not work back to the department store for a refund. The sales assistance refuses to give the refund.
5. A police officer asks a driver suspected of drinking to take a drink-driving test. The driver refuses to take the test.
6. A student wants to leave school and get a job. Her parents are greatly concerned.
7. A daughter comes home late from a party. Her father is very upset at her lateness.
8. A boy has a fight with his girlfriend.
9. A wife has a fight with her husband.
10. A school principal is confronted by a parent who insists that her son is being victimised by teachers.
11. A person making a long telephone call will not vacate the telephone box for a person with an urgent call to make.
12. One car passenger wants the window open, the other wants it closed.
13. A motorist accuses a cyclist of being a traffic hazard. The cyclist claims she has as much right to use the road as a car.
14. A son wants his father to give up smoking. The father is not willing to do so.