

## Chapter 7: Changing Opinions

### Introduction

This thesis has described masculinity as a socially-learned set of practices, wherein men are acculturated to behave in ways that are seen as acceptable. The broad range of emotions and behaviours that young children exhibit gradually become refined and restricted as boys are taught what are desired gender performances for them. The absence of defined, timeless and trans-national attributes of masculinity leaves it as a constantly re-negotiated state, altering in the face of a changing polity, technological advances and emerging social movements. And yet masculinity is presented by media and cultural avatars as a singular, stable trait. If there were only one form of masculinity which all males would eventually embody, there would be no need to teach boys that crying is emasculating. Boys would become hegemonic males on their own without an exhortation to, in the words of my high school motto, *Virilita Age* – ‘act manfully’. However, among the nuanced range of masculine identities, it is only the narrow range of hegemonic performances, embodied by a small percentage of men (Connell 1995), that all men are expected to strive for. There is a disjuncture between the expectation that masculinity is a constant which all men will come to possess, and the realisation that there are different masculinities, located in a hierarchy of status levels, and which are contested and competitive.

Eventually males realise that masculinity is not stable, either in society, or across a man’s life. What a man aspired to be as a child may not be what he becomes, and, importantly, it may no longer be what he desires to be as an adult. Not every boy manages to become an astronaut or a racing car driver, but not every adult male who had those dreams at seven years of age has any interest in them twenty years later. As some of the case histories which follow show, men who conceptualised masculinity through their work or their body in earlier years can come to find a new identity in roles that they may previously have seen as a female domain. Young men tightly held their emotions in check because ‘boys don’t cry’; they refrained from talking about feelings, because this is what girls and ‘poofs’ did. But later, some of these men found greater depth of friendship when they allowed themselves to feel emotions

beyond restrained joy and anger, and to speak of personal difficulties rather than persevere with the 'sturdy oak' façade described by David and Brannon (1976).

Learning to be a man is a lifelong project. It is not complete once you learn how to shave, get your first job or become a parent. The same can be argued for girls becoming women. Under different pressures at different stages of their lives, from peers, superiors and media, each woman will form herself into her adult persona. Like men, she will combine her physical presence, ideals, beliefs and attractions with inputs from the social world to create a self which is individual, reflective of the social and historical moment in which she is informed, and continually open to re-forming. Apart from drawing similarities between the basic process of combining the self with the social world, I do not make any further claims to present a theory of female socialisation.

New situations and events allow a re-evaluation of what masculinity means to individual men, just as similar changes re-create what a society considers masculinity should be. Competitive displays of masculinity appear to permeate adolescence and early adulthood (Plummer 2001; van der Meer 2003), although other ritualised events such as becoming engaged or married become public displays of having attained the status of man. Participants discussed how the pressures of performing hegemonic masculinity dissipated once they had a girlfriend, married, or, importantly, fathered children.

Once the period of competitive, sometimes aggressive, masculinity passes, men described how they were less in the thrall of hegemonic masculinity and its public performance. As men became freer in their ideas about how they were expected to behave, they became open to information around them that further expanded their ideas. Reading was cited by several men as providing a wider window with which to consider the world. The topics read were diverse, with some changing men's ideas of gender and sexuality, and others reshaping men's ideas about their lives in general. Men read theology, both of their own religion, and that of other faiths; they read history, poetry, philosophy and newspapers. Sociology and psychology books on gender and relationships assisted men to understand how they related to partners and peers. Men critically compared religion and science; and Australian culture with

other cultures. From a maximum security prison, Damien studied. His problematic drug use brought him to prison.

Damien: I completed a fair bit of study in the drug and alcohol field. It was something that I was interested in. I had the practical. I had the life experience. So I decided to get my academic as well. So I did a number of university courses through correspondence, and then I did a TAFE diploma through correspondence.

PM: Did that help with parole?

Damien: No. Didn't mean shit for parole. It was a) to kill the time and b) to learn a bit. And I actually learnt a fair bit about myself. (incarcerated mechanic, 37 y.o., metropolitan area)

Damien's world opened up to him, ironically from within a closed world. The liminal sexual marketplace of prison also acted to force Damien to reconsider his ideas of sexuality and gender, and this rethinking will be addressed in detail in this chapter.

Men who travelled spoke of the importance that experiencing different cultures had on what they considered to be correct behaviour. This was in the context of the social world in general, as well as sexuality and gender norms in specific. Travel gave them the opportunity to experience diversity, which was so often missing in their younger lives.

Moving into the workforce potentially brought young men into contact with a wider group of people: men and women of different ages, cultures and experiences. As with the reading and travelling, what men were exposed to in the workforce (unless it was male-dominated like most trades, or rule-bound like the armed services) was diversity. Exposure to difference meant that preconceptions about a range of 'others' were challenged.

Books, travel, contact with diversity and extreme experiences allowed men to re-evaluate their ideas about gender, and in some cases ideas about sexuality, although this was not universal. Some men remained within hegemonic masculinity and endorsed many of its indices, such as perceived differences between genders, but relaxed on others such as the role of emotions in their lives. Some of the younger men had thoroughly re-evaluated their ideas by their mid-20s, and some held tightly

to traditional understandings of gender. Some of the older men expressed violently hostile attitudes to homosexuality, and some had had periods of personal growth and even epiphanies in later years. In short, not all men adapted their understandings of gender and sexuality, and those who did, did so at different stages and due to a range of influences.

This chapter will look at the various experiences which allowed men to re-evaluate their ideas of gender in general. Broad aspects of gender-relearning will be discussed, as well as examples where men described these experiences re-shaping their ideas of sexuality. The chapter will conclude with examples of how changing their ideas of masculinity and gender have impacted on other areas of these men's lives.

**Books: 'You took the risk of feeling uneasy'**

Men described a range of ways in which they became open to new ideas about their social world. Books featured in several participants' accounts, and were described as having the capacity to show them a world beyond their immediate environs.

Ryan described how he and his wife gained a deeper understanding of the differences between genders, reading John Gray's (1992) *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. Although he acknowledged that it may be considered 'pop psychology', the book gave them a basis for discussing their evolving relationship, and their relationships with other people. His wife had:

... worked in a male industry since she left school, and thought she had a fair grip on the way [men thought]. She didn't have a clue. And after reading this thing with her I was damn sure I didn't have a clue. I mean, I *knew* I didn't have a clue. But reading the book only made me more aware of the fact that I don't have a clue. We get on much better because of it. (former air-force officer, IT professional, 53, metropolitan area)

Although this book does tend to maximise the differences between genders and relies on evolutionary and biological explanations for these differences, it did open up a discourse for Ryan and his wife to discuss what masculinity and femininity meant, and allowed them to relate emotionally.

Books provided the impetus for a change for Tom, and were also linked to the idea of meeting a community with shared interests. In a short period of time, his wife left him and he had to leave full-time work in order to care for his young sons. He began smoking cannabis regularly and was becoming deeply depressed. After hearing a radio show on men's groups he made contact with the presenter.

Tom: I rang him up and, as I said, cried down the phone to him. He said, 'Hold on, I'm only doing this because I'm experienced on radio, but I've got a person you can talk to about this'. And this other fellow gave me a call back about half an hour later. He started sort of quizzing me about where things were and how I was going. He said, 'Have you read [Steve Biddulph's book] *Manhood*?' I said, 'No, no'. He said, 'OK, we'll get you a copy in the next day or so'. I always felt like someone was sending me a lifeline in a sense.

This story is underpinned by three factors related to becoming open to new ideas:

- Tom's life was in a state of crisis and he needed to make changes to the way he related to people and his ideas of masculinity;
- Biddulph's (1995) book acted to reassure him that his responses to life changes and the ways he felt as a man were valid;
- In this anomic state, he made contact with a new group of men and was open to new ideas. They held shared ideas about masculinity, were available emotionally, and allowed him to re-evaluate his previous need to be stoic.

Tom described how men were otherwise expected to behave in a crisis:

Tom: I suppose the way I feel about it is that you're expected as a man to be able to cope no matter what is going on. And that even asking for help in a sense was an admission of failure. (cleaner, 36 y.o., rural area)

Although Tom rejected aspects of the hegemony, having an authoritarian, military father, he had still felt the need to be the strong provider. Reading about alternate ideas of masculinity, and socialising with men who shared these beliefs, allowed him to open up to men in ways which he had previously seen as taboo. He was able to lean on other men for support, cry when he needed to, draw strength from being supportive to others, and feel more comfortable about physical contact with this new circle of friends. Ten years after this event, the men's group still forms a major part of Tom's social network and emotional support.

Leo worked in the publishing industry, and cited access to a wide range of books as formative in developing his intellect and broadening attitudes.

Leo: I spent three years working in the book trade between 1962 and '65. I remember books coming out our ears in this place. I mean what you can see is nothing to what I've got. I've got a couple of palletfuls of books in the garage which we don't want to get rid of but we don't need. And I was introduced to books at that time.

Leo describes himself as a Charismatic Christian, although he appears clearly uncomfortable with some of the dogmatic conservatism of this branch of Christianity and its political affiliations.

Leo: I personally believe the current church scene, Charismatic Pentecostal scene in Australia, is a dead end. I think the Christian Right getting behind Bush in America is not the path to peace but the road to Armageddon. I think it's gross. I have been always an outsider in the Church. (retired student advocate, 62 y.o., metropolitan area)

Leo's 'outsider' status is a form of anomie, where the group's norms do not fully resonate with his own. This sense of distance from the rest of his church allows him to formulate his own worldview, without the constraining capacity of adhering fully to Church orthodoxy. With this openness, he continues to use reading to present a wider lens on the world, and discussed purchasing a book by a former charismatic preachers who had recently come out as gay. Books continued, in this context, to bring him into contact with lifestyles and experiences beyond the shared attitudes of his church community.

Justin was also a Charismatic Christian, and attended a conservative college in preparation for the ministry during the 1940s. He found the curriculum stifling and restricted, and eventually began to read outside of the canon.

Justin: Well I read a very good book on the varieties of religious experience and came to terms with some sort of relationship between theology and psychology, and I'm still working on that. [...] And ah, I would sit down in the park there and I used to read. Well there were all these authors who I was never encouraged to read at [deleted theological college]. They somehow gave me some sort of liberation. [pause] Well I really got out, branched out by myself in a sort of way. There was no-one else in the college who wanted to discuss those things.

PM: So your academic development, even in an academic institution, was somewhat held back?

Justin: Oh yes, I was being brainwashed. I wasn't able to think outside [of what I was taught.]

[...]

Justin: And I've done a heck of a lot of reading, and I had to go through was I going to give all Christian faith away and sort of become [agnostic]. See I read extensively the works of Freud and Jung. And I've got books on that. And you take the risk of feeling uneasy.

PM: That's an interesting phrase. What does that mean?

Justin: It means that... feeling half guilty, sort of turning the back on the fundamentalists, a struggle to get away from that which has sort of kept you in narrow confines and just living, that sense of guilt, not doing what's expected of you. (retired minister, 77 y.o., metropolitan area)

Moving beyond the recommended readings of his faith allowed Justin to develop a more personal religious life which incorporated philosophies of other religions as well as psychology. This sensitised his mind to the potentialities of difference. I will return to Justin's journey of development in the upcoming section 'Contact with other people and ideas', looking at how this initial questioning of orthodoxy was augmented by another aspect of re-learning gender – meeting a diverse range of people and trying to understand their viewpoints.

Sam also described the importance of books in helping him re-evaluate many aspects of his life. In his 40s, he began to read beyond his earlier interests. This led to him attending personal development courses, where he was again encouraged to read widely.

Sam: Coming out of the army up until 30 years ago, these books would have been filled with military history. I was interested in nothing else. Military history. I suppose it was a pretty dyed in the wool sort of read. I'd been interested in history and then I was reading military history, and then one day I thought, I'm spending all my time in the past and nothing in the future. And then I started these [personal development] courses. And then people said to me, 'Have you read so-and-so?' and they lent me the book and I read it.

As with Tom, Sam found that people with diverse interests directed him to read beyond the confines of his earlier interests. Personal development took over from the rut of military history. His attitudes towards priorities in his life changed, as did his ideas about sexuality. In a drunken rage during World War II, he had tried to strangle

his best friend who made a pass at him. By his 60s, his attitudes had completely altered, and he credited this to both meeting a wider range of people in adulthood as evidenced by the personal development courses, and the associated readings.

PM: You've changed your thinking about what are acceptable forms of sexual behaviour and relationships. What changed in-between the periods where you held those two different sorts of opinions?

Sam: I suppose, I suppose the type of book I was reading. If you look at my bookcases now, you will see an entirely different type of book and a different type of music ...

PM: OK, so what have we got, we've got stuff on self-improvement, some theology ...

Sam: There's metaphysics. I suppose mathematics. Theology.

PM: You trained as an engineer, didn't you?

Sam: Mmm.

PM: This is not very rational stuff. This is a very different type of brain.

Sam: Oh yes. (retired engineer; alternative health practitioner, 72, regional area)

Of note are the facts that all of the books described in these interviews were non-fiction: novels were not cited as having any influence, and similarly there was no mention of electronic forms of media. In regards to television, this is perhaps unsurprising, due to the largely negative gay characters featured on television until comparatively recently (Brown 2002; Hart 2000). However, television shows like *Dawson's Creek*, *Party of Five* (which featured positive, albeit minor, gay characters) and the gay-themed *Will & Grace* can be expected to be cited in future research as providing positive role models, especially when compared to earlier media presentations of other sexualities as detailed by Russo (1987) or Rick's citation of the *Blue Oyster Bar*. (Of note is the Australian television soap opera, *Number 96*, which featured the world's first regular gay character during its 1972-1977 run (Mercado 2004), although gay characters have rarely featured in Australian television since.) Another new form of media, the Internet, has only recently become a widely available information source and so is too new as a media form to have influenced the developmental years of most of men in this sample.



### **Travel: ‘...the forces that informed me’**

Books provide a window beyond the immediate experiences of men. As many men grew up in sex-segregated childhoods and may then – particularly for the older men – have moved into male-dominated workplaces, books had the capacity to broaden their experience. The same effect was cited for travel by those men who had been able to do so. Here, Howard links the utility of both books and travel in providing him with a broad lens through which to see the world.

Howard: I’ve always been interested, always, as far as I can recall I’ve always been interested in other cultures. Even in my career days, I always look for work that involved dealing with other countries. And I don’t have an Australian-centric approach at all. Just understanding the cultures and whatever. It’s definitely evolved because I have read more as I’ve grown up. (accountant, 44 y.o., metropolitan area)

Walter describes the impact of travel in the context of seeing diversity and becoming accepting of it.

Walter: I think the forces that informed me must revolve around travel to a degree. I think that’s one of the things that’s really changed my ideas and attitudes. I think I’ve got very different ideas to the ones that I had when I left [deleted city] at the age of 21. Spent a lot of time overseas and looking at the world and also the time that I’ve spent here in Sydney. I guess it’s about the variety of person you might meet, and being comfortable in the face of diversity. Not feeling challenged by things that are different, maybe, rather embracing them. Yeah. (accountant, 37 y.o., metropolitan area)

Shane had much the same feelings. Here he discusses how travel opened his eyes.

Shane: In some ways I think that meeting different people, travelling, has opened up a world of possibilities in terms of just changing the way I actually think about people.

As well as changing how Shane saw the world, travel changed how other people perceived him. One friend knew him from his ‘lager lad’ days in London. She told him of the changes she saw as he moved beyond his single-sex social world, which consisted of work, the pub and football.

Shane: And one girl I knew even said to me, I’d met her a few years [beforehand] when I was going to the football. And then I met her a couple of years ago and she said, ‘You’ve totally changed’. Because I’d been travelling as well, you see. She said to me, ‘You’ve totally changed because when I first met you, you were this person, this real tense person. [...] You’re just so much more relaxed with yourself and happy with yourself. You’re doing art and photography, and going out to cafés and having dinner with friends. You’re

completely changed as a person. You're not this football hooligan boy any more'. (photographer/art teacher, 32 y.o., regional centre)

The 'world of possibilities' to which Shane referred meant that he could develop his interest in the arts, which had been viewed sceptically by his friends in London. He now works as a professional photographer and teacher. And although he now lives in Australia, he still maintains sporadic contact with his football-days' friends, who accept that he has a need to be artistically expressive. This echoes the theme of contact with different ideas reducing the potential for suspicion: Shane travelled and came home with new ideas; his friends were then exposed to his new ideas and this helped them re-evaluate some of their ideas of gender and their relationship to Shane.

It was not just adults who were changed by travel. Bert travelled from the United Kingdom to Australia at the age of two and had no memories of a different culture. However, five of the other men moved countries during later childhood. They were able to discuss their recollections of living in different cultures, and, importantly, the impact of feeling different. The negative impacts that this can create have been highlighted in the experiences of Shane and Theo, both called 'poofter' for having different accents and socialisation. Rowan discussed a similar sense of 'outsiderness', but also gave an example of a different occurrence when everyone felt like an outsider. As a child, Rowan moved from central to coastal Canada, to Australia for a year, and then to Russia before returning to Canada for the remainder of his adolescence. While living in Moscow, he attended a small international school.

Rowan: I think because it was small, it was a mix, everybody was a foreigner in a foreign country, so immediately I think that all of a sudden there was a ground that everybody shared on par. Their parents were diplomats or advanced civil servants of some form within the embassy system there. Had spent their life travelling and were used to ethnic differences. And just learning that you've got to fit in. You know you might be here for just two years but it's going to be a shitty two years if you don't get along with everybody. [...] I always found with everybody, both in my younger life and adulthood, the more somebody travels the more that they become more accepting of different ways of life and culture. And the blinkers are not up and they're not as prejudiced. (horticulturist, 33 y.o., regional centre)

**Contact with other people and ideas: ‘I’ve learned a lot of things that most straight guys should know’**

Rowan’s school had the effect of exposing all students to diversity, forcing them to confront it and incorporate people of different cultures into their social world. As travel exposed people to a diversity of lifestyles and experiences, so too did reaching out beyond one’s immediate sphere of reference. The second Vatican Council (1962-1965) liberalised the Catholic Church’s positions on scripture, the liturgy and the clergy. Although he was from the fundamentalist arm of a Protestant church, Justin was questioning the orthodoxy of his training by reading widely. In the mid-1980s, he worked as pastor in a Catholic hospital. His interactions with the nuns, who had so recently reviewed their roles as workers for the Church, allowed an exchange of ideas and a sense of shared experiences.

Justin: Well, the Sisters of [deleted religious order], I felt they accepted me. I had a contribution to give. They invited me to have the Sunday midday meal with them in the refectory with the priests too. The Vatican Council had finished in the ‘60s, so by the ‘70s, Catholics had changed their thoughts on many subjects and the nuns were coming out of their black cloaks and mixing with people. So they were given that sense of freedom and I suppose that was helpful for me to meet people like that.

Justin’s questioning nature, his reading of authors who were not approved by the Church during his training, his interactions with men and women of different faiths and being prepared to take the ‘risk of feeling uneasy’ allowed him to become more accepting of systems of belief beyond the rigidity with which he was trained.

Justin: That’s one thing about fundamentalism. They cannot accept that there are such things as shades of grey. They have got to be right and make sure they are right, whereas there had always been a lot of questions in my mind. (retired minister, 77 y.o., metropolitan area)

Exposure to diversity allowed Justin to begin re-evaluate his ideas beyond that which he had been taught. Other men spoke of the impact that contact with people of other sexualities had on their ideas of what masculinity meant to them. As an adolescent, Rick had a cautious response to homosexuality, seeing it something to be joked about, and to avoid too close an association with. At 21, he was job hunting.

Rick: I was almost destitute and I was going through the Yellow Pages. And I called up [this shop] and I said, ‘Have you got any work?’ without having any idea of what kind of place it was. And they said, ‘Do you know we’re a gay shop do you?’ and there was a slight pause. And I said, ‘Oh well I need a job’.

His ideas about other sexualities in his teens had already relaxed enough for him to work in a gay adult bookstore, and the subsequent close proximity to both a gay clientele and gay erotica has had the effect of removing any remaining preconceptions. His initial response to viewing gay erotica was that he found it 'abhorrent' but that he no longer does.

Rick: I just think of it as bodies now. [...] I've learnt a lot of things that most straight guys should know. I'm quite desensitised to it now. It doesn't phase me in the slightest really. (student, 27 y.o., metropolitan area)

Eddie grew up in the rural south of New Zealand, and reported that he was unaware that such a thing as homosexuality existed until he moved to Sydney. His first close association with a gay man was work-related, and occurred several years later.

Eddie: He rang me one night and said he'd like to have a talk and come and work with me in view of a partnership. By that time I knew he was homosexual. We had a meeting and I was very confident on what he could bring. He was bringing in cash but he was also bringing a following and expertise. Sexuality didn't matter at all. I assessed the situation, and it did not matter.

Having already assessed that the man was of good character and successful in business allowed Eddie to change his ideas about successful masculinity, and lead to a strong business relationship and personal friendship.

I took him on as a partner in business but it evolved into more than that. He became my partner, [but] because my father was dead, he was a substitute father. His partner was very, very good to me, and for my kids he became a grandfather figure. He retired after 10-15 years and today we're still best friends. [...] I'm not homosexual, never have been, never tried it or whatever. If somebody said something against him, or his preference for sex, especially against him, I would be right against them. (businessman, 49 y.o., metropolitan area)

Sam has already described diversifying his reading material, and being open to new ideas allowed him to re-consider many aspects of his life which he had previously assumed were certain. During one workshop, he was paired up with a young man who he had met several times and they developed a close bond. In one discussion, it suddenly became apparent to Sam that the 'partner' to whom this man referred was not his wife, but a male lover.

Straight away this big door came down. Bang! Then almost at the same instant I thought, 'I really liked this guy before he said that, so what's changed? Nothing.' And this happened almost in a split second. (retired engineer; alternative health practitioner, 72, regional area)

Allport (1954) writes that out-groups strengthen our sense of self by positioning members of the out-group as different and potentially inferior, but that contact can reduce hostility between groups by minimising perceived differences. He writes that simple casual contact risks reinforcing stereotypes, but if members of the new group are of similar or higher standard, they may effectively reduce prejudice. Herek (2002) also notes the utility of having at least one gay or lesbian friend in the reporting of more positive attitudes to other sexualities. By making a personal connection with a man who he liked, when Sam realised that the man was gay, he was able to circumvent his preconceptions about sexuality. Similarly, Eddie has assessed a potential new business partner as being reputable, and his sense of difference between him and gay men was reduced as he saw the whole person. He described how builders who worked for him initially made gay jokes about his new partner.

Eddie: I had these builders come up – because a lot of my customers are builders – ‘Keep your back to the wall.’ They only saw the mechanics of sex. ‘Oh but he’s a great guy and all that, but keep your back to the wall.’ They only see the mechanics of sex. And that’s the problem.

But again, once the builders eventually recognised that there was more to Eddie’s partner than a different sexuality, their attitudes also relaxed. I asked how his business partner and his male lover fitted in now.

Eddie: They didn’t at the beginning, but now they do and they are respected for what they’ve done. Whatever they go into, because they do it so well. (businessman, 49 y.o., metropolitan area)

### **Extreme situations: ‘...does this mean I’m a poof?’**

Beyond travel, books, and social contact with diversity were the men who were in situations that forced a dramatic re-evaluation of their ideas of gender. Following time in prison, Jordan was sent to a drug rehabilitation centre, another total institution. He found himself sharing a room with a gay man and a bisexual man.

Jordan: [It was] the only time I ever talked about sexuality with other men. We used to stare out over the mountains and stay up until two or three in the morning, and (deleted name) – the little gay guy – he’d pull out his cockrings and all his ticklers and man it was like, ‘Wow, fuck me, I didn’t know people invented shit like this’. And it was funny because the other guy would get there and it was like, ‘Hey, didn’t you know about this?’ ‘No.’ ‘Well I’ll tell you, me

and my cousin one time ...' and he'd go into this big rave. And I'm, 'Fuck me man, I've been kept in the dark about all this!'

In the close confines of a rehabilitation centre, which like the prisons he had spent years in, was an anomic environment, the normal social rules were suspended and new social mores could be acculturated. This allowed preconceptions of other sexualities to be eroded, and all of the men to begin talking about their lives in depth. Bear in mind that Jordan had been sexually abused by a group of men from the age of four, including penetration from seven, until his early teens.

Jordan: It felt like that burden had been taken off me where I could openly [talk about sexuality]. And what it did, that was a big part of me becoming comfortable. And becoming more assured. (at-home dad/youthworker, 42 y.o., rural area)

Despite Jordan's history of sexual abuse, he expressed no homophobic sentiment and was able to articulate differences between paedophilia and homosexuality. Nonetheless, homophobia had previously acted to restrain his ability to talk about the abuse for fear that he would be considered gay because of it. Sharing the heightened emotional contact of going through rehabilitation with these men brought about an ability to share personal histories, and a subsequent openness about male sexuality.

Damien also lived in a total institution – a maximum-security prison – for 13 years. The disruption that this created in his social and sexual life created the need to re-evaluate his ideas of acceptable sexual activities. The constructedness (and de-constructability) of homophobia is present in his story.

Damien: I myself spent the first couple of years satisfied just with masturbation. As time wore on, I guess I craved the touch, softness. I had nothing tender in my life in prison. No-one ever touches me with affection. [...] I looked at the homosexuals and I thought, 'Nah, it's not really what I'm looking for.' Looked at some of the trannies, and thought I must have been in jail too long, 'cause some of them are starting to look good. So if you wanted a blowjob off a trannie, you got a blowjob off a trannie. [...] First time round, I was pretty hesitant about it, because 'does this mean I'm a poof?', sort of thing. I had to battle that through my head, but fuck it felt good, so I soon got over that thought. [...] So in my community, there was the option of masturbation or sex with another male. So sexual contact with another male became an option and it was an option that I chose to take. (incarcerated mechanic, 37 y.o., metropolitan area)

This account represents a major repositioning for Damien. He had described a social separation as an adolescent between himself and any other boy who was perceived as gay, and yet he totally re-evaluated his ideas of sexual behaviour when the opportunity for female sexual company was removed. While he was still not prepared to have sex with a male-identified man (which other heterosexual peers in prison were doing), he could accept sex with transgenders, who presented less of a compromise to his masculine identity by being feminine in appearance. His transgender partners were seen as erotically pleasing, but he still acknowledged that he was having 'sex with another male'. The answer to Damien's question 'does this mean I'm a poof?' is no: Klein (1993) again shows how sexuality is not a singular aspect to personality. Damien considers himself to be straight, he fantasises about women, would only fall in love with a woman, and although he acknowledges that he is having sex with a male, the gender presentation of his sexual partner is feminine. Klein also discusses temporal and situational attributes, and as Damien previously exclusively had sex with women and intends to again once he can meet some, his same-sex activity is contingent upon a discrete time period and reduced access to sexually-available women. As Hensley and Tewkesbury (2002) point out, while up to 65% of men have sex with each other in prison, only 8% may identify as homosexual. This shows three factors about attempting to categorise sexuality: the malleability of sexual drives; the need to consider other aspects of sexuality such as desire, fantasy, and self-identification, not just behaviour; and finally, the over-simplification induced by forcing people into rigid classificatory systems.

### **Changing opinions over time: '...we become more mellow'**

As has been discussed in Chapter 4, peer pressure to conform to group standards has a powerful constraining capacity on young men. As men grew older, self-confidence and a desire to be seen as an individual began to change how men wanted to be seen. Robert described how he thought of himself now, contrasted to his adolescence.

PM: What is more important: individuality or peer affiliation?

Robert: Individuality. Yeah. In my opinion. Masculinity; I still link it with someone being a bold personality rather than someone who runs with the pack. Sure you can be masculine standing around in a pub with your mates, I mentioned the football, drinking. But to exude masculinity, in my opinion, someone who's a bit of a bold personality. Can stand out as an individual.

PM: Is that the same as 15 years ago?

Robert: No. I would have been, in those days, more in the peer group. More of a pack mentality in those days. (public servant, 28 y.o., metropolitan centre)

Self-confidence, which was described as increasing as men grew older, was cited across a range of situations wherein men were able to do previously taboo activities without worrying about their masculinity being called into question. A focus group discussed whether or not men would protect their skin by using sunblock or moisturiser in their youth, compared with their current attitudes.

PM: What has changed between 20 years ago, when you wouldn't use sunblock or moisturiser?

Gavin: It's just self-confidence. If someone gave me shit about putting some lip-moisturiser on, I'd tell them to go fuck themselves and go and do it anyway. All these issues we're talking about you've got to remember are a reflection of childhood. It's not an issue now.

Other factors must be considered in this quote, such as the emergence of skin cancer awareness as a health discourse in Australia and its accompanying health warnings, but underlying this comment are also indicators of social pressure: self confidence allows a man to challenge these considerations, which were grounded in childhood compliance.

Peer affiliation for males has been shown to be a vital part of youth, and yet it is a constricting form of socialisation. In later life, the drive for individuality that had been suppressed for fear of standing out was able to be asserted as men felt more comfortable challenging peer culture.

Howard: In your earlier life you want to be popular; you want to be one of the crowd, you don't want to stand out. And yet later in life you eventually want to stand out, you want to be different, and you want to have that difference reflected in your lifestyle. (accountant, 44 y.o., metropolitan area)

Warren described how as he grew older he felt comfortable to challenge peer-group standards, even in regards to homophobic baiting, challenges which have been shown to potentially bring homophobic focus on the challenger.

PM: OK, what is a real man to you?



Warren: It's someone, a real man would have to be, say, if he's got a family, he would first of all look after his family and make sure that they had a roof over their heads, food, clothing, that sort of thing – the basics. Also, someone who's accepting of others.

PM: What do you mean by that?

Warren: Instead of being part of the gang of, 'Here comes that poof,' 'Oh yeah, here comes that poof. Let's ignore him'. Just being more along the lines of, 'How you are going?' to anyone. (farmer, 23 y.o., rural area)

Similarly, Rhys described how accusations of homosexuality would not affect him now in the same way that they may have when he was younger.

Rhys: Like if somebody called me a poofter as a derogatory term, I wouldn't care. It's just funny.

[...]

PM: What would have happened if you'd been called that [when you were younger]?

Rhys: At 11 I would have gone and punched them.

PM: So strong enough to evoke a physical response?

Rhys: Yeah. It also depends on who said it and how they said it. If they were actually saying that for what the meaning was, I would have hit them. But that's probably because I was scared. Scared of people thinking that I was a poofter. (telecommunications technician, 21 y.o., metropolitan centre)

Brett also described how when he was younger he was very homophobic.

Brett: I used to absolutely hate homosexuals. But today I've changed my attitude and I've thought, there's some beautiful, beautiful people out there that choose partners of their own [gender], whether it be female or male. I know some, I've met people. I've got some good friends that are gay and good friends that are lesbians. And I thought, 'Ah, that's cool'.

Before his attitudes changed, he had an aggressive response to a man making a pass at him in a bar when he was:

... 21, yeah. [I felt] absolutely fucking repulsed. Because it's not an area that I believe I needed to go. I wasn't like that, I don't want to know about it. If I was talking to someone and they said, 'Hi I'm gay,' well I'd say, 'Well fuck off then'. Or I'd fuck off. But today, hell, one of my solicitors is gay.

PM: What would happen now you were in a bar chatting to someone and he made a move on you?

Brett: [I would say] 'Listen mate. I'm not interested at all. I'm straight.'

PM: That sounds like a much calmer response than 21.

Brett: Oh, fuck yeah.

PM: What's changed?

Brett: At the time I said to my mates, I said, 'Get this bloke and get him out of here,' because I was getting really enraged. And then my mates had got hold of him and took him outside and told him to fuck off, which he did. But Pol, when we grow older and we grow wiser, and we become more mellow. (businessman, 50 y.o., rural area)

As well as mellowing, Brett's relaxed attitudes are also a response to increased positive social contact. His initial repulsion at a pass in a bar is indicative of Allport's (1954) caution against casual contact reinforcing stereotypes, as well as members of a minority group needing to be of equal or better standing to challenge opinions. Brett's deeper social and business contacts with a diverse group of people have allowed his attitudes to shift over the years, part of his 'mellowing' process.

Dennis noted how it was moving out of the police force which exposed him to diversity, and a re-evaluation of his beliefs about sexuality and gender. His attitudes from childhood were conservative and this was reinforced working in a male-dominated industry, an atmosphere he described as 'strongly male [...] macho'.

Dennis: My background has always been that homosexuality is not normal. As I've got older and I've seen the world change, and I know homosexuals. You just have to be think 'Well they're just like everybody else'.

PM: What changed in your thinking over time and what do you think caused those changes?

Dennis: I got out of the police force. [...] When I left I went to farming. There weren't too many homosexuals out there in the bush. So it wasn't really an issue. But having got married, got my children, and being involved more with the community, I see a lot more of it. And so you've just got to accept it. (former police officer, part-time pilot, property developer, stay-at-home dad, 49 y.o., regional centre)

These cases illustrate how men's interactions with others different from themselves have allowed them to become more accepting of diversity on personal levels. In the following quote, exposure to a taboo subject at a societal level was shown to initiate discussion of diversity, and in surprisingly positive way. Since Kinsey and the sexual revolution, there had been a growing relaxation about attitudes towards homosexuality in the United States: in the early 1980s, the emergence of HIV caused a reversal of this liberalisation (Shilts 1987). However, over the next 20 years, the discourses of AIDS brought sexualities firmly into the public domain. The initial hysteria gave way to more measured discussions of HIV risk, sexual behaviour in general and homosexuality in particular. Warren spoke of how, in the regional centre in which he lives, attitudes have altered remarkably in recent years. He spoke of how gay men in his area had previously been ridiculed.

Warren: In five years I've noticed that it's changed a lot though. Five years ago [if there was a gay] bloke in the footy club he would have been hunted. But now there's a few blokes in the footy club who are gay and everyone seems to be for it.

PM: So what's changed?

Warren: I think knowledge, say of AIDS. That's probably the biggest thing. Like, you can give this bloke a hug and he's not going to give you AIDS. And he's not going to crack the fat [get an erection] over you. He's not going to be thinking about you in that sort of way. So it's just the way it is. (farmer, 23 y.o., rural area)

This chapter has looked at what are some of the reasons that may cause men to reassess their beliefs about masculinity as they age. The remainder of this chapter looks at how their changing attitudes impact on other areas of their lives. This reassessment included how men related emotionally, what their beliefs about work were, and their understandings of gender and friendship. Some examples will show attitudes changing, and some will show men remaining under the rubric of hegemonic masculinity. Some of these examples relate to men accepting a greater range of acceptable behaviours related to gender, and others are specifically related to ideas about sexuality.

### **Emotions: 'I get more emotional as I get older'**

A display of the 'wrong' emotions has been shown to induce homophobic abuse, and likely to cause men to restrain their emotions so that they only show hegemonic stoicism. As men aged, they became more likely to express the emotions which they were feeling, including crying, and this was less likely to be seen negatively. This was not true of all men in the study. In Chapter 5, William and Robert both described very traditional ideas about men who cried. William locates this behaviour as being common to men of his age-group, and yet as Sam has shown, older men are capable of acculturating to new norms. Although younger than William by 44 years, Robert held equally restrictive ideas about expressivity. Both men cited the death of family members and in William's case a dead dog as being acceptable reasons to cry. They continued to hold these ideas, as well as very traditional ideas about gender and held homophobic attitudes. In contrast, the following men spoke of how their emotional range became more open as they grew older, as their ideas about acceptable masculinity were reconsidered.

Sam: Oh I could cry now. I couldn't cry till I was in my 60s.

PM: What was wrong with crying prior to that?

Sam: It was just something that men don't do. (retired engineer; alternative health practitioner, 72, regional area)

Timothy: As a matter of fact, I get more emotional the older I get. (small business owner, 58 y.o., regional centre)

Frank: I think as a lot of blokes find as they get older, life is a lot easier when they get in touch with their emotional side. [...] And I remember my father saying always when we were kids, it is not a weak thing to cry. And I encourage blokes out in the bush. (retired soldier, police officer, 39 y.o., metropolitan centre)

Despite learning from his father that crying was natural and healthy, and encouraging the boys with whom he worked, Frank added a codicil: it was something to be done in private, as there was still the potential for being seen as less masculine if this was done in public. However, Frank and his father considered the older idea that 'boys don't cry' to be more psychologically damaging.

Beyond the emotional expression of crying are less intense forms of emotional interactions, such as talking about personal problems. A focus group with men in their 30s and 40s spoke of how they saw Australian ideas of male communicativeness changing.

Anton: I'd have to say it's just been something that's just inbuilt from many years ago and it's just generation after generation. I've noticed over the last couple of years that it's slowly starting to change. It'd be more like 40% would be ok [to talk about problems] but 60% still back in that generation of not willing to change or ready to. (focus group 2)

Warren also described differences between his friends when they were younger compared with now, with some life experience to inform them, and also between his generation and older men.

Warren: The mates I've got are pretty good. [...] They've all been through things before. So we all know where we're all coming from. We've all been through break-ups or depression, or all those sorts of things. So yeah, it's pretty easy. One will sort of see if the other one's getting a bit down, or not having enough time off work. They're quite easy to talk to in that way.

[...]

PM: What makes it harder when you're younger to talk about personal stuff?

Warren: I think you haven't got the experience. Basically. It depends on the people as well. Like I could say there is a group of blokes who you wouldn't say anything personal to them.

PM: Why?

Warren: They're just sort of from the old school, I guess they would say, 'Oh, you've got problems have you? That's no good.' And that would be the end of the conversation. (farmer, 23 y.o., rural area)

These 'old school' men are replicating the stoicism of William. Warren and his friends are mutually supportive, indicating a change in how these young men see friendship. However, as Robert shows, even men in their 20s can still hold restrictive opinions. He is not as supportive of friends in crisis as Warren is.

Robert: I don't want to hear about the problems. I mean, if it's something where they say, 'Look, I'd just like a bit of advice about this,' then I'm more than happy to give my honest advice in confidence, of course. But if it's constant whinging, 'Should I ring her? Shouldn't I ring her? We're not speaking at the moment. We've been breaking up on and off'. It's just, 'Fucking get over it. I don't want to hear it'. But you don't say that to them because you don't want to

hurt their feelings. But I would just say, 'Look, you know,' I'd give them advice but at the same time I'd think, 'For fuck sake just deal with it. I wouldn't give my emotional shit to you, I don't expect it in return'. (public servant, 28 y.o., metropolitan centre)

Robert and Warren represent different ideas of acceptable masculinity, and are both in their 20s; William and Sam hold similarly diametric opinions and are both in their 70s. Age is not necessarily predictive of attitudes to emotions, gender or sexuality. What appears to be operating is an adherence to restrictive gender norms. Those men who were able to break free from how they are told men should behave – because they were able to open their lives to diversity for the reasons discussed in this chapter, or because they found the hegemony restrictive – were able to incorporate a broader range of ideas. Those with much of their identity invested in hegemonic masculinity, and having no reason to challenge this, hold tightly to their ideas.

### **Work and masculinity: 'What I don't do is to define myself by my work'**

The meanings of work, and the physical use of the body, also change in emphasis over time. Jordan had previously held very traditional ideas about how to present his masculinity. Much of his masculine status was located in his body, and how he used it at work.

Jordan: I was managing a turf farm and I was making big money. I was employing blokes. But my marriage fell apart; I was very much in that mode of 'I earn fucking money, I'll go out and work 12 or 15 hours a day. If I want to fucking go out and drink I'll go out and fucking drink.' Real macho-type deal. Which wasn't fair on her, and we split up.

A public performance of masculinity was intrinsic to this type of work. He required that his work was:

... anything that made me sweat and get dirty. No-one could get there and say, 'Are you a bank clerk?' or something like that.

PM: What if someone had said, 'Are you a bank clerk?' What would that have indicated to you?

Jordan: It would have indicated that they were questioning my manhood, and they would have paid for that. I know a lot of people did. I used to call it the 'soft cock' work. 'You won't catch me doing shit like that. I do a man's job. I'm a man, I do a man's job and I'm proud of that.' It was all about you had to be the man all the time. And everyone I knew and worked with was like that.

However, Jordan attributes these attitudes, in part, to the dissolution of his marriage. Re-evaluating his ideas of masculinity in the drug rehabilitation unit, and examining what in his life had contributed to his marriage failing allowed Jordan to reshape his life. Later, he remarried and had three sons. When it became apparent that his new wife earned a higher wage, he became a full-time house parent and augments the family income working casually in youth welfare. While his previous work was external and physical, his new work, in and out of the home, centres around caring for other people. He draws much strength from his new roles.

Jordan: I have people come up to me on a daily basis and say, 'Man you do such a great job. Thank you for being so nice to my kids'. That's very, very good for your self-esteem. For someone who didn't have a lot of self-esteem or a lot of self-respect. [...] I can't ever remember looking at myself when I was big and muscly [and feeling satisfied]. You go, 'You're not big enough and you're not muscly enough. You haven't got enough tattoos'. It was back to the yard, go and pump more weights, go and fight more people, put more notches on your belt. Now that I've taken away that measuring stick, for a long time I actually found it really hard; I didn't have anything to measure myself against.

The physically-oriented, stoic and autonomous hegemony was a never-ending battle to prove masculinity, one that would ultimately fail when he could no longer fight. Jordan was aware that his position on the masculine hierarchy was always contested. Eventually he gained a new identity through work, which was reinforced by other men in his community.

Jordan: You get the odd comment. You get the odd look. But they're so few and far between. [...] I have men come up and say, 'What's it really like, staying at home?' And I say, 'How fucking cool can it be? I get to hang out with my kids. If I want to go to the pool, I can go up to the pool. I get to cook dinner. I get to hang at home. How cool is it man? It's the juice, it really is'. And they actually say to me, 'How do you do it'. I say to them, 'I've got a Mrs that wants a career, that deserves a career. I support her in that and I'll pick up bits and pieces [of work] as I need to.' What I don't do is to define myself by my work. I had to be a tough man. I think that's the pitfall. That's the hole that men in this country have fallen into. They need that definition and they need to live down to that definition.

The importance of being involved with their children was echoed by all the men who have been active parents. Mike the plumber, with his beliefs of inherent differences between genders, expressed bemusement that he now cooks and cleans for his son; Lloyd and Tom, both with traditional, military fathers have changed their focus from work-based careers to looking after their children and finding a masculine role therein that their fathers may not understand; Walter now watches with a combination of

slight envy and admiration, as his distant career-driven father creates a new family and taking on the role of primary carer for his new adopted daughter, providing care and attention which was denied Walter and his brothers.

In his small rural community, Jordan has become a role model for a different masculinity than the one he entered adulthood with. He physically still embodies the stereotype of rugged masculinity, at two meters and 100 kilograms. As he said:

... I wear my manhood well.

But his powerful presence is tempered by a gentleness which I observed as he interacted with his young children, and his wife when she returned home from work. Near the end of our long interview, he received a visit from a young man, who he has known for four years. When they met, the young man was already a father, and struggling with drug use and insecurity. Jordan believes that the young man is gay and will soon come out. He describes the changes that have occurred.

What I'm seeing is a blossoming. (at-home dad/youthworker, 42 y.o., rural area)

Perhaps this is also an appropriate description of Jordan's journey.

### **Friendships: '...the best thing in my life'**

Earlier, Eddie showed how pragmatism in approaching his partner as he would any potential business relationship allowed him to see more than his partner's sexuality, and to reassess his other ideas of masculinity. This had a flow-on effect on how he considered homosexuality in other people. I asked him how he would feel if his son was gay. He replied that he would.

... be very disappointed. Because I want for me and my father and my grandfather and the rest of the family to have an offspring which carries the name. But having known [his business partner and his partner] I could accept it.

All of the males in Eddie's family had died by age 54. Eddie himself had a hole in the heart as a child and was not expected to survive to adulthood, and as an adult has type II diabetes. His hesitation appeared to be grounded in his sense of mortality and his stated desire to see the family name continue. When I asked how he would feel if his son was gay, but fathered a child, he said that would solve the problem of arrested



lineage. When pressed about how he would have felt about a gay son prior to developing the relationship with his business partner, he said he would not have accepted this.

Eddie: [My friendship with him] is the best thing in my life.

[...]

PM: If your son was gay, do you think your current open-minded attitude would have been the same if it had been five years before you met your gay business partner?

Eddie: No.

PM: What's changed?

Eddie: Because I have a relationship and an ongoing relationship, and beyond our business relationship ... yeah, no I wouldn't have had that openness to that sort of situation because, OK, I didn't know about it until I came here. I didn't really know about gayness until I lived in Sydney, I suppose. It's not something that's talked about. But having [business partner and his partner] in my life for the last 20 odd years, I don't look at their sexuality as an issue because they're people. [...] I see him as a father-figure for me, a grandfather figure for my kids, as a wonderful business partner – very, very, very astute and very, very good and taught me a lot, and I've taught him a lot. (businessman, 49 y.o., metropolitan area)

It was through coming to know his business partner as an individual that allowed Eddie to reassess of his ideas of sexuality. Justin similarly used intense professional contact to reassess what gender and sexuality meant to him. His journey from orthodox, conservative Christianity to a more self-developed relationship with God began with reading; this was augmented through professional and social contact with Catholic nuns. These challenges to his training eventually prepared him for a complete re-evaluation of his ideas on the contentious topic – for a clergyman – of homosexuality. In his earlier years, he had been taught to fear homosexuality in the navy, both by superiors and bullies, and by church teaching. The hospital where he worked had a large number of HIV-positive patients during the devastating period of the mid-1980s.

Justin: Yes I sat with these people who were dying of AIDS, covered in terrible sores, in terrible pain, and I was able to relate to them. I saw that they were general people. And their boyfriends, sitting with them. And I just came to accept that that's what they needed, and the important thing was to have compassion. [...] People were dying, and they wanted the Christian message,

they wanted to feel accepted. They didn't want to see themselves as ready for hell, as some clergy would have said to them at that time. (retired minister, 77 y.o., metropolitan area)

Rethinking his ideas about Christianity beyond the orthodoxy in which he had been trained allowed him to review his ideas about sexuality, sin and redemption, and he was able to minister to this group of men who he had previously viewed askance. This re-evaluation began early in Justin's training; it continued as he was exposed to new ideas of different religions, and culminated in contact with gay men who he was able to now see as individuals, not a categorised sexuality.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has looked at the possibilities of relearning: when and how some men are able to re-consider what masculinity means to them. Some men described gradually incorporating the differences that they encountered beyond childhood into a more tolerant adult worldview. For some men this included reshaping their ideas about sexuality; for others it meant reconsidering other factors which had previously indicated a lack of masculine status such as emotions.

Hegemonic masculinity forced Tom to try and be stoic as his work and his marriage disintegrated, but left him isolated and with increasingly heavy cannabis use. Sam needed more to male culture than reading about war, and Brian wanted more than surfing, rugby and the pub.. Some men rejected aspects of the hegemony, and have found more fulfilling lives, be that Jordan enjoying watching his sons grow up, or Eddie finding his closest friend is a gay man 20 years his senior.

So far, Robert has not questioned the hegemony. He appears to be comfortable in his heterosexuality, and from a wealthy, middle class family with political connections. He still feels that any emotional display will lead to public humiliation, preventing him providing anything more than superficial friendship, or from reaching out to friends when a major relationship dissolved. Mike is from a similarly privileged background, and his identity is also deeply engrained in being tough. The biggest challenge to his masculinity has been taking on a sole-parenting role for his son and the re-evaluation this has meant to his ideas of the roles of genders. Apart from this,

Mike has not had cause to question the hegemonic gender arrangements which appear to suit his personality and interests well. William equally appears to be well serviced by hegemonic masculinity. He is a white, middle-class, heterosexual landowner ensconced in comfortable homogeneity who sees no need to question his role as husband, father and grandfather. His attitude to homosexuality was the same as that which he attributed to rugby coach, Ron Barassi: he chooses to ignore it except as a subject of gentle ridicule. The safety cocoon provided by adherence to hegemonic standards (apart from Mike taking on the caring role for his son) means that little reflexivity on sexuality or gender is in evidence, and appears to have produced the three most homophobic interview participants.

For those who are either outside of hegemonic masculinity, or who question it, challenging ideas about the stability of gender were thrown up: and yet those men who described negotiating what masculinity meant were describing journeys of learning. In some cases, like Justin's, it was a life-long journey to set aside his uncertainty about his relationship with God, and the people to whom he ministered. For Sam it was desire to have a nuanced view of the world. For Shane and Walter, travel opened their eyes, perhaps before they even realised that they were looking.

Some participants also cited extreme examples of re-learning when they were removed from their environment and placed in situations of total anomie such as prison. In the absence of their normal social world, they had no option but to re-acclurate to the norms. Without reconsidering his ideas to sexuality and gender, the entirety of Damien's prison term would have been devoid of physical human contact and the social benefits that he described. Without laying aside his ideas that education was something for less masculine men, he would not have completed tertiary studies.

When exposure to *difference* occurred, be it through the lenses provided by books, the experience of travel or moving from the protected environments of the school to the workplace, it created a sense of anomie, where the previous ideas of the social world were no longer seen as all-encompassing. Men who experienced *difference*, saw that that it adds colour, not challenge, to one's existence. Encountering diversity showed men that other lifestyles have validity. It required men to set aside their

ethnocentricity, but the benefit of this action meant that these men saw their lives fitting into a broader context, and from which they could draw ideas and inspiration.

This chapter restates the view that masculinity is an ephemeral state, re-interpreted by each generation, and absorbed by each male. As such, masculinity itself is a continual state of anomie; a lack of identifiable norms which each man is to embody even though none can fully articulate it as a stable identity. Homophobia is not the *sine qua non* of masculinity, but it is part of the equation. It shapes and constrains many aspects of modern manhood, and shucking it off, even partially, opens up a broader range of ways to be.

Just as misogyny is only one feature of homophobia, homophobia is only one of the controls of masculinity. Even men who move beyond the pervasive homophobia of youth still had much of their behaviour restricted by it as and many homophobic men feel ordained to express discriminatory opinions and are frequently unchallenged. The conclusion chapter looks at how, in a social world where other forms of discrimination such as racism or sexism are considered unpalatable, homophobia is still broadcast widely.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

### **The differences between this sample and other attitudes voiced in Australia**

Reading of the changes that occurred in the lives of older men like Justin and Sam, or the liberal attitudes of young farmer Warren, one could think that a major sea-change has occurred in Australian society. Current expressions of vitriolic homophobia within this group of participants were confined to a minority of men, with the rest expressing how they had moved towards a more evolved and accepting version of masculinity. However, a homophobic minority has a disproportionate voice, as I witnessed on a train home from a concert two nights before completing this final chapter. A drunken man chanted 'He's a poofter, he's a faggot, he's a cock-sucking homo', to no-one in particular, and about no-one in particular, for the duration of the journey. In a crowded train, no-one challenged him. This can partially be attributed to a fear of embarrassment or violence implicit in the bystander intervention effect (Darley & Latane 1968) and yet I wondered what would have happened if he yelled 'He's a Jew, he's a nigger, he's a slope.' Unfortunately, it is not just drunks on trains who feel authorised to voice such sentiment. The lack of challenge to such statements cannot always be attributed to a bystander effect, as shown in situations where racism or sexism are disallowed but homophobia goes unchecked. To illustrate this, I present some final data from senate committee reports I accessed, and then from readers' comments to *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

There were submissions to the 1999 Inquiry into the Anti-Genocide Bill objecting to the inclusion of sexual orientation as a category to be protected alongside religious affiliation or ethnic groupings. The Christian Democratic Party and The Returned and Services League of Australia objected on the basis that such an inclusion would weaken Australia's moral capacity to object to genocide, and encourage child molestation (CDP 1999; RSL 1999). Thus a political party and the major national lobbying body of retired soldiers, both of whom command a degree of respect and public airtime, broadcast homophobic statements through the political system.

In the Sexuality Discrimination Inquiry, evidence was heard of from the Christian group, The Salt Shakers, that discrimination based on sexuality should be allowable, and that homosexuality is caused by child abuse (Muehlenberg & Stokes 1996). In the same report, Kelsey, Stevens and Way (1996) claim on behalf of the religious sect, The Brethren, that while discrimination based on race or dis/ability is wrong, their religion has a biblically-ordained right to discriminate against homosexuals. While groups like The Salt Shakers and The Brethren appear to be on the political fringe, recent reports show that an even more conservative group, The Exclusive Brethren, not only attempted to influence elections in New Zealand by lobbying against parties who support anti-discrimination legislation or same-sex relationships (Altman 2006; NZPA 2006) and Tasmania (Altman 2006; Hassan 2006) but have also had their views defended by Prime Minister John Howard (Grattan 2006). The senate reports contain numerous submissions from individuals, organisations and church-groups, including descriptions of homosexuals as being 'intrinsically disordered' (Catechism of the Catholic Church, para 2357 cited in Gethin 1996: 638).

It should be noted that the submissions to the Sexuality Discrimination Inquiry were tabled ten years ago, and that some attitudes have changed since then. However, as an increasing number of Australian social services are tendered out to church-based non-governmental organisations, there is potential for legal, tax-payer funded discrimination. Following a mental health forum at the AIDS Council of New South Wales recently, I spoke with a transgendered woman: she had been fired when the welfare organisation she was employed by was taken over by a Christian church. She was told that the service would neither employ transgenders nor provide social services to them, having been given an exemption from anti-discrimination legislation based on religious belief.

Homophobic attitudes still permeate the media as Worthington's (2006) 'pansy ball' letter shows. In a blog following an article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* about the marriage of singer Darren Hayes to his male partner, the following comments were posted. (Spelling, capitalisation and non-capitalisations for the following six blog citations are as reproduced directly from the website; 'sic' has not been used after grammatical errors to avoid disturbing the narrative flow.)

i think its disgusting!! i dont care what you all say or how you all think its now socially acceptable to be gay. at the end of the day its ment to be adam and eve not adam and steve damn it!! all you gay people make me sick! get some help! [...] Im not homophobic, im not scared of gays...i hate them and think its wrong and u know what im damn proud of it! ADAM AND EVE NOT ADAM AND STEVE!!! (wateva 2006)

Being gay is wrong no matter what. Just think at the way they have sex, imagine that for a moment an tell me if it is beautifull, tell me if you wish your first or next son or daughter becomes gay, tell me if you wish that for one of your family...□It is a sad life being gay, they are very sensitive and talented people but they need mental help, they are very confuse. (Chevive7 2006)

Was [the co-opting of the word 'gay'] an attempt to make the abnormal attraction to the same sex tame or even bring it mainstream acceptance? No matter how hard I look, I cannot see how 2 men wanting to be lovers can be possibly seen as normal. (steve 2006)

I spoke to Kimberley Porteous who monitors blogs for *The Sydney Morning Herald*. She informed me that these comments had been approved for publication on the website, and did not reflect the more extreme attitudes which were received but not published. Therefore, not only did this newspaper find it acceptable to publish 'all you gay people make me sick' but these were milder than some of the other sentiments held in the community. (The above posts were removed after my call.)

The policy of *The Sydney Morning Herald* is to not accept any posts:

... which racially or religiously vilifies, incites violence or hatred, or is likely to offend, insult or humiliate others based on race, religion, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation or any physical or mental disability (SMH 2006)

In a subsequent email, she wrote (Porteous 2006):

... the Herald website finds homophobic comments every bit as deplorable and inappropriate as a racist comment.

Nevertheless, two weeks later in response to a blog on male waxing, the following messages were published, and again are presented verbatim:

ANy guy who gets a brazilian is a paedophile or a gay boy who sips skim soy lattes, eats friands and tofu sandwiches and drinks the gay beer - peroni. (Gardener Boy is a dork 2006)

Men don't get brazillans. Pansyboy metrosexuals in touch with their feminie side do. The same type who moisterise,drink upmarket beers and drive little hatchbacks. (Bob Sacammano 2006)

Despite breaching the newspaper's blog policy, these comments were also deemed to be acceptable. (These examples once again highlight the use of humour to police masculinity by equating grooming, small cars, non-Australian beer, paedophilia, vegetarianism and effeminacy with homosexuality.) As Chapter 5 has noted, it is difficult to police some forms of humour without appearing humourless, or being associated with the derided out-group.

### **The problem with difference**

Also for consideration in the final two blog quotes is a major theme of this thesis, the fear of difference. In the case of these two comments, it is the fear of different masculinities: an effeminised, emasculated form which can potentially destabilise the gender order. While homosexuality gains some credence in some sectors of the community, the fears about emasculated manhood are still evident. Homosexuals are tolerable as long, it seems, as they are manly (Nayak & Kehily 1997). Within the gay community, there also appears to be more status for masculine gay men. Tracing life histories of gay men in Australia, Connell (1992) found that even as gay men can resist hegemonic masculinity, they may still benefit from it, particularly those who can perform the masculine scripts: not be too emotional, create social distance between themselves and women, and have an interest in sport or traditional male careers. A more extreme adherence to hegemonic masculine presentation is cited by Clarkson (2006) who describes a gay male subculture which eschews any 'feminine' aspects to homosexuality, including personal advertisements featuring men describing themselves as 'straight-acting'. The problematisation of gender non-conformity is rife, even in a community which frequently suffers under rigid gender classification systems. The risk contained in this elevation of hypermasculinity is the increased devaluation of any men who cannot or choose not to present as hegemonically 'butch', as 'camp' men are seen to be gender betrayers who would cast 'straight-acting' gays in a poor light.

It became clear that 'difference' is considered to be problematic in Australian society, and presumably internationally. What was monitored by the use of words like 'poofter' or 'faggot' were deviations from hegemony, largely concerned with gender but not exclusively. Ivor's example of Asian boys being constantly mocked for using moisturiser illustrates a blurred line between possessing 'failed' gender and 'failed'



race, as did many of the comments from men who described an overlap between racism and homophobia.

Different masculinities in a society which expects one, heterosexual, physically dominant masculinity induced uncertainty in men. This could incite men on lower levels of the hierarchy to elevate their position by distancing themselves from the difference of the 'failed' men through violence. The options were simple: become tough, or remain subordinated to the toughest males.

While this research is focussed on masculinities, it became apparent that other forms of difference were alluded to. The consequences of considering someone as 'other' or 'different' is apparent when these techniques allow that person to be de-humanised, as in the case of the unconscious woman who Ian's mates had sex with, or in the pack-rape of Greg. Different colour created segregation in the United States (King 2004) and apartheid in South Africa (Walker 2005); religious difference created a divided Ireland (Fulton 2002) and 'ethnic cleansing' in the former Yugoslavia (Markusen & Mennecke 2004) and Dafur (Vehnamaii 2006).

It is beyond the capacity of this thesis to ascertain whether the fear of difference is a socially-learned condition, or an inherent aspect of humanity, an idiopathic memory stored in genes from times when high levels of vigilance were required. I am not ascribing causality but simply noting how difference is negatively regarded and some of the negative consequences that can occur when 'difference' creates a failure to recognise the rest of the similarities between people. The men who moved into broader social networks, and saw that the 'different' people had more in common with them than they had been led to believe, lost the fear. They allowed themselves to experience a variegated world without fearing different cultures, and finding more depth within themselves.

### **In the context of previous research**

This thesis has examined the impact of homophobia on Australian masculinity. Taking as its starting point Plummer's (1999, 2001) theory that homophobia is largely concerned with policing transgressions from normative gender performances rather

than sexual activity, this research has broadened that theoretical lens. Moving beyond the impact of homophobia on gay men, I have investigated the impact of homophobia on men in general. This has shifted the focus from sexuality to gender, from homosexuality to masculinity, and pays close attention to the policing capacities of homophobia on the construction of Australian masculinity. This section looks at how the current research fits into earlier research. To do so, I will again discuss the main analytical themes which have underpinned this paper: the socially constructed nature of gender, sexuality and homophobia as enacted by 'othering', hierarchies, ritual and contagion.

Participants described how becoming a man was a characteristic which was learnt over time, reinforcing the social constructionism view of gender. Like Kimmel (1996), men spoke of learning the correct attributes of masculinity based on a shifting series of indicators of what their given society lauds as 'real' masculinity (see also Connell 1995, 2005; Mac an Ghail 1994; Messerschmidt 2000). Masculinity, while grounded in a sexed body, is a learned, contested attribute which is continually reinforced through a series of publicly performed challenges. Hierarchies of desirable and derided masculinity were created on which boys and men tried to gain positions which brought the most social status. Reinforcing Butler's (1995) performativity of gender, the participants spoke of gaining status when their enactments of acceptable gender were done for an audience. A clear example of this were the bullies described by Theo: '...in a group he was part of that group but he was different at the squash courts', showing that hegemonic, tough behaviour was intrinsically linked to gaining status in front of peers.

This shows a hierarchy of status levels, as described by van Genneep (1960) and Weeks (2003), but in a specific performance around gender. The risks to the bullies were to not be seen to associate with the less-hegemonic boys in the presence of the most hegemonic boys, lest the bullies' status be devalued by contagion with the despised 'other'. The challenge to the boys who were bullied was to decide if they would subordinate lesser-status boys in attempts to elevate their own status, or continue to take the abuse that was dealt out to them.

When Trevor described pushing the lower status boy out of the tree, he joined ‘the ranks of the bully’ (Rofes 1995: 80) in a ritualised performance that showed that he was adopting the standards of dominant hegemonic masculinity. In terms of Goffman’s (1973) concept of stigma, Trevor ‘othered’ the boy in order to avoid the contagion effect of being seen as too close to him.

While Goffman’s work on stigma is a meta-theory of difference, this research gives very specific enactments of how ‘othering’ is operationalised on a day-to-day basis, and functions as a major technique for negotiating personal interactions and specifically, male status. Related to Goffman’s work, but in the discipline of social psychology, is Allport (1954) and his finding that the creation of social distance is required in order for prejudice to develop and be enacted. As the participants who changed their views shows, once the ‘other’ comes to be seen as possessing more similarities than differences, inter-group hostility decreases.

In regards to the stability or instability of gender, many participants described how the socially-inspired ideals of masculinity which were so dominant in their earlier lives gave way to more personally derived ideas about gender and sexuality as they aged: participants were under less pressure as the power of the peer group to dictate their opinions began to weaken. The social constructionist view of gender was clearly validated in this research. Likewise, as men’s ideas of appropriate or inappropriate sexuality developed, this reinforces the constructed nature of homophobia described by Plummer (1999).

### **New discoveries**

The current research describes a performative, hierarchical base to gender, but specifically locates a fear of being seen as gay as the most powerful moderator on the attitudes and behaviours of boys and men. In the modern West, homosexuality has come to represent the nadir of failed masculinity. It is equated with effeminacy, no matter how masculine the presentation of the individual man. Homophobia acts to police a variety of male behaviours, as deviation from a narrow range of acceptable behaviours or attitudes can bring homophobic slurs, most of which have nothing to do with sexual activities: having emotions beyond anger or restrained joy; having the

wrong body shape; interacting with the opposite (or same) gender outside of an ill-defined range of permitted activities; having the wrong interests – all of these activities can cause a boy or a man to have his sexuality questioned. When boys and men expressed insecurity about their own sense of masculinity, they cited examples of ‘othering’ boys and men who seemed to represent lesser forms of masculinity than their own. As such, masculinity can be conceptualised as a constant state of flux which requires vigilance, a Durkheimian state of anomie where norms are never fully enacted or understood.

Those who are seen to exhibit any variation from a narrow, confining definition of masculinity will have their sexuality, and thus their masculinity, challenged. As men conceptualise so much of their self-identity both in masculinity and sexuality, homophobic challenges have great power. Empirical data cited in this thesis gives numerous examples of men changing their behaviour to fit in to the culturally-accepted definitions in order to avoid homophobic labelling. These changes ranged from pushing themselves to play sports that their bodies were not naturally built for or that they necessarily enjoyed, to restraining their emotional ranges, to modifying their physical and emotional interactions with other males. Other forms of discrimination are generally disallowed, but homophobia was continually cited by participants as a pejorative term they used themselves at times in their lives, or was not challenged when used around them. While race-based divisions in our society were deeply entrenched within the recent past (the ‘White Australia’ policy, which restricted non-white immigration to Australia was only revoked by the Whitlam government in 1973), they have since largely been set aside, to the benefit of the entire country. This is not to say that racist attitudes are no longer present in Australia: simply we do not tolerate their espousal. Similarly, misogynistic attitudes still permeate aspects of Australian culture, but we do not authorise them or tolerate their use in schools, workplaces or media. However, homophobia remains one of the few pejoratives that can be used with relative impunity, and can be used to monitor a wide range of non-hegemonic gender enactments.

Justification for the use of homophobia ranged from the belief that ‘no harm was done’ when boys used this form of control, to the ideas that ‘toughening up’ was an important part of male socialisation. The impact was dramatically enunciated in the

different stories of men who had been extensively targeted with homophobic abuse compared to those who were not.

Boys and men learn that by adopting hegemonic qualities such as aggression and non-emotional presentation, they can avoid homophobic baiting and advance their position on a masculine hierarchy at the expense of others. The use of homophobic language or aggressive physicality as public, ritualistic displays of humiliation are central to this activity. Through these techniques, homophobia becomes a bonding technique holding the most similar boys together. This self-reinforcing cycle becomes difficult to break as those who do may then be viewed with suspicion. The ability to 'take' homophobic abuse without complaint, like the ability to receive pain unquestioningly, was thought to indicate that boys had moved beyond childhood and into adulthood. Homophobia had the capacity to shape boys into specific ways of interacting, included not standing out. Men's capacities as individuals were quashed as they were formed into teams which demanded subservience to the group's needs and became socialised to put the needs of peers before their own. Thus, homophobia became a ritualised rite of passage, embedded in group processes that all males must pass through.

This research has uncovered new insights about the role of homophobia in Australian society. Homophobia restrains the lives of all men. It is not simply directed at gay men, but at any man who moves beyond hegemonic masculinity. As such, homophobia appears to police *difference*. While difference is an effective concept in assisting us to understand who is 'like' us by providing an understanding of the self through comparison, this process requires an outgroup. When an outgroup is despised, the ingroup may then be forced to artificially and restrictively monitor itself to avoid any outgroup qualities. When the ingroup/outgroup dynamic is formed around a nebulous construct like gender – one that boys and men are supposed to inhabit in a very narrow manner – the pressure to conform is almost irresistible. Men in the study spoke of restraining their emotional ranges, fighting to save losing face, and becoming bullies to elevate their masculine status over those who could not fight back. Sexual behaviour was authorised in a specific set of heterosexual practises, although the rape of Greg indicates that these constraints were open to suspension.

The very constructedness of homophobia is highlighted when comparing notions of sexuality across time in Australia, and between countries. Chauncey (1995) and Garber (1995) describe different enactments of same-sex sex in the recent West, and Chauncey (2004) writes of a silenced history of sexuality. Some of the older participants in this research describe other sexualities being largely out of view in their earlier lives, topics of whispered rumour and fanciful stereotypes. These ideas gave way to better understandings of sexuality as the sexual revolution and media created new discourses. While Fone (2001) describes homophobes as feeling authorised in embrace their discrimination, the men who partook in this study frequently spoke proudly of the diversity of the people in their lives. 'Hell, one of my solicitors is gay', said Brett as a way of describing how far from his earlier homophobia he had moved. While the expressions of homophobia in the community are manifold, so too are the expressions of consideration and acceptance voiced by the majority of the men I met. While the problems of homophobic violence are real, and the impact of other forms of homophobia such as silencing or forcing men to 'prove' their masculinity have detrimental effects, this research has also uncovered an egalitarian quality to many Australian men. This research is based on the power of discourses to shape behaviour and attitudes. A discourse of homophobia gives a structure to how 'other' sexualities may be negated, but this research shows there is also a less-expressed discourse of acceptance, of masculinity not predicated upon fear, running through the lives of many men. Allowing this alternative discourse of masculinity to be propagated will give a language of inclusion and diversity to the many men who find the discourses of hegemonic masculinity restrictive and damaging.

### **Gaps in the current research**

There were interesting variations in responses of men from different age groups across the current research. Flood and Hamilton (2005) found that older Australians are more likely to be homophobic: to some extent this was born out. The focus group I conducted with older men espoused some quite vitriolic comments, as did another focus group where half of the men were over 50, but countering these examples though were Justin and Sam, both in their 70s, who described changes in attitudes later in life. Similarly, Flood and Hamilton found that younger men were the *most*

homophobic group – a fact illustrated by four of the six men under 25 being openly and unashamedly homophobic. Flood and Hamilton write that the peak ages for homophobia appear to be 14-17 years, figures similar to those found by Plummer (1999).

Significantly, Kimmel (1994: 132) describes adolescents as ‘gender police’ who carry a disproportionate capacity to shape how the rest of the community deals with sexual and gender difference. At odds with the attitudes of some of the younger men was 23-year old Warren with somewhat more tolerant attitudes, and yet in a good example of the variances of opinions of men, he too expressed some ideas which indicated an underlying ongoing homophobia. Almost every participant held some homophobic views in line with their peer-group standards during their youth, but the majority described at least a softening – if not reversal – of their opinions on sexuality and a range of other ideas as they became more established in adulthood. While saturation was reached in the scope of the research’s aims – to uncover how homophobia impacts on Australian men – what was also uncovered was how critical the period between adolescence and early adulthood is and the scope for deeper analysis on this concept.

Sport clearly emerged as a major theme in the reproduction of masculinity, and although many men described sport as a part of their lives at school, it was not until my second last interview that I encountered Ian, who still plays competitively. In this interview, he gave examples, like Ivor’s army group sex experiences wherein same-sex sex was not considered to be gay. Ian and his mates described it as team-bonding, something that mates share together. Currently before the New South Wales coroner’s court is the case of Diane Brimble, who died after consuming the date-rape drug, gamma-hydroxybutyrate – ‘fantasy’, or GBH – on a cruise ship in 2002. Like a series of high-profile pack-rape cases involving professional football teams and unconscious women in Australia recently, several body-builders allegedly gave Mrs Brimble the drug with or without her knowledge, and had sex with her while she was unconscious and failed to call for medical attention when she stopped breathing. In light of Ian’s recollection – coincidentally on a cruise ship – of his mates having sex with an unconscious woman, this shows a dangerous enactment of sex as a team-building exercise, especially where the woman is so secondary to the event that she

can be unconscious. This can be seen as an extreme enactment of dominant, penetrating manhood performing on the ultimate passive woman. However, as this interview came as the data collection period was concluding, this emergent theme was unable to be developed further.

Media was cited by a number of men in the context of where men learnt ideas of acceptable gender. This concept formed an aspect of the analysis across chapters five, six and seven, as media was cited as disseminating imagery about how men could present themselves, and how men of various presentations may be treated. However, there was not sufficient scope in a thesis to cover all aspects of a topic and so it was not possible to devote an entire discussion to this important and rapidly evolving technology.

The time and financial restraints on a postgraduate thesis meant that sampling yielded a relatively homogenous ethnic mix of participants, and the majority of these men were raised as Christian. As Australia is a multicultural society, accessing men from non-English speaking backgrounds could have added the influence of other cultures. For example, Melbourne is the third largest Greek city in the world after Athens and Thessalonica. The influx of migrants from Mediterranean countries to Australia following World War II, and the later waves of Asian migrants following the removal of the White Australia policy in 1973 dramatically changed aspects of Australian culture. The successes and difficulties in new ethnic groups in integrating into a new country were highlighted in the 2005 Cronulla riots, where significantly, ideas about gender (protecting 'our' women) became distorted into a campaign of 'othering' and violence (Poynting 2006).

As rules about sexuality are often derived from religious tradition, men from other religious backgrounds could also have discussed how their beliefs influenced their ideas about gender and sexuality norms, and also how this may create a sense of difference for some communities within broader Australia. Neither the variances on ethnic background nor religious beliefs were able to be canvassed by this research.

The main basis of this discussion has been around normative concepts of sexuality and gender, but as men cited examples of difference related to ethnicity or



embodiment being policed both with homophobic and other pejorative words, it emerged that difference of any form can be difficult for people to incorporate into their lives. This important concept is beyond the brief which I set out to investigate, but I shall return to this idea in the next section.

### **Future research directions**

Perhaps the most pertinent finding that this research has described have been the links between performativity of appropriate gender and how this is contingent upon the stages of a man's life and the influence of peers that period. This indicates an important area for further research: participants in this study are largely self-selected and the average age of participants was nearly 48 years. However, as younger men are: (a) frequently strongly homophobic; (b) freely expressive of homophobic ideas, which may not be shared by older men, and yet are infrequently challenged; and (c) on the verge of reformulating their ideas about gender and sexuality, this shows what a deep field of data is to be found in these developmental years.

This age group represents perhaps the most interesting area for future directions of research. To facilitate this research, sampling of younger men would need to be refined, preferably within a longitudinal study framework to track changes in opinions and motivations across the years from late adolescence to early adulthood. The impact of new media, such as the Internet, and the increasing representations of diversity in traditional media such as cinema and television could provide another technique through which gender norms are learnt in a way that has not effected most of the men in this sample.

Similarly, the role of sports teams in this period of a man's life in providing a means of shared intimacy provides a broad range of research topics. This can range from pathological team-bonding, as indicated by the rape of Greg, or the unconscious sex partner of Ian's mates, to simpler enactments wherein boys and men are only allowed to share an emotional moment in the safe contexts of sporting excitement. The positive benefits of belonging to a team can have negative consequences for people outside the team (as in the sexual assaults described) or for people within the team who begin to find the shared norms distasteful, from Ian's revulsion at his mate's behaviour to Walter shunning his racist, sexist, homophobic circle of friends.

Therefore, as well as sports teams, social groups based on characteristics of homogeneity are deserving of close analysis.

The importance of peer-group interaction on men are present in Jeff's comments to me at the conclusion of focus group 3, where he described feeling constrained within by Kenny. This realisation could also be used to move the research methods in a new direction: combining the peer-based interaction of a focus group with personal interviews of the same men. This would allow participants to describe the impact of the group dynamics on what they disclosed and what they felt they held back, once the gaze of the peers had been removed.

This research gives a perspective on how masculinity and gender ideals are formed in Australia. The techniques which were used would be applicable to other countries, allowing a comparative analysis between different data sets. Australia shares many similarities to other Western nations, although the cultural variations between remain significant (Altman 2006). Within Australia there are still many contradictions regarding masculinities and their development, and further research in these areas may help to illuminate these processes. Specifically, how do we reconcile the stated view of chapter five, that masculinity and aggressive forms of sport are intimately entwined when less hegemonic masculinities also appear to generate less hostility? If homophobia is a powerful motivator in pushing boys and men to aspire to the aggressive forms of masculinity, and sport takes an even greater role in Australian culture, how does this interact with the liberalising views of most of this study's participants discussed in chapter seven?

It is the divergence in the attitudes of these participants and the cultural norms which provide perhaps the most fertile area for ongoing research: how does the disproportionately small number of openly homophobic people have such a disproportionately large impact on the polity of the nation? Why is it that when some countries in the West, such as Canada and Spain, have legalised same sex marriage, and New Zealand and Ireland have marriage-in-all-but name for same sex relationships, the leadership of other countries such as America and Australia continue to resist? Likewise, the reluctance of television and cinema to keep abreast of changing social attitudes is an area for ongoing research, as the threat of boycotts

and the fear of being anti-(nuclear)-family appears to be a powerful restraining force on an expensive media form.

Homophobia may be weakening in its capacity to police sexuality and gender in Australia: the participants here indicate that it has lessened in its impact on them as they grew older. Its impact on younger men is still profound though, and until the changes permeate from national leadership to youth and peer cultures, it will continue to constrain boys and men – and girls and women – of all sexualities and gender presentations. Vigilance is still required. Liberal, decadent Berlin on the 1920s descended into the murder of tens of thousands of homosexuals (Heger 1982); modern, Westernised Iran found itself under the control of a theocracy (Parsa 1989); libertine America of the 1970s saw the emergence of a right wing administrations heavily influenced by fundamentalist Christian leaders (Shilts 1987). While the first two examples are extreme, the latter one shows how progressive attitudes may be rolled back quickly with charismatic (not in the religious sense) leaders who can articulate social discomfort and focus it back onto minorities. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, conservative Christian groups continue to lobby both federal and state governments, and sexuality provides fertile ground for them to sow discontent. It is the ability of small, well-organised groups to influence politicians that is of great interest in this field of study.

While other forms of discrimination are generally no longer considered allowable or desirable, the fact that homophobia continues to have some degree of authorisation indicates that there are still strong undercurrents about contemporary ideas about gender that provide a great deal of anxiety that require deeper investigation. While homophobia may have lessened its grip on some section of the community, it still has a broad, constraining impact. As the majority of Australians can be considered less homophobic – Rissel et al (2003) found that 39% of the Australian population thought that all same-sex sex between males was wrong – research needs to be conducted to examine why this homophobic minority has such a prominent voice, and why non-homophobic people are still frequently constrained to challenge such views. The current sample was largely liberal in their attitudes to sexuality and gender, and yet there were still degrees of tolerance. Open-minded minister Theo still does not believe that same-sex couples should marry, and a significant proportion of

participants with otherwise liberal attitudes still expressed reservations about fully accepting a gay son. Duncan will not tolerate homophobic language from his apprentices, and yet still questions the validity of the lifestyle. Even though this is a relatively non-homophobic sample, there are still limits to their tolerance.

### **Policy implications**

How one 'learns' masculinity is not a process that is uniform across cultures, nor that works consistently: different cultures have used different techniques and rituals to pass on ideals of behaviour, and not all of these cultures have produced forms of gender which we would consider acceptable. Changing ideas of the rights of men and women since the birth of feminism have left many cultural constructs of women-as-property repellant, and the rapid changes of technology in the twentieth century have rendered many techniques of inculcating gender obsolete when faced with the pervasiveness of electronic media. Current methods of 'schooling' gender through 'toughening boys up', utilising humiliation and othering have been shown to have negative effects on all men. The least hegemonic are devalued; the most hegemonic men find that adherence to the hegemony requires the suppression of emotion, and performing potentially dangerous hypermasculine activities in a continually contested and ultimately unwinnable arena. The impacts of these forms of masculinity impact on all boys, on all men, and of course on all girls and all women.

In an article in *The Weekend Australian*, psychiatrist Jonathon Phillips and gender researcher Michael Flood each cited what they perceived to be the influences on male youth culture which could have led to the recent case of a young disabled woman being sexually assaulted, urinated on, and having her hair set on fire by a dozen teenage males. The assailants filmed the assault and sold the DVD on the Internet (Lunn 2006). Phillips saw desensitisation by media outweighing other social modeling. Flood cited the linked fields of misogyny and homophobia: a culture which creates an artificial separation between the genders, elevates masculinity over femininity, and celebrates male aggression and dysfunctional peer-bonding rituals. This is where policy initiatives in the socialisation of boys require attention. The enforced separation of genders in schools has a detrimental effect on both boys and

girls, as it creates an ‘othering’ of gender which negates the social similarities beyond physical differences. This also valorises a discourse of hierarchical masculinity, encouraging boys to compete in an unwinnable, ongoing battle for supremacy.

Within schools, sex education needs to examine a broad range of sexualities, and present them in a non-emotive, equal way. To ignore same-sex relationships during school creates a discourse of silence and shame. Taylor and Richardson (2005) detail the uproar that ensued when the national broadcaster, the ABC featured a segment on a girl with two mothers on *Play School*. Describing working with an older group of children, Pallotta-Chiarolli (1995) also notes the resistance to dealing with other sexualities in schools. Even people with the most liberal attitudes will express reservations at the idea of discussing homosexuality with children: it is still a dirty, homophobic secret. Although this topic is considered politically delicate, that is no reason to ignore it, especially when the outcomes of such an avoidance have been clearly presented.

The elevation of aggressive, team-based sport within schools must be augmented with individual sports and non-aggressive methods in which boys can experience their developing bodies. Male-dominated organisations reinforce these ideas and tightly regulate the behaviour of their members. Schools and employers, who have an obligation to protect their charges from bullying of any sort, cannot abrogate responsibility on this matter, and yet they continue to do so. The lack of response to homophobia must be addressed at a policy level, and also within national leadership. The failure of the federal government to adequately address the many levels of policy-based discrimination against sexual minorities continues to produce a discourse of acceptable homophobia.

Homophobia must be taken as seriously as racism or sexism. A society which would not allow a church to discriminate on the basis of race must not be given an exemption to discriminate on the basis of sexuality – at least not when they are being resourced with public funds. Exclusionary, discriminatory language should neither be allowed in media, nor ignored in the playground.

Evidence presented in this thesis shows a strong, restrictive capacity of this behaviour on all men, with severe psychological damage for those most intensely affected regardless of their sexual orientation: disinterring homophobia from national policy frameworks and discourses of gender will create a level of human rights accessible to all Australians. Although this research did not address female-directed homophobia, addressing such policies would, of course, be of benefit to lesbians as well. The elevation of aggressive masculinity, distanced from femininity and difference has negative effects on women, from the humiliating assault described above to numerous sexual assaults which occur daily, or to simpler forms where women are in relationships with men who have been acculturated to suppress their feelings. Creating discourses which allow for a broader range of gender performances will have positive effects for all men, and all women.

## **Conclusion**

Homophobia is not the only force that shapes Australian masculinity, but as other forms of discrimination are disallowed, and homophobia still commands a degree of tolerance, it continues to have a policing capacity on the attitudes and behaviours of boys and men. As the word 'gay' has come to be equated with all things bad, homosexuality becomes an indicator of all that is undesirable. All sexualities beyond heterosexuality are devalued in the process. The fear of being thought of as gay restrained many of the participants: even those with liberal attitudes who would not care if anyone thought that they were gay had their behaviour restrained by the actions of other men.

All men felt the impact of homophobia. Some unquestioningly fitted into the proscribed behaviours, jostling for the most dominant positions on a hierarchy of masculine status. To do so, this required subjugation of some of their peers. Some boys felt that no harm was done in this process, and that it was all part of the natural transition to hardened men. Other men questioned the impact they saw on peers; and those who were subjected to it reported emotional distress up to the point of suicidal ideation. This latter group also felt that the claims by bullying boys that 'no harm was done' was a cover for co-ordinated, orchestrated behaviour that they realised was

harmful. When damage was done, it was done early in life and its impact was often long-lasting.

Addressing the use of homophobia, and the narrow range of behaviours that we allow for males in general, will create a broader social landscape for boys and men in Australia to grow. As the participants who changed their ideas on sexuality and gender showed, hegemonic masculinity is restrictive and men expressed greater satisfaction with their lives and relationships once they expanded their ideas of what sort of men they should be. Allowing a discourse of masculinities which incorporate the liberalising attitudes of these men will give voice to new ideas about what men can be, and allow the propagation of these discourses to a wider range of men. Two themes run through this research: as boys become men, their attitudes to sexuality and gender soften; and the pressure on boys prior to this is immense. Although many of the men expressed welcoming attitudes in the face of difference, many did not, and many who liberal men silently condoned homophobia when they encountered it. While to adult men, this may be background noise, to young, developing personalities, these attitudes have impacts that can have serious long-term physical and emotional impacts. While I have presented many cases of men adapting to a changing social world, this does not presume that sufficient change has occurred at all age levels. It is hoped that this research can assist in enunciating the possibilities for such an attitudinal shift for Australian men in general.

‘Difference’ allows us to understand who we are and who we consider to be like us, by marking out the boundaries between self and ‘other’. This can be the difference between adults and children; between races; between genders; between religions; between sexualities; between nations. The positive aspect of difference gives us understanding of what bonds us to our peers: the negative side of that understanding is a sense of mistrust of the ‘other’. In a sports stadium this can create an atmosphere of theatre, but as soccer riots show, this can cross a border into aggression. A fuller understanding of homophobia’s policing capacities, and the interactions between this and the policing of other differences, could well provide new tools for integrating diversity for the benefit of all.

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